U@Uni Summer School Program: Implementing Summer Schools as a Successful School Outreach Strategy

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Background

Students from low socio economic backgrounds are significantly under represented in higher education in Australia. The Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth (LSAY) research program reported that socio-emotional factors were important in encouraging young people to continue studying, and identified a strong link between student attitudes and stated intention to enter higher education and eventual participation in higher education (Hillman, 2010). Factors predicting university study 'are achievement at age 15 years, sex, socioeconomic status, intention to pursue a degree and attitude towards school.' (Lonsdale & Anderson, 2012, p.15). Outreach programs, access schemes and school partnerships between tertiary education institutions and schools are vital in engaging, informing and motivating high school students to participate in higher education.

Consistent international research indicates that school and community partnerships provide positive outcomes for students. A recent report by Lonsdale & Anderson (2012, p. 2) it is noted that strong school-community connections can facilitate a variety of benefits such as 'social, intellectual, financial, psychological and performance'. Schools that engage with community enhance the school culture and prepare students for the twenty first century. Furthermore schools that engage with community have been shown to be 'highly effective' and provide opportunities for both teachers and students (Lonsdale & Anderson, 2012).

Universities in the U.K, Australia and America have engaged in schools outreach programs with low socio economic schools for over a decade. Through evaluation and research, effective characteristics have identified. In a study of effective pre-college programs in America, almost all case studies identified the building of self-efficacy and students belief that they can succeed as a major characteristic in effective programs. A U.S based program called 'Foundation for a College Education' (FCE) commented that they are most successful working with students and parents to "make sure that they have the information and the confidence to be effective advocates for themselves" (Swail et al. 2012, p.viii). Bandurra (2005) believes that self-efficacy affects the way in which students engage in tasks and this is a vital part of schools outreach.

In Australia, the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) has undertaken research into outreach practices, identifying 10 characteristics of successful programs. These characteristics include: people rich programs; offers of financial support; long term and sustained (not just one off interventions); offer an enhanced curriculum; are cohort based; include campus visits and are research driven (Bowes et al. 2013). These characteristics indicate that universities need to create programs that bring together teachers, academics and students on campus in long-term projects.

A vital aspect of effective outreach is having 'people rich' programs. The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) have found that students who

receive mentoring and work with students from a similar age group had a higher estimated probability of enrolling in university. They found that mentoring raised aspiration and assisted in removing barriers perceived in higher education (Curtis et al. 2012). Effective outreach is multi layered involving university spaces, engaging mentors and collaborative relationships.

Table 1: Four strategies and ten characteristics of outreach programs (Gale et al 2010)

Assembling resources	Engaging learners	Working together	Building confidence
People rich	Recognition of difference	Collaboration	Communication and information
Financial support or incentives	Enhanced academic curriculum	Cohort based	Familiarisation/ site experiences
Early, long term, sustained	Research driven		

The University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) has a long history of improving access to, and participation in higher education by individuals from targeted equity groups. These groups include low socio economic, Indigenous, refugee and other under represented populations. The earliest work at UTS in this area dates back to 1988 with the introduction of the UTS Educational Access Scheme called InpUTS which offered up to 10 extra ATAR marks for humanities subjects and 7 marks for all other subjects. Due to the success of the initiative all courses were later offered with up to 10 marks off the ATAR and it remains today. UTS has also delivered a number of other programs since the 1980's including professional development for teachers, UTS taster days and a 4 day student shadowing program. The priority of such work has enabled UTS to be at the forefront of widening participation in the Australian Higher Education sector.

In 2008 the Equity & Diversity Unit at UTS embarked on a project to build on its work with students from low socio economic backgrounds. With the support of the NSW Department of Education & Communities, UTS began developing the first summer school for high school students. The summer school was delivered in January 2009 with a focus on filmmaking and literacy for 27 year 9 and 10 students. With the introduction of Higher Education Participation, Partnership Program (HEPPP) funding in 2009, UTS has expanded it's outreach to equity groups, and in particular the U@Uni Summer School Program. Under the UTS Widening Participation Strategy, funded by HEPPP, UTS has supported students by focusing on building aspirations, widening access, retention & success and inclusive community.

