The Churchill Fellowship to explore best practices in engaging and retaining students who are the first in their families to attend university.
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Signed: [Signature]

Dated: 19 December 2018

Keywords: Higher Education Access and Participation; First in Family students; First Generation students; Student Success; Higher Education equity; Social inclusion; Equality; educational equity; university student retention
It is no use saying, ‘We are doing our best.’ You have got to succeed in doing what is necessary.

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INSTITUTE OF HIGHER EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Celebratory Discourse
Foreground our FiF populations
Cautionary Tales: Possibility of labelling
Students in partnership and as collaborators
Reframing Staff Perspectives: Development opportunities
Embrace complexity rather than adopting a one-size fits all
Developing necessary social capital
Show me the money!
Integration, integration, integration
Lead rather than follow

Recommendation One: Whole of Family Engagement
Recommendation Two: Make it Everyone’s Business
Recommendation Three: Clarify what ‘First in Family’ actually means
Recommendation Four: Revisit your approach to peer mentoring
Recommendation Five: Develop highly accessible staff resources
Recommendation Six: Make contextualised research a priority
Recommendation Seven: Avoid unintentionally creating a FiF ‘ghetto’
Recommendation Eight: Recognise the importance of funded internships opportunities
Recommendation Nine: Create meaningful relationships with FiF alumni
Recommendation Ten: Foreground the solitary nature of the FiF student transition
Recommendation Eleven: Don’t forget the ‘human touch’
Recommendation Twelve: Examine institutional discourse carefully
Recommendation Thirteen: Seek out innovATIVE AND ENTREPRENEURIAL FUNDING MODELS

DISSEMINATION: SHARING THE FINDINGS

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This Fellowship focussed on exploring approaches to supporting and engaging those students who are the first in their families to attend university. This is a growing cohort in Australia, nationally over 51% of our student population are estimated to be the first in their immediate family to attend higher education. This population are reported as having additional and somewhat ‘hidden’ obstacles that impact on their educational participation, often related to the fact that they do not have access to a knowledgeable other who can assist them in unpacking some of the assumed or ‘insider’ knowledges associated with university. For those who are the first out of their family or community to attend university, the lack of a ‘guide on the side’ means that they may not have access to anyone they feel comfortable asking about this assumed knowledge. One example is the language of higher education which is both complex and confusing - sometimes even differing between universities, resulting in a bewildering array of vocabulary that may have very little meaning to those outside the institution.

This is a highly intersected group that may have a range of issues impacting on their educational experiences. Spiegler and Bednarek (2013) report that the first in family student cohort is ‘more likely to be from lower income and lower status-occupational homes; they tend to be older and they are more likely to belong to an ethnic minority’ (p. 321). This range of largely invisible parameters can weaken a sense of belonging within a HE institution and when combined with a limited generational family biography of attendance (Ball, Davies, David & Reay, 2002), may lead to a sense of being an ‘outsider’ where thoughts of early departure become inevitable. This hidden disadvantage is not only significant for the individual learner but also those watching on the side lines. If first in family students depart from higher education early, the intergenerational impacts on those around them can be significant. Often the educational journeys of these students are being witnessed by others in their community and if they leave, this sends a very negative message back to their observers, arguably limiting educational choices and aspirations.

1. Definitions of first in the family do differ across institutions and countries, in my own research I define first in the family as the ‘first’ person out of parents, siblings, partners and children to attend university and obtain a degree (O'Shea, May & Stone, 2015).
The fellowship explored various approaches to supporting and engaging first in family students implemented by universities in the UK, Canada and the US. These countries have recognised the significance of this cohort for a longer time than Australia and so, by examining the types of interventions that they have introduced and the theories behind their execution, I was able to consider what approaches might be usefully applied to the Australian context. The opportunity to meet and talk with specialists and researchers across these countries offered insights that can directly inform my work with this cohort. I will utilise existing social and online platforms to disseminate this work across Australia.

I am indebted to the Churchill Fellowship for supporting me in these endeavours, this is relatively innovative work within the Australian HE sector and so I am grateful that the Trust was able to recognise the importance of this work and its timely nature. I am also very appreciative of the support of my employer University of Wollongong for providing me with Sabbatical Leave to enable me to make this trip and also, providing ongoing support of my research and work in this field. I wanted to also acknowledge my colleagues in the equity field who also work tirelessly to ensure that Australian Higher Education is accessible to all rather than a select few. We still have a lot of work to do!

