



ACU Student Retention Strategy



Foreword

We know there are great economic and social benefits of higher education for students and the wider community. We also know the promotion of student retention, completion and success enhances career progression and mobility. That's why we have developed the ACU Student Retention Strategy.

The strategy, is underpinned by the University's mission and values and focuses on identifying and implementing whole-of-university approaches to improving student retention and success.

Student retention is achieved through quality learning and teaching, a supportive academic culture and an excellent student experience, both curricular and co-curricular.

We recognise that success commences from the point of recruitment and

first contact with the University, and continues all the way through to graduation. Our strategy is designed to address challenges and opportunities centred on three important aspects of the student lifecycle: admission, learning and teaching, and co-curriculum.

Our new Student Retention Strategy recognises the diversity of our students and the complexity of their lives. As such, student safety, health and wellbeing are promoted and fostered through a culture of inclusion, a sense of belonging and the provision of academic and professional support services. We know that the more students are academically and socially engaged the more likely they are to succeed and graduate.

For the retention strategy to be effective, it will require all faculties

and organisational units of the University to be responsible for its implementation. Its progress will be monitored by the University's Retention Steering Committee and reported to the Academic Board, the Senior Executive Group and myself on a biannual basis.

Our commitment to student retention depends entirely on a whole-of-university approach to achieve the greatest impact. As such, the successful implementation of the ACU Student Retention Strategy is an important priority for the University.

Professor Greg Craven, AO GCSG
Vice-Chancellor and President



Our commitment to the students

- In alignment with ACU's mission, supportive academic and co-curricular practices to promote student retention throughout the whole of the student lifecycle will be prioritised.
- ACU will maximise the chances of success and completion for all its students including students engaged in vocational education and training; undergraduate and postgraduate courses; executive education; international students and students from equity groups, through the appropriate provision of academic and other supports.
- Student-centred administrative processes will be designed to promote access and participation in higher education.
- Students will be welcomed through a range of entry pathways to the University. Admission processes will provide qualifying students with ease of access and participation.
- We will invest in students' transition to the University, so they are supported, setting them up for academic and personal success.
- Students will be given opportunities to establish networks through their interaction with their peers and University to build a sense of belonging within a supportive community.
- Students will have access to a quality learning and teaching experience setting them up for success in their chosen areas of study and preparing them for their future careers.
- A range of co-curricular programs will be available to promote student engagement in university life. Opportunities will be provided for the development of student leadership and graduate attributes, making students career-ready professionals.
- Student health, safety and wellbeing will be promoted through the provision of a safe and inclusive physical and online environment. Professional services will be available to provide students with support.

Overarching principles

- The commitment to ACU's Student Retention Strategy is evident in institutional leadership, recognised as a University priority and is the responsibility of all staff.
- Student retention strategies are student-centred and developed in recognition of student experiences throughout the student lifecycle from the point of first contact through to graduation.
- A strategic focus on the student experience provides students with a wide range of opportunities for interaction and engagement promoting a sense of belonging.
- Staff capacity needed to build a culture of student engagement is fostered through access to professional development, support and appropriate recognition.
- Student participation and academic performance is monitored to identify students at risk of withdrawing from their studies with appropriate interventions in place when at-risk behaviour is identified.
- Meaningful data and analysis is regularly reviewed and evaluated to monitor the effectiveness of retention strategies and to better understand the student experience and the contributors to retention and success across the student lifecycle.





Our six retention focus areas

RETENTION FOCUS AREA 1: PATHWAYS, ADMISSION AND TRANSITION

- 1.1 Pathways and admission
- 1.2 Building engagement and belonging

RETENTION FOCUS AREA 2: HIGH-QUALITY, STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING AND TEACHING

- 2.1 High-quality learning and teaching
- 2.2 Flexible curriculum

RETENTION FOCUS AREA 3: STUDENT ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT, SUPPORT AND CO-CURRICULAR ENGAGEMENT

- 3.1 Student support services
- 3.2 Support for external students
- 3.3 Support for equity groups
- 3.4 Co-curricular programs

