

2014

Getting Smart about the First-Year Undergraduate Experience

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Recommended Citation

O'Rawe, M. (2014) 'Getting Smart! about the First-Year Experience', *33rd Annual conference on the First-Year Experience*, University of South Carolina, San Diego, USA.

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Getting Smart! about the first-year undergraduate experience

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D.I.T.

- 125 year history
- combines the academic excellence of a traditional university with career-focused learning
- Student numbers currently 19,500.
- Shortly in transition to new Dublin city centre campus



Current and projected student numbers

| Student Category | 12/13 | Projected 2019/20 + 7% | Projected 2029/30 +24% |
|---------------------------|---------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| UG FT | 12,307 | 13,168 | 15,261 |
| PG FT (taught & research) | 939 | 1,005 | 1,164 |
| UG PT (incl cpd) | 4,052 | 4,335 | 5,054 |
| PG PT (taught & research) | 1,374 | 1,470 | 1,704 |
| Junior Music | 900 | 900 | 900 |
| Total | 19,572 | 20,878 | 24,083 |

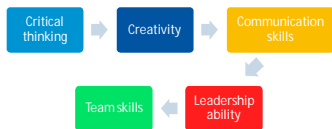
The Irish perspective

- Irish higher education now at a point of transition
 - ❖ Student numbers and participation – increase from 5% in 1960 to 65% in 2010
Numbers enrolled are expected to rise continuously-2019 +7% 2029 + 24%
 - ❖ Changing profile of student – demographics, learning styles & their impact on engagement
 - ❖ New emphasis on high-order knowledge-based skills
 - ❖ Economic & recessionary pressures
- Renewed interest in:
- ❖ Quality of the student experience/strengthening student engagement
 - ❖ Broadening the curriculum
 - ❖ Adaptability & entrepreneurial skills
 - ❖ Particular emphasis on the first-year experience

(*Hunt Report: 2011
Dept. of Education & Skills 2013)
ESRI Nov 2012)

Development of key skills - the national picture

Range of key generic skills identified:



“The simple acquisition of knowledge is not enough to count as an education”

(Hunt Report 2011, p. 79)

Development of key skills – the local/D.I.T. picture

- An environment of change for all stakeholders was identified (post 2007):
- Opportunities and challenges
 - Engagement and retention
 - Student motivation
 - Professional and personal development
 - Oral and written communication problems
 - Students' ability to manage work and learning
 - Increased demands on curriculum space

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"Key skills" set identified
Theoretical underpinnings

Strengthening student engagement - the theoretical challenges

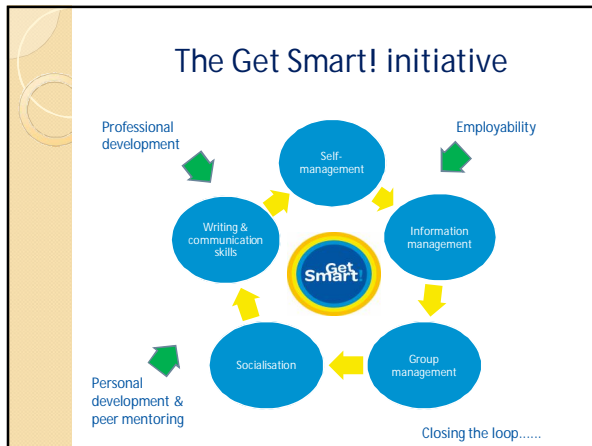
Engagement-based Learning & Teaching approach (Jones 2009)

1. Cultivate one-on-one relationships
2. Learn new skills & habits
3. Incorporate systematic strategies
4. Take responsibility for student engagement practices
5. Promote a school/department-wide culture of engagement
6. Focus on professional development of staff

Strengthening student engagement - the practical challenges?





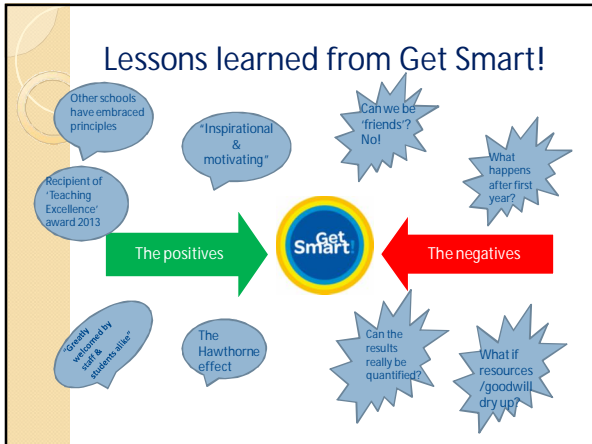


Get Smart!

- An initiative developed through a bottom-up lecturer-led approach through which the emphasis is on teaching through engagement
- Designed to *communicate* with students in their language as well as formal communication modes;
- Sits laterally across modules and forms an *integrating* mechanism between academic and non-academic areas;
- *Embeds* learning strategies, information literacy, study skills, personal & professional development into all first year module content.

Teaching for engagement – closing the loop


- Supportive feedback on formative assessment
- Teaching for student engagement
 - “The potential for enthusiastic engagement in the curricula should be harnessed in the critical first days of the first weeks of the first year, thereby promoting a sense of belonging, so often missing for the contemporary learner”
(Kitt & Nelson 2005, p. 229)
 - Induction – a new approach
 
 - Getting a buzz – Get Smart! workshop



Conclusion

A journey of chaos & cultural change... and trying to quantify the unquantifiable?

- Students only learn in an engaged environment
- Emergent role of lecturer as a provider of (academic) support mechanisms;
- New modes of communication employed (with varying degrees of success);
- The lecturer may now be viewed as an enhancer of the selected key skills;
- Need to interact strongly with non-academic areas.







Get Smart! in action

<http://www.youtube.com/user/DITGetSmartVideos>