Throughout this Fellowship journey I also benefited from the extreme generosity of time and collegiately from scholars and practitioners across the globe. I want to thank all of you for giving up time to speak to me and also, providing advice and support in a myriad of ways. Special mention to Ms Rosa Thorn-Jones at University of South Carolina who created an itinerary that was scheduled to the minute but with adequate time for refuelling at the wonderful Prestons restaurant! Also, my very sincere and deep thanks to Professors Tom and Trisha Reeves who went out of their way to ensure that my trip to The University of Georgia was both productive but also, full of companionship and laughter – thank you both very much for many adventures and also thank you to Tom for ‘making introductions’ at Arizona State University.

Last but certainly not least, I want to thank my family (particularly my husband Sean) for ongoing support and ‘holding the fort’ while I was away (again). This was a long trip (nine weeks in total) and having to manage our young adult family, two large dogs, a demanding cat and also run a household is no mean feat – this is the last time (promise!)

Professor Sarah O’Shea
December 2018
Executive Summary

Dr Sarah O’Shea,
Professor in Adult, Vocational and Higher Education,
Northfields Avenue, University of Wollongong.
Research Overview: www.heaccessforall.com
Email: saraho@uow.edu.au

This fellowship explored best practice in supporting and engaging students who are the first in their families to come to university. The terms first in family or first generation are used in this report interchangeably to identify students who are the first in their immediate family to participate in university, this includes parents, siblings, partners and children. This is a growing student population globally and one that is highly intersected by equity categories, such intersectionality impacting on student retention and completion. By investigating how institutions across the UK, Canada and the US consider these learners, the fellowship foregrounds innovative approaches and thinking in this regard.

The fellowship enabled me to visit university sites across each of these locations and to both witness practical initiatives targeted at supporting this first in family (FiF) cohort and also, to have discussions with leading researchers and academics in the topic. The fellowship had a dual-fold focus seeking to explore innovative theoretical applications as well as investigate how various interventions are implemented. Despite researching and working in this field for over a decade, this fellowship greatly increased my understanding of the field in two ways - providing me with new knowledge and importantly, confirming existing perspectives on what I thought would work. Having the opportunity to engage in productive conversations with a wide range of stakeholders allowed me to reflect deeply on what could work in the Australian context as well as consider how to implement these changes sector-wide. I want to acknowledge all the people who took the time to meet with me, each had a hectic schedule and gave generously regardless.

Overwhelmingly, what struck me is how the FiF student cohort is very visible across the institutional discourses in each of these countries. This is a success discourse which characterises entry into higher education in terms of celebration and positive outcomes. This is key to ensuring that the FiF population feels welcomed rather than being regarded as deficit or lacking essential skills or knowledges. Repeatedly this ‘celebratory discourse’ is displayed in institutional charters, marketing campaigns and also, targeted support initiatives. The approach is largely global in focus, often foregrounding the FiF status of staff and including very visible markers of belonging (i.e. National FiF Celebration Day; FiF badges and stickers; videos of successful FiF alumni etc). Many of the institutions productively leverage their alumni to both support programs and also, highlight future success.

Dissemination of these and other key learnings will occur through a diversity of avenues. This report will be distributed to thought leaders across the HE sector, particularly those who lead the academic and student experience areas. Additionally, social media and my existing online presence will be used to ‘drip-feed’ findings; the blogs that I wrote whilst travelling will be placed in an online digest and distributed to an existing e-list of equity stakeholders. Finally, I will present on these findings at leading conferences with one invited workshop already confirmed at the National Equity Practitioners Higher Education Australia Conference in 2019.
UNITED KINGDOM

9 - 11 SEPTEMBER
Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU)

MEETINGS & INTERVIEWS ²

Interview with Professor Claire Hamshire:
Head of Education, Faculty of Health, Psychology and Social Care, Manchester Metropolitan University.

Interview with Ms Helen Lord:
Transition and Peer Support Manager, Widening Participation and Transition & Peer Support Team, Manchester Metropolitan University.

