

Building the Professional Readiness of Graduates from Day One: An Empirical Approach to Curriculum Continuous Improvement

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Abstract : Industry employers require new graduates to bring with them a range of knowledge, skills and abilities which mean these new employees can immediately make valuable work contributions. These will be a combination of discipline and professional knowledge, skills and abilities which give graduates the technical capabilities to solve practical problems whilst interacting with a range of stakeholders. Underpinning the development of these disciplines and professional knowledge, skills and abilities, are “enabling” knowledge, skills and abilities which assist students to engage in learning. These are academic and learning skills which are essential to common starting points for both the learning process of students entering the course as well as forming the foundation for the fully developed graduate knowledge, skills and abilities. This paper reports on a project created to introduce and strengthen these enabling skills into the first semester of a Bachelor of Information Technology degree in an Australian polytechnic. The project uses an action research approach in the context of ongoing continuous improvement for the course to enhance the overall learning experience, learning sequencing, graduate outcomes, and most importantly, in the first semester, student engagement and retention. The focus of this is implementing the new curriculum in first semester subjects of the course with the aim of developing the “enabling” learning skills, such as literacy, research and numeracy based knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs). The approach used for the introduction and embedding of these KSAs, (as both enablers of learning and to underpin graduate attribute development), is presented. Building on previous publications which reported different aspects of this longitudinal study, this paper recaps on the rationale for the curriculum redevelopment and then presents the quantitative findings of entering students’ reading literacy and numeracy knowledge and skills degree as well as their perceived research ability. The paper presents the methodology and findings for this stage of the research. Overall, the cohort exhibits mixed KSA levels in these areas, with a relatively low aggregated score. In addition, the paper describes the considerations for adjusting the design and delivery of the new subjects with a targeted learning experience, in response to the feedback gained through continuous monitoring. Such a strategy is aimed at accommodating the changing learning needs of the students and serves to support them towards achieving the enabling learning goals starting from day one of their higher education studies.

Keywords : enabling skills, student retention, embedded learning support, continuous improvement

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