The UTS WPS strategy has seen the introduction, improvement and expansion of a range of projects around the university to engage, enroll and support students from a wide range of backgrounds. The Equity and Diversity Unit works closely with 19 'U@Uni' high schools in South Western Sydney as well as some regional schools. The UTS approach is underpinned by research indicating that successful schools outreach creates deep, long lasting relationships with schools. Some of the programs in place to support students at UTS include:

- First year Support Programs such as U:PASS
- New pathways from TAFE to UTS for mature aged students

- Access Schemes for School Leavers (Principals Recommendation Scheme, Educational Access Schemes)
- Diversity scholarships
- Teacher professional development opportunities
- Schools outreach including HSC tutoring, UTS Art Gallery Programs, Engineering Outreach for girls (LUCY mentoring), Refugee outreach (SIPRY).

A central component of the outreach delivered as part of the WPS occurs through the U@Uni Summer School Program. The U@Uni Summer School Program is a 3 year program that aims to boost enthusiasm for HSC study and beyond, demystify university, build interpersonal skills and raise personal aspirations. The program offers a people rich, long lasting, collaborative experience for students based on campus. The U@Uni Summer School program aims to build;

- Increased student confidence, aspiration and motivation toward higher education
- Improved student understanding about pathways to enable lifelong learning, including courses, university, life and career options
- Improved student academic preparedness and outcomes
- Increased student and family knowledge and awareness of the value of higher education

UTS offers an inclusive and supportive package to students from low SES areas that supports students from high school to the end of their degree.

Program Structure

As part of the UTS Widening Participation Strategy, the U@Uni Summer School Program aims to increase motivation for university study and demystify the idea of university through project based inquiry learning. The program currently engages students in years 10 – 12 through a two-week summer experience as well as a series of workshops to assist with HSC study and support post school decision-making. Students choose from six courses including business, filmmaking, science, design, health and engineering & IT in the two week summer school.

The program works with 14 U@Uni schools identified by the NSW Department of Education and Communities as schools that have a high level of need. Indigenous students from schools within NSW are also encouraged to attend the summer school program supported by UTS Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning. Participants are nominated by the year advisor or career advisor and must meet one or more items in the following criteria:

- a student who has the potential to attend university, but may not be applying him/ herself to their schoolwork.
- a student who is the first in their family to attend university.
- student who has an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background
- a student who has the potential to attend university but lacks aspiration due to cultural, financial, attitudinal or other 'barriers'.
- Someone who has the academic ability but lack in confidence or social skills.

At the end of the 2-week summer school, families, teachers and friends are invited onto campus for a Graduation Ceremony, in which students showcase their achievements in academic robes and receive awards. In January 2013 over 700 students, parents, families and friends attended the ceremony. Over year 11 and 12,

students are invited to a series of follow up workshops to further support students through their HSC.

The program is evaluated both internally and externally through a number of approaches including student, parent and teacher surveys, case studies as well as focus groups. In 2012 the Equity and Diversity Unit embarked on an external evaluation of the U@Uni Summer School Program as part of ongoing improvement of the program. Participating students who had completed the program took part in the evaluation and their feedback was supported by teacher and parent surveys. The evaluators found that the program is very well regarded by both schools and participants and that demand continues to outstrip supply of places.

Project Reach

The program has engaged with over 680 students in years 10 -12 over five years. The first cohort began with 27 students and today the new year 10 cohort starts that program with over 220 students enrolled. There are a further 156 in year 11 and 135 who have recently completed their HSC. In January 2014, the program will offer 6 summer schools including a new business school and an expanded science school for 50 students.

Students who complete the 2-week program are invited to a range of follow up workshops that are 'opt in' and occur on weekends and in school holidays. In 2013, 433 students in year 11 and 12 attended follow up workshops. Another estimated 1600 took part in a school visit and 250 took part in pre summer school events such as Orientation Day.

