

Student support

Goal: to set standards in student support which will help attract, support and retain students.

Establish, in partnership with other parties where appropriate, a range of amenities to attract and support both domestic and international students

Amenities that attract and support

Counselling, mentoring, peer support, student activities and welfare services continued for all students, both domestic and international, in 2006. International students also had access to specialised services such as additional language support, visa management and Overseas Student Health Cover arrangements.

A new e-bulletin improved communication on topics such as key dates, support services, scholarships, and events designed to assist students in their studies.

Three new staff positions were established to assist and enhance the delivery of services and support, and to improve student retention and success.

- The Student Wellbeing Officer will promote health education and deliver various wellbeing and welfare services to students, including services related to tenancy issues and financial assistance.
- The Student Clubs and Activities Officer will organise wide-ranging events to promote student involvement and positive participation in a variety of recreation and sporting clubs. This will encourage personal development, healthy lifestyles and opportunities for social and discipline-related interactions.
- The Student Access Officer will identify factors leading to monitored enrolment, and assist students on monitored enrolment who would benefit from financial advice, tenancy support, time management advice, academic skills support, and improved health care contacts.

Scholarships and bursaries

In 2006 the University offered scholarships and bursaries worth more than \$1 million to students enrolled in various study areas. About \$180,000 of these funds were provided by local organisations and businesses, and this growing community involvement in USC



- PhD student James Lee was awarded a \$30,000 Kirk Foundation Scholarship for his work in remote monitoring technology (sport and health). His research is supervised by Dr Brendan Burkett and Dr Rebecca Mellifont at the Centre for Healthy Activities, Sport and Exercise (CHASE) in the Faculty of Science, Health and Education.

was celebrated in 2006 when the University held two major ceremonies to present scholarships, bursaries and prizes to students.

Scholarships and bursaries are available to commencing and current undergraduate and postgraduate students. Recipients are selected on a variety of criteria, including financial need and academic performance.

Assist students in achieving the best possible academic outcomes

Support services

A range of academic support services were offered throughout 2006. Seminars and workshops held during Orientation helped students adapt to a new learning environment and meet the challenges of tertiary study. Personal consultations were available to all students.

Transition programs remained popular. They included academic writing and study skills sessions, return-to-study workshops for mature-age students and basic computing skills courses.

In 2006, Library 'drop-in' sessions were introduced and ran throughout the week, along with faculty workshops offered during

class time. The sessions raised the profile of the skills advisory services and increased the accessibility of advisers.

Student materials and a workbook for the new course Academic Skills for Success were developed in conjunction with the Tertiary Preparation Pathway, which began in second semester (page 23).

Support the development of Library resources and IT capacity

Library resources

In 2006 Library resources included access to a print collection of more than 100,000 items and to electronic databases including more than 26,000 online journal and newspaper titles. The print collection continues to grow by about 10,000 items each year. Online journal titles increased significantly with the subscription to EBSCO MegaFile. This multi-disciplinary database provides full-text for almost 12,000 publications and indexing and abstracting for more than 16,000 publications, with coverage dating from the 1800s.

Information technology

Improved sustainability of the University's ICT systems was a major focus for Information Technology Services (ITS) staff in 2006.

Development work included:

- upgrading the University's Internet connection from 4Mb to 20Mb
- launching a wireless Internet pilot in the Library, for review following student use during first semester 2007
- developing a University Portal for release in early 2007
- introducing a standard computing environment for staff and students
- providing new Macintosh computers for computer-based art and design students
- completing a major audiovisual upgrade in four lecture theatres
- fit-outs of nine new teaching venues for students studying geographic information systems, health and nursing, and in sports and science laboratories

Encourage students to engage with the University (eg through committee involvement and input to decision making processes)

Student membership

Two members of the student body sit on the University Council, while one undergraduate student from each faculty and one postgraduate student sit on the University's Academic Board. Membership of the University's Research Management Committee includes a higher degree by research candidate, who is not a member of staff of the University (or who has a staff appointment of less than 0.5), and the composition of the Learning and Teaching Management Committee provides for an undergraduate student member.

Loans Scheme review

A review of the Student Loans Scheme by third-year Social Policy students resulted in a revision of policy and a change to payment arrangements. Funds are now paid directly into students' bank accounts, rather than as cheques.

Student ambassador program

In 2006, 12 student ambassadors performed 549 hours of work for the University. Ambassadors attended training sessions presented by the University, covering topics such as behaviour management, presentation skills, program knowledge, IT and technology skills.

Ambassadors represent the University at careers markets, school visits, campus tours, and various events in the Sunshine Coast, Brisbane, Darling Downs and Wide Bay regions. Feedback on their performance is obtained from all schools and highlights the ambassadors as valuable assets to the University.

Encourage students to continue their association with the University on graduation as part of the alumni

Alumni Relations initiatives

In 2006, an Alumni Relations position was created within the University Foundation to develop and enhance graduate contact with the University. The appointee launched a quarterly e-newsletter, introduced a series of alumni networking events and increased alumni presence on the USC website.