Interview with Mr Peter Riley:
Head of Widening Participation and Student Financial Support, Manchester Metropolitan University

Interview with Dr Rachel Forsyth:
Associate Head, Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, Manchester Metropolitan University

13-14 SEPTEMBER
York St John University (YsJ)

MEETINGS & INTERVIEWS

Interview with Mr Simon Ganderton:
Manager, Student Success & Engagement Team, York St John University

Interview with Ms Jenni Addicott:
Widening Participation Officer, Outreach, York St John University.

Interview with Ms Anna Deacon:
Student Widening Participation Advisor, York St John University.

Interview with Ms Alice Rowan:
International Student Support Officer, York St John University.

Interview with Mr Nick Streatfield:
Head Student Services, York St John University

² All interviews were recorded with permission for further use in reports and blogs while meetings were not recorded and any reference to what was discussed has only been paraphrased within the report.

Professor Sarah O’Shea, 2017 Churchill Fellow
15-16 OCTOBER
Centre for Higher Education Equity Research (CHEER) University of Sussex

MEETINGS & INTERVIEWS

Interview with Dr Emily Danvers:
Lecturer in Education, Co-Director (CHEER) and Research and Evaluation Programme Manager

Interview with Dr Tamsin Hinton-Smith:
Senior Lecturer In Higher Education (Education), Member (Centre for Innovation and Research in Childhood and Youth, Centre for Higher Education and Equity Research)

Meeting with Professor Louise Morley:
Professor of Education and Director, Centre for Higher Education and Equity Research

CANADA

19 OCTOBER
University of Toronto, Canada

MEETINGS & INTERVIEWS

Meeting with A/Professor Diane Falmer:
A/Professor in Social Justice Education and Faculty Member Centre for Research in French-Ontario Education (CREFO)

Meeting with Professor Leesa Wheelahan:
William G. Davis Chair in Community College, Faculty Member Leadership for the Study of Canadian and International Higher Education

Interview with Dr David Kim:
Dean of Residence and PhD Graduate who researched FiF mentoring programs.

22-23 OCTOBER
Western University, Canada

MEETINGS & INTERVIEWS

Interviews with Professor Wolfgang Lehmann:
Department of Sociology, Western University - two interviews and visits that occurred over two days.
## UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

### 25-26 OCTOBER

National Resource Center for The First Year Experience and Students in Transition, University of Sth Carolina

### MEETINGS & INTERVIEWS

**Interview with Dr Jennifer Keup:**
Director, National Resource Center for the First Year Experience and Students in Transition

**Interview with Dr Dallin Young:**
Assistant Director for Research, Grants, and Assessment, National Resource Center

**Interview with Dr Althea Counts:**
Director, TRIO Programs, National Resource Center

**Interview with Ms Claire Robinson:**
Assistant Dean for Undergraduate Advisement and Director of University Advising Center

**Interview with Ms Sandra Varney:**
Assistant Director of Advising Center Administration

**Interview with Dr Dan Friedman:**
Director, University 101 Programs

**Meeting with Ms Emily Tedesco:**
Program Coordinator for Conferences, National Resource Center

**Interview with Mr James Winfield:**
Assistant Director for Faculty Development, University 101 Programs

**Meeting with Mr Joey Derrick:**
Director of Student Financial Aid and Scholarships, and

**Ms Ashley Bailey-Taylor:**
Assistant Director, Gamecock Guarantee Program, Student Financial Aid and Scholarships

**Interview with Professor Sandra Kelly:**
Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Office of the Provost
29-30 OCTOBER
Institute of Higher Education, University of Georgia

MEETINGS & INTERVIEWS

Roundtable and presentation for staff:
at The Institute of Higher Education, participants included Professor James Toutkashian, Professor James Hearn, A/Professor Greg Wolniak and A/Professor Amy Stitch (amongst others)

Interview with Ms Jessica Robinson:
Director Georgia College Advising corps

Interview with Ms Erin Thompson-Podvin:
Coordinator | First-Generation and Scholars Programs

Meeting with Professors Patricia Reeves and Thomas Reeves:
Faculty Staff Members and mentors in the Coco Cola First-Generation Mentoring Program

Meeting with Professor Libby Morris:
Provost and Zell B. Miller: Distinguished Professor of Higher Education

1-2 NOVEMBER
Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona

MEETINGS & INTERVIEWS

Interview with Professor Iveta Silova:
Director, Center for Advanced Studies in Global Education and Faculty Member Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College

Interview with A/Professor Molly Ott:
Higher & Postsecondary Education Program Coordinator and Faculty Member Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College

Meeting with A/Professor Yi-Chun (Shelly) Hong:
Division of Educational Leadership & Innovation and Faculty Member Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College

Meeting with Dr. Lu Ding:
Postdoctoral research associate, Learning and Cognition Lab.

