**UNE L&T Symposium 2024 – Presentation Synopsis**

**1. Title of Presentation:**

Proactive student support: A targeted approach to reducing first-year attrition in Exercise and Sports Science students.

**2. Presenter(s) Name(s) and Affiliation(s):**

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**3. Main Takeaways:**

**Takeaway 1:**Brief (10 minute) 1:1 interactions with first year students prevented the loss of some exiting the degree, and enhanced rapport.

**Takeaway 2:** Opportunities are needed to explore ways to increase student communication rates, earlier in the trimester.

**4. Application in Educational Contexts:**

**Teaching Methods:**

- Course coordinators and those responsible for first-year oversight should discuss with course convenors about embedding contact hours into workload, and share load across a team.

- These stakeholders should consider utilising the Microsoft Bookings system, for scheduling automation (e.g. student driven process).

**Student Engagement:**

**-** This approach utilised a low-barrier opportunity for student to connect early with academic staff; helping to build trust and foster a sense of belonging during the critical early weeks of study.

**Curriculum Development:**

- Embedding check-in points and referral prompts into first-year unit delivery supported a more responsive, student-centred curriculum; allowing for earlier identification of learning barriers and aligning course expectations.

**5. Valuable Sources and References:**

**Source 1:** Gonçalves, et al. (2024). Undergraduate Student Retention Activities: Challenges and Research Agenda - Standardised approaches to student retention are unlikely to be effective, meaning tailored and contextually appropriate strategies should be considered. This review provides a contemporary overview of student retention and success solutions.

**Source 2:** Mahoney, et al (2022). Strategies for student belonging: The nexus of policy and practice in higher education. 'A practice report'. - This source provides perspectives on inclusivity and belonging. By creating caring learning experiences for students and paying consideration towards their student journey, they may be benefits and feel more connected to their chosen studies.   
 **6. Weakness and Area for Future Research:  
Weakness:** More and earlier contact was needed with students to fully release the aims of this project; with ~80% of students not taking up this opportunity.

**Research:** Planning is underway to repeat this project for 2026, but utilise the badge system to funnel students into contact points.

Abstract

First-year student attrition remains a significant challenge in tertiary education, specifically in Exercise and Sports Science units, impacting both student success and institutional sustainability. This project aimed to enhance student retention by proactively identifying at-risk students and providing them with targeted support through coordinated academic interventions.

A working group of academic stakeholders was constructed that included unit coordinators, teaching contributors, and the course convenor. These individuals contributed to the development of outreach system that included:

1. The development of questions focused on i) personal goals and enrolment rationale, ii) content tracking, load management, and preparation for intensive schools, iii) mental wellbeing and life circumstances
2. Establishment of referral triggers that enabled academic staff to direct students to appropriate support services within the Discipline and Institution.
3. Personalised check-in points, where students were invited to a brief 10-minute teams meeting with an academic staff member, where personalised outreach could be provided.

Through this approach, we sought to foster a sense of belonging, enhance student engagement, and ultimately improve retention rates in first-year courses. This seminar will highlight the rationale for this project, the steps taken to develop this approach, preliminary outcomes, and key lessons learned for broader application in tertiary education settings.