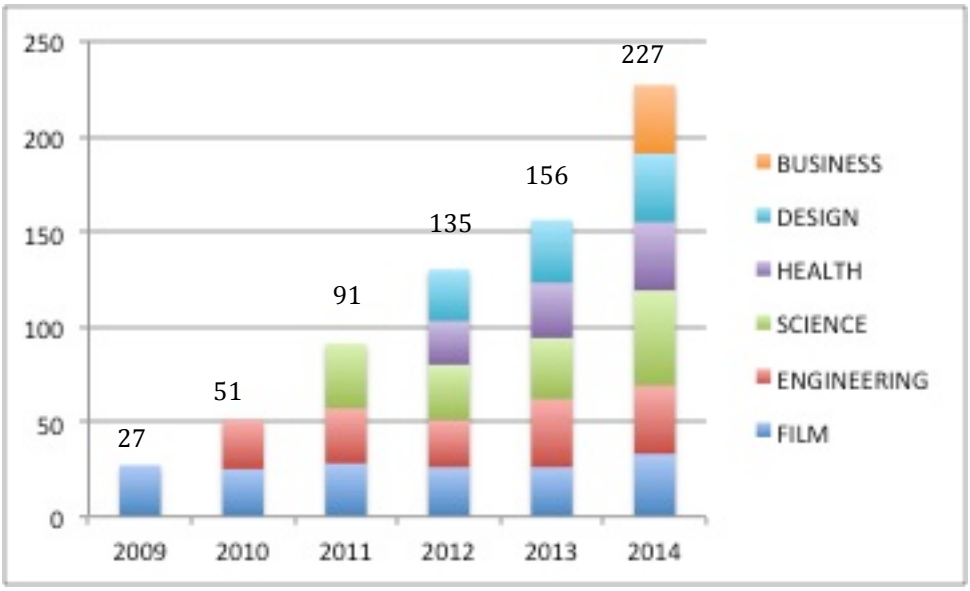
As the program has expanded and responded to evaluation a deepening engagement of students has occurred. This has resulted in an increased attendance at workshops. Attendance to the Summer School DVD premiere and workshop by year 11 students increased from 68% (N=89) in 2012, to 72% (N=112) in 2013. Open Day year 12 attendance jumped from 11% (N=10) in 2012 to 42% in 2013 (N=54). Year 12 student attendance to the Managing the HSC workshop increased from 19% (N=17) in 2012 to 28% (N=37) for the following cohort. This increase in participation may be linked to an increase in the number of follow up workshops that have been undertaken and may also be a result of the program being embedded into school culture.

An alumni of students who have completed the program and currently study at UTS has been created providing further support, training and work experience for students. This group has been called 'equity ambassadors' and includes 8 students who assist at U@Uni events, delivery content in the 2-week summer school and represent UTS at schools and events. There are plans to increase this group of students to 13 in 2014.

As well as a student reach, the program also engages with parents and teachers. Since its inception it is estimated that 1200 parents and families have been engaged primarily through the summer school graduation ceremony, which takes place in January each year. At least 72 teachers have been engaged in 2013 through Orientation Days, Graduation events, school visits and other communications. Seven teachers have worked on the summer school program in 2013 providing advice and assistance in developing and delivering the program. In January 2014 a teacher open day and parents information session have been planned to further engage

these groups. The U@Uni Summer School program has a ripple effect that extends beyond the participants to encompass parents, families and teachers as well.

Figure 1. Growth of the U@Uni Summer School Program.



Participant Experience

Students have reported a very positive experience in the U@Uni Summer School program. In a school leaver survey undertaken by the year 12 in 2012, 100% (N=46) reported that activities were interesting and fun, and 98% (N=45) agreeing they would recommend the UTS program to other students. 96% (N=44) of students considered the program to be beneficial. One student commented '*As soon as I got back, I told my friends, you have to go!*'

The current year 12 cohort were asked what their plans were for 2014. UTS does not offer some major degrees making it difficult for some students to highlight UTS however, 31% (N=11) said that they were still considering courses and options at various universities, 29%(N=10) said that they are planning to put UTS as their top choice of uni and 31% (N=11) of students said that they would put UTS in their top 3 preferences. This result indicates that students enjoy their time at UTS in programs such as the U@Uni Summer School program.

Figure 2. A wordle representing the words and frequency of the words used to describe the U@Uni Summer School program.



