Transitions in higher education

We draw from literature in higher education on student retention and transitions to better understand factors that contribute to success:

**Tinto, 1975**: A pioneer in studying transitions and retention in higher education. His research found that both academic and social integration were important for student success.

**Astin, 1984**: Builds on Tinto’s theories. Showed that successful student transitions and retention depend upon:

- **Inputs** (what the student brings with them, i.e., cultural, social, and academic capital)
- **Experience** (their academic and social during the university program)
- **Outcomes** (how they perform in the program).

**Bean & Eaton, 2000**: Bring together more psychological lenses to understanding successful first-year transitions, noting the importance of:

- developing self-efficacy
- students’ attitudes and behaviours
- whether students engage or disengage socially and academically
- whether students attribute the locus of control internally (positively correlated) or externally (negatively correlated)

**Academic, social, and emotional experiences all matter!**

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**Degree Completion Track**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey 1:</th>
<th>Survey 2:</th>
<th>Focus groups:</th>
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**Preliminary Findings**

<table>
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<th>Entry to practice</th>
<th>Degree completion</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>70-80% come straight from high school</td>
<td>Enter 2-19 yrs after high school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Most have no post-secondary education</td>
<td>Average 4 years PSE</td>
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<td>Greater study awareness</td>
<td>Fewer study tools upon entry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stress predominantly emanates from exams, classes &amp; studying &amp; finances</td>
<td>Stress emanates from classes, finances and outside work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Participant Survey**

- **Entry to Practice Track**
  - Survey 2: Apr 2015 [N=21, RR=78%] May 2015

**Focus groups**

**Main challenges identified by students**

- Tailored tutoring services in Chemistry and Biology for first-year students
- Creation of new workshops on studying and time management
- Increased opportunities for first years to interact with staff and faculty outside of curricular time
- Discussion of shifting DH courses currently offered in Term 2 to Term 1 to facilitate earlier integration into the program

**Methods**

**Entry to Practice Track**

Oct 2012. A pilot study with 60 students across all four years

**First-year experiences**

Cohort A

- Survey 1: Oct 2013 [N=24, RR=85%]
- Survey 2: Oct 2014 [N=21, RR=96%]
- Focus groups: May 2015

Cohort B

- Survey 1: Sep 2014 [N=21, RR=78%]
- Survey 2: Apr 2015 [N=21, RR=85%]
- Focus groups: May 2015

**Research questions & Rationale**

Student feedback and pilot studies suggest that these two tracks of students face unique challenges in transitioning into the program over their first year.

Our research questions are:

- What contributes to successful academic, social, and emotional transitions for first-year students in the two tracks?
- How can we facilitate successful transitions for student retention, engagement, and overall success?

From our research, we are modifying curriculum, making changes to student services, and offering tailored workshops.

Modifications will continue as we learn more about how to support first-year DH students!