Interview with Professor Punya Mishra:
Associate Dean Scholarship and innovation and Faculty Member Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College
Involving + connecting with parents.

Trouble-shooting.

AICD: Academic Intervention Coordination Day.

Academic coaching: academic coaching, 2015.


6 Stages: Discover, design, locate, set.

Complaints re adjust.
Introduction

Sometimes in life we are offered the opportunity to do something so unexpected that it had never been considered or conceived of before. This is what the Churchill Fellowship offered me. Having researched the field of educational equity and access for over two decades, with particular focus on those student cohorts who are defined as being from equity groups, I was repeatedly drawn to research and work with students who are the first in their families to come to university. Since 2014, I have interviewed over 600 students and family members. These narratives have provided genuine and rich insight into the realities of contemporary university participation for the first in family (FiF) population. This rich data set has underpinned 1) numerous student interventions targeted at students at all stages of their studies and 2) a range of resources designed to assist students and their families in this educational journey. However, what this work lacked was an understanding of the ways in which institutions in different contexts and locations productively engage with and retain this cohort. The Churchill Fellowship enabled me to actually visit locations and witness first-hand how the FiF population is considered and supported in-situ.

The rationale for focusing on FiF students was manifold, and predominantly based upon an understanding that these learners are frequently intersected by existing equity categorisations. Internationally, poorer educational outcomes have been recorded for this cohort (Harrell & Forney, 2003; Lehmann, 2009; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2012) with research indicating that those who do not have a history of HE attendance are collectively less likely to go to university and also, after arrival, may not perform to the same level academically as their second or third generation peers (HEFCE, 2010; NCES, 2012).

Importantly, FiF students make up a significant proportion of the university population within Australia. The most recent statistics indicate that over 50% of the university population are the first in their families to attend university (Spiegler & Bednarek, 2013). This figure is not exact as it relies on institutional enrolment data and individuals correctly identifying parental education levels. However, even after considering the possibility of human error, this represents a significant proportion of our students. Unfortunately, the high number of FiF enrolments is not similarly matched by high completion rates. In Australia, one report indicated that 26% of FiF students considered leaving university in the first year and this figure increased to 34% for later year students (Coates & Ransom, 2011).

Given this context, we remain unclear about who exactly our FiF students are; the sector does not have one overarching definition of this population and engagement strategies targeted at this group are still emerging. My research (O’Shea 2018, 2016a, 2016b, O’Shea, Stone, Delahunty & May, 2018) has indicated the importance of adopting a strengths-based approach to supporting and engaging diverse student cohorts and so, being able to visit a range of institutions and contexts in order to witness first-hand the approaches adopted, as well as discuss the field with leading researchers and practitioners, provided an excellent opportunity to consider strategies that could be applied to the Australian context.

1. The targeted student equity groups in Australia are defined as learners from low socio-economic backgrounds, students with a disability, students from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, students from rural and remote areas, women in non-traditional areas of study and students who have a first language other than English

2. The terms first in family (FiF) or first generation (FG) are used in this report interchangeably depending on the context – in the UK both FiF and FG are used while in the US and Canada the use of the term first generation is more common.

LEFT - Figure 1: Making sense of my notes and reflections mid Churchill Tour
Methodology

The methodology adopted for this fellowship allowed focus on both practitioners and also researchers in the field. This was a deliberate strategy as it facilitated an understanding of the practicalities of particular initiatives but equally provided me with additional insights into theoretical and scholarly considerations. All the conversations were generative but followed a flexible interview schedule with key questions outlined below:

1. Can you tell me a little about the student population in your institution?

2. Approximately how many first in family students do you have in this institution?

3. Is data routinely collected on this cohort at a national level? At an institutional level? If yes: how is this data collected? If no: how do you identify this particular cohort?

4. Based on your own experiences (research/teaching/support) what would you define as being the main obstacles this cohort encounter during their transition into university and also as they move through the degree?

