

Fellow Profile



Sarah O'Shea University of Wollongong

Sarah O'Shea has spent nearly twenty-five years working to effect change within the higher education (HE) sector through research that focuses on the access and participation of students from identified equity groups.

Fellowship title: “Engaging Families to Engage Students”: Exploring how university outreach activities can forge productive partnerships with families to assist first in family students navigate their higher education journey.

Year completed: 2017

Expertise key words: HE access and participation, educational equity, sociology of education

What did you achieve?: This Fellowship focused on those students who are the first in their families to come to university in order to explore approaches to retaining and engaging this cohort. Of particular interest was the ways in which the family and community of learners might be included in this university journey.

Whilst many university outreach and retention programs have been put in place to improve the participation rates of students from equity groups, arguably they are missing a key component that is essential to the success of these programs — meaningful engagement with family and community of learners. The consequence is that many outreach programs may not achieve their potential because family members lack awareness of what it means to go to university and how to effectively support students in this journey. In recognition of this, this Fellowship worked with university staff involved with the transition and retention of FiF students across Australia. In a series of workshops and also, through the development of an array of online resources, the Fellowship showcased approaches to fostering connections with the family/community of learners in order to better sustain student engagement during transition into the university environment.

The Fellowship developed a number of online resources and tools to assist students' significant others in understanding the transition to further studies. These resources were complemented by both recommendations for the sector and an online toolkit for equity practitioners. All of these resources and more are available from: <http://www.firstinfamily.com.au/OLT.php>

What does the sector need now?: My 2017 Churchill Fellowship continued my exploration of this area and the key recommendations are available here: <https://video214.com/play/TWTKaaZXAJuSqzDtEzXeTQ/s/dark>



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