RETENTION FOCUS AREA 4: STUDENT HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELLBEING

- 4.1 Student health and wellbeing
- 4.2 University-wide mental health strategy
- 4.3 Safety, inclusion and wellbeing

RETENTION FOCUS AREA 5: STUDENTS AT RISK OF EXITING OR STUDENTS WHO HAVE DISENGAGED

- 5.1 Identification of students at risk
- 5.2 Targeted intervention
- 5.3 Students who have disengaged

RETENTION FOCUS AREA 6: EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

- 6.1 Evidence-based practice and evaluation
- 6.2 Monitoring and continuous improvement
- 6.3 Mainstreaming student retention



Student retention framework





Indicators of success

- Improved student retention rates across all discipline areas.
- A student-centred approach is evident at each interface with students.
- Students are partners in the University's governance, decision-making, design and evaluation of strategies promoting the student experience.
- ACU's Student Retention Strategy is implemented by all organisational units of the University.



Measures of success

The successful implementation of ACU's Student Retention Strategy will be monitored in line with the following targets within the ACU Strategic Plan 2020-2023:

- Student retention rates
- Student satisfaction rates
- Student success rates

The Retention Steering Committee will oversee the implementation of the Student Retention Strategy and monitor the impact of interventions against agreed performance indicators.



Highlights from our retention strategy

FACULTY STUDENT ADVISORS

A network of academic staff will work collaboratively with the University's student support services and programs to provide ongoing contact and advice to students.

FIRST YEAR STUDENT PEER MENTORING PROGRAM

The peer mentoring program will provide first year students with an opportunity to engage with students in their second or third year of study to build their sense of belonging and connection with the University.

'RE-INSPIRE' STUDENT RE-ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM

Marketing and recruitment strategies targeting students who have discontinued their enrolment from the University will be developed and implemented to invite re-enrolment.

STUDENT-CENTRIC INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

The University campus experience will be enhanced by the development of vibrant student spaces and facilities to encourage student engagement through an infrastructure plan which addresses students' current and future needs.

Retention strategy and agreed outcomes

STRATEGY	AGREED OUTCOMES
Retention Focus Area 1: Pathways, admission and transition	
<p>1.1 Pathways and admission <i>Engaging students with information, giving them course advice and the opportunity for career planning on entry to the University.</i></p>	<p>Students are provided with information about the learning experience to improve decision-making prior to entry. Pathways for students optimise entry into a course of study at the University. Career planning has enabled students to match their aspirations with their course selection. ACU College students are provided with opportunities to transition into an undergraduate course. Admission policies and procedures are student-centred, responsive to student needs and promote equitable access to the University.</p>
<p>1.2 Building engagement and belonging <i>Nurturing a culture of belonging and creating an environment to promote student engagement, retention and success.</i></p>	<p>An orientation program is in place to transition students into university life. International students receive a comprehensive orientation program to familiarise them with University procedures, Australian study methods, social customs and culture. Professional development to build staff capacity for the promotion of student engagement is available.</p>
Retention Focus Area 2: High-quality, student-centred learning and teaching	
<p>2.1 High-quality learning and teaching <i>Providing a high-quality, student-centred learning and teaching experience enabling students to develop academically and staff to develop an understanding of their students.</i></p>	<p>Learning and teaching practices are evidence-based. Student success rates improve annually. Student Evaluation of Learning and Teaching (SELT) data improves annually. Percentage of staff engaging with Professional Learning in Higher Education improves annually.</p>
<p>2.2 Flexible curriculum <i>A flexible course curriculum offers options for course transfer within the University or micro-credentialing to obtain recognition at different points of exit.</i></p>	<p>Options for course transfer are explored and offered to retain students. Flexibility through blended or virtual offerings is available. Exit points which are compliant with the Australian Qualifications Framework are offered, providing students with a greater range of exit options with meaningful qualifications. Opportunities to engage in a suite of distinctive postgraduate award programs and leadership-focused short courses are available through ACU Executive Education.</p>
Retention Focus Area 3: Student academic development, support and co-curricular engagement	
<p>3.1 Student support services <i>Students who have the capacity to succeed in higher education are given the best chance to complete their studies through the appropriate provision of academic and other support services as required by the Higher Education Standards Framework.</i></p>	<p>The provision of academic and other support services is informed by the needs of student cohorts and meets the requirements of the Higher Education Standards Framework. Advice is provided to international students to assist them with general enquiries, accommodation advice, general student visa information, pre-departure and orientation information and campus engagement events. Student Experience Survey (SES) data improves annually.</p>
<p>3.2 Support for external students <i>Attention is given to ensuring support services are available to meet the needs of external students who are not regularly attending campus recognising they are at a higher risk of not completing their studies.</i></p>	<p>The retention rate for external students improves annually.</p>