More than 100 alumni attended an Alumni Reunion held as part of the University's tenth anniversary in March. An Alumni Homecoming, including a business start-up workshop, art exhibition, tour of new campus buildings and facilities and a social event, brought graduates together and updated them on recent and future University developments.

At a University Foundation event in September 2006, USC Bachelor of Business graduate and World Ironwoman Champion Kristy Munroe received the 2006 Outstanding Alumni of the Year Award.

The Outstanding Alumni Award is determined via nominations from faculty deans and final selection by a panel of senior staff, including Vice-Chancellor Professor Paul Thomas AM. The inaugural Outstanding Alumni of the Year Award was presented in 2005 to paralympian Marayke Jonkers.

Provide for the particular needs of equity groups and Indigenous students

Equity bursaries and scholarships

In 2006, the University announced it would increase the number of equity bursaries and scholarships it offers, from a value of \$20,000 in 2006 to \$100,000 in 2007, to help more students from low socio-economic backgrounds. The University allocates Commonwealth Learning Scholarships and offers USC Equity Scholarships for students from low-income backgrounds or other recognised equity groups.

Indigenous student support

USC is committed to equitable access to and participation in education and training for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) students.

Visits to schools and regional Indigenous networking groups proved valuable, while specialised Orientation activities for Indigenous students met specific needs, and Indigenous Services Officers arranged tutors under the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme.

A National Indigenous Cadetship Program (NICP) Coordinator was appointed in March 2006, and achieved nine placement targets by the end of the year. USC's target, set by the Commonwealth Department of Workplace Relations, is 18 placements over a period of two years, and the NICP Coordinator is on track to achieve this goal. Through NICP, the University appointed its first on campus cadet to the Faculty of Science, Health and Education in first semester 2007.

Disability Services

USC continues to enrol a high proportion of students with disabilities (4.12 percent of domestic students in 2006), and the Disability Services Officer focuses on providing individual support for these students. Assistance includes notetakers, aids and equipment, participation assistants, sign language interpreters and adaptive software.

In 2006 a lunchtime speaker program was introduced. Specialists from the community discussed the management of specific disabilities and learning difficulties at sessions attended by academic and support staff and postgraduate students.

Student support

Key performance indicators

Improved undergraduate student progress and retention rates, including for equity and Indigenous students

Attrition¹

All students

Based on summary data provided by the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) as part of the Institution Assessment Framework Portfolio², USC has experienced a consistently high attrition rate when compared to both the cohort and sector, as summarised below.

Year	USC	NGU*	National
2000	25.48%	21.78%	17.20%
2001	25.75%	21.72%	16.15%
2002	27.93%	18.94%	15.10%
2003	27.86%	18.23%	14.50%

* New Generation Universities.

1 Percentage of students who do not enrol in the following year nor complete their program. The 2003 attrition rate compares students enrolled in 2003 and their status in 2004.

2 Includes undergraduate students only (domestic and international).

Attrition rate calculations compare only students within an institution and do not take into account movement across the sector. The University of the Sunshine Coast often serves as a feeder institution for students planning to eventually study elsewhere. Where students wish to undertake a program not offered at USC, yet do not meet entry criteria at another institution, they have been encouraged to enrol at USC and then transfer to preferred programs the following year. This has been an inevitable part of USC's development, given the comparatively limited number of programs on offer. Students do not usually commence their major/s until second year and can generally obtain credit at another institution for subjects completed at USC.

When students formally withdraw from USC, they are asked to indicate the major reasons influencing their decisions to discontinue. Of the students who formally withdrew over the period 1 September 2003 to 24 March 2006, 38 percent indicated the main reason for leaving was to study at another university.

The next most common reason (16 percent of respondents) was employment commitments.

In addition, a 2003 survey of 934 first year students conducted by an external consultant early in first semester supports the contention that many students use the University as a feeder institution. The survey found that more than a quarter of students surveyed (26.4 percent) intended to transfer to another university. The survey will be carried out again at the beginning of 2007.

Student Administration and the Strategic Information and Analysis Unit are collaborating on a project to enable online withdrawals. This facility will gather additional qualitative information to inform a formal Attrition Study to be conducted by the Strategic Information and Analysis Unit in early 2007.

Equity groups

Equity data produced by DEST (published most recently in 2005) indicated that USC students from low socio-economic backgrounds, students with disabilities and students from rural areas show consistently lower retention rates than the state and national averages for these groups. Given that a large proportion of the University of the Sunshine Coast's students are from local areas, where many postcodes are designated low socio-economic and rural, these rates may be expected to mirror those of all domestic students. In all cases, the retention rate for these groups at USC increased from 2003 to 2004 with the retention rate for students with disabilities in 2004 nearing the state average.

Rates for students identified as from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds or Isolated Areas have not been assessed due to the small numbers of enrolments. Rates for ATSI students have been assessed and are considered with care, due also to the reasonably small numbers of students involved.

