

# Providing targeted support to disengaged students in response to COVID-19

K.C. Linden,<sup>1</sup> P. Gonzalez<sup>1</sup>

1. Charles Sturt University, New South Wales, Australia

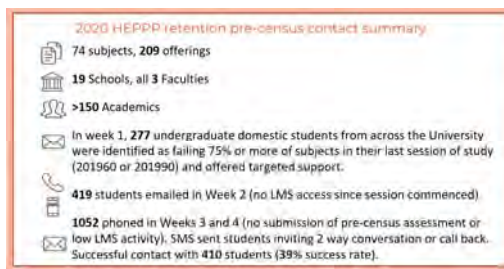
## INTRODUCTION:

Both the Higher Education Standards Panel (2017) and Grattan Institute (2018) reports included recommendations about monitoring student engagement before the HECS census date. In a pilot project, we were able to show significant improvements in subject progress rates by identifying students with missed early assessment items and offering targeted support (Linden, 2019). In 2020, the Charles Sturt University Retention team expanded this project and worked with academics from across the three Faculties (Faculty of Arts and Education, Faculty of Science and Faculty of Business Justice and Behavioural Science) to support the implementation of pre census early assessment items into 74 subjects. A range of learning analytics are also used to monitor student engagement. This project was expanded post census in response to COVID-19 to track missed assessments and offer targeted support to students throughout the remainder of session 1 2020.

## Pre Census:

In the first 4 weeks of session 1 in 2020 over 1200 students did not submit the early assessment item and were offered targeted student support prior to the census date. The student outbound calling team attempted to phone students on two separate occasions and also sent an SMS inviting a two way conversation. A follow up email with relevant links was sent to students that did not answer the phone or reply to the SMS.

The student outbound call team offered targeted support, such as advice on seeking special consideration, student support or contacting a subject coordinator to help a student succeed. If required, advice was provided on reducing subject load, deferral or withdrawing from study to save an unnecessary debt.



## Post Census:

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, during the final 6 weeks of session 1 in 2020 1197 students did not submit assessment items and were offered targeted student support. Many students contacted did not realise that they could request an extension.

2020 HEPPP retention post-census/contact summary	
Students withdrawn before contact could be made	248
Total students offered targeted support	1197
% of Contacts leading to dialog with Outreach team	66%
% Contacts without dialog	34%
Total subsequent assessment submissions	395
Submission rate of students with contact leading to a dialog	40%
Submission rate of students with contact without dialog	19%

## CONCLUSION:

Student feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with 40% of students contacted subsequently submitted the missed assignment. Following successful contact, disengaged students engage significantly more with the learning management system than those not contacted. Overall, this project demonstrated that the correct students were identified for the call campaign, ensuring that support was being targeted where it was most needed.

## REFERENCES:

- Grattan Institute. (2018). Dropping out: the benefits and costs of trying university. Retrieved from <https://grattan.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/904-dropping-out-the-benefits-and-costs-of-trying-university.pdf>
- Higher Education Standards Panel. (2017). Improving retention, completion and success in higher education. Retrieved from [https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/final\\_discussion\\_paper.pdf](https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/final_discussion_paper.pdf)
- Linden, K., & Webster, L. Back to Basics: combining analytics and early assessment with personalised contact to improve student progress. *Personalised Learning. Diverse Goals. One Heart.*, 499.

## WHO ARE WE?

Dr Kelly Linden is the Sub Dean Learning and Teaching at Charles Sturt University, B.Sci (Hons1), PhD (Medicine) and Dr Prue Gonzalez is the Retention Lead at Charles Sturt University, BEnvSci(Mgt-CultHerit)(Hons) CSU, PhD CSU