STRATEGY	AGREED OUTCOMES
<p>3.3 Support for equity groups <i>Attention is given to ensuring support services are available to meet the needs of students from equity groups who may experience additional barriers to engaging higher education.</i></p>	<p>The retention rate for students from equity groups improves annually.</p>
<p>3.4 Co-curricular programs <i>A range of co-curricular programs to promote the engagement of students are offered with consideration given to the diversity of the student population.</i></p>	<p>The number of co-curricular programs is further diversified leading to a wider range of opportunities and increased student engagement. A student peer mentoring program designed to promote connectedness and engagement is established across campuses.</p>
<p>Retention Focus Area 4: Student health, safety and wellbeing</p>	
<p>4.1 Student health and wellbeing <i>Services to promote health and personal wellbeing to maintain students' capacity to study are available.</i></p>	<p>Student access to personal support services is available, including emergency services, medical services, counselling, legal advice, advocacy and accommodation services.</p>
<p>4.2 University-wide mental health strategy <i>A university-wide mental health strategy is in place promoting services and programs in recognition that student life is complex and challenging.</i></p>	<p>A university-wide mental health strategy and an implementation plan are available.</p>
<p>4.3 Safety, inclusion and wellbeing <i>A safe and inclusive environment is promoted and fostered, which includes advice to students and staff on the actions they can take to enhance safety and security on campus and online.</i></p>	<p>A framework to support a university-wide approach to safety, inclusion and wellbeing is established and meets external standards.</p>
<p>Retention Focus Area 5: Students at risk of exiting or students who have disengaged</p>	
<p>5.1 Identification of students at risk <i>Student engagement is monitored to identify students 'at risk' through data-based risk analytics, including attendance, participation in learning, assessment processes and outcomes.</i></p>	<p>Accurate and timely reports of student behaviour, academic performance and demographics are available to inform targeted intervention strategies.</p>
<p>5.2 Targeted intervention <i>Students who are identified as 'at risk' are provided with targeted support interventions.</i></p>	<p>Targeted intervention strategies are available to support students 'at risk'. The retention rate for equity groups improves annually.</p>
<p>5.3 Students who have disengaged <i>Re-engagement opportunities are provided to students who have discontinued their enrolment from the University (including students who have deferred, are on a leave of absence or have withdrawn).</i></p>	<p>Re-enrolment rates increase annually.</p>
<p>Retention Focus Area 6: Evidence-based practice and continuous improvement</p>	
<p>6.1 Evidence-based practice and evaluation <i>An evidence-informed student retention strategy is underpinned by relevant student data and is regularly evaluated against indicators and measures of success.</i></p>	<p>Student retention practices meet agreed outcomes and are evidence-based.</p>
<p>6.2 Monitoring and continuous improvement <i>The retention, progression and completion performance of courses is monitored to inform the retention strategy and future interventions.</i></p>	<p>Targets for course-based retention are established and reported on annually.</p>
<p>6.3 Mainstreaming student retention <i>Learnings from new interventions and approaches that promote student retention are shared across the institution and consideration is given to mainstreaming.</i></p>	<p>Effective interventions to improve student retention are identified to inform the further development of the University's retention strategy.</p>