Findings

Evidence supports the outreach approach used in the U@Uni Summer School Program. 55% (N=67) of participants who completed high school in 2012, were offered a university place in 2013 (compared to *48% of the Australian population)[1]. This cohort was a mix of students who completed summer school in 2010 and 2011, as well as a pilot winter school in 2010. Focusing on the program outcomes, the following findings outline the programs success.

Outcome 1:
Increased student confidence, aspiration and motivation toward higher education
The summer school program builds confidence and self efficacy through its programs as evidenced in student comments *'I would be less shy and intimidated by others. Performing in front of others has increased my courage to try new things.'* In a survey question asking students to comment on what, if anything, would they do differently at school as a result of participating in UTS Summer School 77 out of 156 responses related to motivation towards achieving goals, study or doing well in school. Responses included comments such as '*Summer School experience encouraged me to study and improve my studies to actually be able to go in uni*' and '*I will work much harder at my studies and schoolwork in order for me to get into uni because I know it will be beneficial for me in the long run*.' A further 15 responses related to confidence and self esteem.

Of year 12 students in 2013 who participated in the program, 74% (N=24) commented that since this experience they felt more confident about themselves and 84% (N=27) felt more confident about their studies. This can be further evidenced through comments such as '*I'm feeling more confident and I'm participating in more group work and activities at school.'* A teacher commented, *"Attending Summer School gives them (students) confidence, networking and interpersonal skills".* Another comments *"Quite a few participants are now prefects and (one is) also the School Captain. The captain was considered a very unlikely candidate but he blew everyone away with his speech"*

Another area in which the program consistently creates change is in student's sense of belonging within higher education. Since 2011, data collected before and after the 2-week summer school has produced a statistically significant difference in students attitudes towards 'fitting into university'. In late 2012, 69% (N=114) of participants agreed that they felt they would fit into university compared to 82% (N=128) after they participated in the 2-week program. This is a very important aspect in demystifying the idea of university and increasing confidence and motivation.

[1] *The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) undertook a survey of a sample of students in 2011 in years 10-12 and found that the most common pathway was from school to university with 48% of year 12 completers transitioning to university.

Case Study- Bradley, former student at Lurnea High School currently studying at UTS.



Brad attended the first summer school in January 2009 and loved the experience. '*It was the starting point to where I am now.'* He is currently completing his third year in a Bachelor of Communications (Journalism) at UTS. Brad lives in Liverpool and attended Lurnea High School, a U@Uni partner school.

Brad's father, a truck driver attended the Summer School graduation ceremony and it was the first time he had been inside a university before.

Brad is the first person in a very large extended family of 58 cousins on one side to attend university. As well as studying at UTS Brad also works as an ambassador for the summer school program and is working 2 days a week to assist in the planning and delivery of the program. Brad shares his motivation and story with participants in the summer school program.

Outcome 2:
Improved student understanding about pathways to enable lifelong learning, including courses, university, life and career options

An important part of the program is to provide an on campus experience to further inform students of courses, careers and university life. Over 96% (N=150) of participants in the 2013 2 week summer school agreed that the activities helped them to understand what university life is like and 91% (N=142) said it encouraged them to want to go to university. Further to this, 92% (N=144) said they had been motivated to consider careers that need a university degree. One year 12 student commented that since participating in the program they have *'been managing my time more wisely and thinking about uni life more.'*

The program has clearly provided students with course and career ideas. 89% (N=139) of participants said that the U@Uni Summer School program gave them ideas about career choices and university courses. Importantly, 90% (N=140) said that they would consider a degree in the same area as their Summer school course showing the impact of this type of learning. A teacher at Birrong Girls High School commented that '*Summer school reveals information about the possibilities they have not heard of.*'

Case Study - Narendrasing, Birrong Boys High School.



A teacher at Birrong Boys High school reflected on her students experience at the 2013 2-week summer school saying that *'One student in particular -Narendrasing didn't get into his first choice (at summer school),which was engineering so he was stuck doing nursing.*

After the summer school he told me that he loved the summer school experience and learnt so much and that he felt inspired to study midwifery in the future.

He said that it was a life changing experience and that he never expected to want to be a midwife, but now he knows what he wants to be and study for the future.'

