

Students and Their Learning Journeys: A Study of Failure in an Australian University

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Abstract

This thesis explores students' learning journeys in and through units in Higher Education degree courses. The exploration focuses specifically on student learning failure. It does so by using empirical evidence from one Australian university over a two-year period. The argument presented here is that universities can exploit detailed data at their disposal to enhance students' achievements on their learning journeys.

An information-rich but modest Toolkit is proposed that provides a detailed description of student learning journeys in general, and of failure in particular. The Toolkit comprises an individual student's current achievement in a unit (Grade); an individual student's previous semester achievement (Grade Point Average); three failing Categories, namely, Academically Weak, Not Engaged or Speed Bump and two passing Categories, namely, Passing OK or Flagging, into one of which each individual student is assigned after encountering a unit; and the Group Learning Attainment of all students in that unit (an average of all Grades in a unit).

The final Toolkit element concerns Dimensions of responsibility for learning. The Dimensions are Student, University, Course and Lecturer. This thesis suggests that student academic learning failure is an interrelationship of these four Dimensions. An argument is presented that the three non-Student Dimensions can impact negatively on student learning journeys, and are likely to contribute to failure.

Notwithstanding these issues, the thesis concludes that it is possible to support and enhance student learning achievement journeys.

Keywords

Failure, withdrawal, dropout, learning.

Acknowledgements

While one hopes for the best, more so with a thesis-building work, it is a timely reminder that these lines from the allegorical poem, *Heaven*, by Douglas Stewart, may come to pass.

The great, black Judgement Book

Says nothing good of him.

Weeping of the Seraphim.

But one hopes not, because support comes from many places.

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I describe myself as a PhD candidate with an interest / passion / preoccupation in researching and designing metrics to measure and become enlightened about student academic learning journeys.

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