Responding to retention challenges through Indigenous First Year Engagement

New ways of working in partnership, Oral

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Abstract:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are more than twice as likely to withdraw from university studies in their first year compared to non-Indigenous domestic students. In 2017, Walanga Muru, Macquarie University’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student centre, developed a new and innovative Indigenous first year engagement program. The program focuses on fostering meaningful partnerships between commencing students, the Walanga Muru community and other key stakeholders early in a student’s university journey. The program is a multi-layered approach which combines existing services with new initiatives, including the establishment of First Year Advisors providing mentorship, a Cultural camp, community dinner, social events and individualised preparation sessions.

Building meaningful partnerships and a strong sense of community at the start of a student’s journey has resulted in an increase in first years accessing key resources for success throughout the semester, as well as a strengthened sense of belonging within the university environment. In the first semester of the program, Walanga Muru has increased first year retention rates by 24%. This presentation will discuss the program’s methods of promoting culturally-appropriate relationships for student success and reveals further data that demonstrates the qualitative and quantitative impact of the program on student retention and success.

Biography:

Eliza Kitchener is the Academic Engagement Coordinator at Walanga Muru, Macquarie University’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander centre. A proud Dharawal woman and Human Sciences- Community Services graduate, Eliza is passionate about promoting and celebrating Indigenous success in tertiary settings.