Outcome 3:
Improved student academic preparedness and outcomes

On top of providing a project based campus experience, the program also builds academic preparedness through workshops based on increasing study skills, academic writing and providng stress management strategies. After participating in the Managing your HSC workshop in 2013, 94% (N=30) of year 12 students found stress management strategies valuable and another 94% (N=30) agreed that they learnt strategies that would benefit their HSC.

Out of the current year 12 participants in the program 80% (N=26) agreed that since taking part in the program they made better progress in their school work and 93% (N=30) agreed they are working harder on their studies. One student commented that they are now *'Changing my attitudes towards studying. Asking for help when needed. Implying better study methods.'*

Case Study – Taminya, Chester Hill High School, Indigenous participant

Taminya Brown from Chester Hill High School was ready to drop out of school and look for a job in the beauty field. Taminya's teacher put her down for the nursing summer school and at first she did not want to do it. Her teacher comments that *'After many confrontations Taminya gave the course a go and really enjoyed it. She also made many friends'.* She said taking part in the nursing and midwifery activities had completely changed her mind. "*My sister has just started studying nursing and now I think that's what I want to do – being around people and helping people and babies."*



Her teacher says '*Taminya finished Yr12 and sat all her exams. She said it wasn't that hard and was 'surprised' at her results. Now Taminya is working at Concord hospital in the burns unit. One year has passed and now has been given permanent job at the hospital. She is now thinking of completing a nursing degree.'*

Outcome 4:
Increased student and family knowledge and awareness of the value of higher education

Feedback from parents shows that the program informs future choices. One parent commented *'it has shaped my child's understanding of the world and has influenced my child into doing a course worth doing in university'.* In a survey with parents of students who completed the 2-week summer school in 2013, 100% (N=7) reported that they saw positive changes linked to the participation in the program. Examples included subject specific skills, overall confidence and personal effectiveness, general awareness of university. All participants also agreed that the program influenced what their child is planning after school.

Over 500 family and friends attended the summer school graduation ceremony in 2013 showing the engagement of families in the program. Such an event allows families to take part in campus activities first hand. This is an area in which program activities are being improved to further engage this group.

Case Study- Sandra, Birrong Girls High School.
A teacher at Birrong Girls reflects on the ripple effect the program has had at their school commenting that '*the effect of being able to "pick up" information with their parents (after they have attended Summer School) has been significant, motivating a number of students to be able to attain marks above those which they had earlier set as their goal.'*

Conclusion

The U@Uni Summer School program is an example of effective outreach to build motivation and preparedness for higher education. The program has seen growth in numbers from 27 in 2009 in the first cohort students to 227 in 2013 entering the program. New content has been developed including 2 new faculty areas in the 2 week summer school and an increase in the number of follow up workshops providing an long lasting and sustained program.

Built upon effective practices such as peer learning and methods to increase self efficacy, the program demystifies the idea of university through project based inquiry learning. As noted by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), successful outreach programs include characteristics that are people rich; provide financial support; are long term and sustained; offer campus visits and are research driven (Bowes et al. 2013). The U@Uni Summer School program prides itself on meeting these characteristics and was used as a case study to highlight effective schools outreach in the NCSHE paper in 2010 (Seller, Hatman & Tranter, 2010). U@Uni Summer School provides a campus based program over 3 years that offers financial support for students during the program as well as offering support for students who attend UTS.

The U@Uni Summer School program also prides itself on using strong evaluative measures to constantly reflect and improve. External evaluation produced by Westwood Spice provided a number of recommendations, to further improve the program. Recommendations included developing ways in which to share best practice among schools, and consideration to fund further expansion of the program to meet demand. One of the most interesting recommendations that the report highlighted is the tracking and consideration of the ‘ripple effect’ of the program on peers and family. A suggested action would be to survey students about how they shared information with their peers after the program (West, Plant & Cleave, 2013). This is an area in which the program will explore further by investigating the change taking place at a peer, family and community level.

Moving forward the Equity & Diversity Unit hope to put plans in place to ensure the future of this program to continue to motivate and educate high school students in low socio economic areas.

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