When comparing retention rates of equity group students to non-equity group students, in 2004 students from low socio-economic backgrounds, students with disabilities and students from rural areas were retained at a higher rate than their non-equity

counterparts. This was not the case at either the state or national levels. ATSI students continued to be retained at a lower level than non-ATSI students in 2004, and this was also reflected at both state and national levels.

Progress rates⁴

All students

Based on summary data provided by DEST as part of the Institution Assessment Framework Portfolio, the progress rate for undergraduate students has increased each year since 2000 and is similar to the cohort and sector averages.

Year	USC	NGU*	National
2000	82.01%	83.39%	85.99%
2001	83.29%	83.88%	86.45%
2002	88.62%	89.18%	89.98%
2003	88.66%	89.16%	90.43%
2004	90.18%	89.36%	90.75%

* New Generation Universities.

4 Proportion of load successfully completed.

Increased uptake by students of opportunities to become involved in University decision-making

The University's formal committees (Council and its committees, Academic Board and its committees and the Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Committee) include 10 designated student places. This number has remained unchanged since 2004.

In considering its response to Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU) legislation, Council considered student membership of University committees post-VSU, and noted that the current level of student membership of committees would remain unchanged. The only change would be that the composition of a committee could not make reference to a student or students being nominated or appointed to a committee by the Student Guild. In future the selection of student members must be undertaken by some other means (eg by election).

Positive and constructive student feedback on infrastructure and services

Library

The Library takes part in the Rodski survey every two years. This survey contains 40 questions covering the full range of Library services, and data collected are used to assess Library client satisfaction. The 2005 Rodski survey at USC revealed that 89 percent of respondents reported being 'satisfied' to 'highly satisfied' with Library resources and services. Staff were seen as fair, professional, friendly and providing quality service. The issue causing most concern for clients was the number of computer workstations available. Since the 2005 survey, more than 33 changes and improvements have been achieved. This included the addition of 19 computers to the Information Commons, bringing the total number of computers in the Library building to 124—an increase of 300 percent since 2003.

Of the feedback forms received by the Library during 2006, 75 percent of suggestions were, or are in the process of being, implemented. Feedback from students attending information literacy tutorials showed 94 percent of respondents rated content and delivery of tutorials as either excellent or good.

Student Administration

A Student Administration satisfaction survey was conducted in 2004 and results reported to Council in 2005. The survey was repeated in 2006. Analysis is still underway and preliminary observations are as follows:

- Student satisfaction with quality of service at front counter, on the telephone and by email remains high at more than 93 percent of students surveyed.
- Students described the services provided as professional and friendly in more than 95 percent of forms returned.
- Email remains the preferred source of communication for students.
- Students would prefer Student Administration to remain open late on Mondays rather than Wednesdays.

Student Administration annually surveys students who hold Commonwealth Learning Scholarships and University Equity Scholarships. The first survey was conducted in October 2005 and a report presented to the Equity Committee in 2006. In brief, results confirmed that these scholarships were benefiting recipients significantly, particularly in the following areas.

- Academic impact—scholarships reduced the need to work long hours in part-time employment, with 33 percent of respondents indicating they chose not to work at all and only four percent saying they each worked more than 16 hours a week.
- Emotional impact—students generally perceived that the scholarships reduced levels of stress and worry and reported strong feelings of support and encouragement.
- Financial impact—students felt more able to fund educational and living expenses.

The 2006 Scholarship Survey was distributed in late 2006, with data to be collated in 2007.

Voluntary Student Unionism

Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU) was legislated in December 2005, for implementation from 1 July 2006.

In early 2006, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor formed a project team to provide recommendations to the University on how USC could best manage the impact of VSU. The team conducted broad stakeholder consultation regarding the likely impacts of changes or removal of services offered by the Student Guild, should they occur.

The project team presented a formal report to the Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, with recommendations communicated to Cost Centre Managers and the Student Guild. Two new Student Services positions were created as a result of the recommendations—a Student Wellbeing Officer, and a Student Activities and Clubs Officer (page 44). Student Services was also tasked with coordinating the Orientation program for new students beginning in 2007.

The two new Student Services roles were initiated to ensure continuity of student health and welfare activities and social and cultural programs. The Student Loans Policy and Procedures were also reviewed in 2006 so as to improve effectiveness and accessibility, and the Student Wellbeing Officer was made responsible for the administration of student loans.

It was identified that there could be less opportunity for student participation in committee and governance roles, should activities of the Student Guild decrease. While this did not eventuate in 2006, the University began planning for a Student Liaison Committee with student members, to be formed in 2007.

In 2006, planning for the continued operation of a 24-hour on campus recreation room for students by the Guild in partnership with the University took place, with USC assuming responsibility for provision of on campus ATM facilities for the use of students, staff and visitors.

There is a clear intention on the part of the University to continue the services it has assumed into the future.