5. What are the types of supports offered by your institution for this cohort?

6. What is the take up like? How do students learn about these initiatives?

7. In an ideal world, what types of supports or interventions would you like to see introduced? What do you feel would be the most effective ways to support this cohort?

8. Again, based on your experience what or who do you think is doing really interesting things in the field – or what programs or supports are you particularly impressed by?

9. Within Australia, this group is intersected by a number of diversity of equity characteristics (such as being from low SES backgrounds/rural or remote) – is this the case in your institution/country? If yes, could you tell me some of the equity categorisations that would fall under the category of FIF?

10. Do you find that students are happy to identify as first in the family?
Most of the interview conversations were recorded and permission to use the information that followed was requested at the commencement of the interview. Some of the interviews were transcribed in full whilst others were referred to and paraphrased accordingly. Each evening I would write up a review of the day’s activities while it was still fresh in my mind and also consider what ‘new knowledge’ had been gained. I used these initial overviews to publish blogs on the Penzu site and make these available via my LinkedIn account and also via Twitter. A total of 8 blogs were published and these are all available at the following link. In developing my conclusions, I pulled together each of the new knowledge gained sections and thematically analysed the observations, this thematic analysis is presented in the conclusions and recommendations section of this report.

In addition to participating in interviews and meetings, I also spent some time walking around locations and meeting students as well as observing marketing and student support materials and resources. This enabled me to get a ‘feel’ for each location and how transferable the ideas or approaches I was learning about would be to an Australian context.

As I reached the end of the fellowship, I described in one of my entries how ‘as this tour proceeds there are a number of themes that are repeated’, I did not conceive of this as a negative but rather an indication of how this reflects, what is termed in research, as ‘data saturation’. Data saturation is a key point to achieve in any study indicating that the scope of the project has been sufficient to address its objectives. Despite this being a very focussed exploration, I am confident that the sites I visited and the people I spoke to, provided a high level and comprehensive overview of this field and hope that the conclusions and recommendations outlined in this report do this material justice.
Figure 2: University owned (and listed) public house
The following sections present case studies of each of the eight places that I visited. The case studies necessarily contextualise the approaches to supporting and engaging the FiF populations at each site. This contextualisation is required as it provides an important backdrop to the activities and enables readers to assess whether these strategies are translatable to their own institutional context.
OVERVIEW

The Churchill Fellowship began with a visit to Manchester; a city of great tradition and growth with a cityscape dotted with building sites and development, not surprisingly Manchester currently has one of the largest number of cranes (n=64) within a city centre.

My visit over the next two days was with Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) to meet with staff from across the university including those that work within the Widening Participation Unit (similar to Australian Equity and Outreach teams) as well as academic staff involved or affiliated with the Teaching and Learning space. Interviews were lengthy and informative and each had a specific focus that together provided a comprehensive overview of MMU’s approach to engaging and retaining FiF students.

During this two-day visit I met with:

- **Professor Claire Hamshire**: Head of Education, Faculty of Health, Psychology and Social Care, Manchester Metropolitan University,
- **Ms Helen Lord**: Transition and Peer Support Manager, Widening Participation and Transition & Peer Support Team, Manchester Metropolitan University.
- **Mr Peter Riley**: Head of Widening Participation and Student Financial Support, Manchester Metropolitan University
- **Dr Rachel Forsyth**: Associate Head, Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, Manchester Metropolitan University

MMU is a large institution (32,000+), including students from a diversity of equity groups who have followed a wide variety of pathways to get to university. As Professor Claire Hamshire explained, they have a high proportion of students who have entered via a BTEC (which is a vocational route) as well as FiF students (approximately 50% of the student population) and those from low-income backgrounds (16% of students come from 20% of the lowest areas of university participation). MMU, like Manchester itself, is a campus of contrasts with newly built buildings of glass and concrete nestled alongside older structures characterised by the traditional red brick (including a university owned and run traditional pub - see Figure 2).
During this two-day visit I met with:

- Professor Claire Hamshire: Head of Education, Faculty of Health, Psychology and Social Care, Manchester Metropolitan University.
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PICTURED

RIGHT - Figure 3: The First-Gen Scheme at MMU

ABOVE - Figure 4: The First-Gen badge worn by staff and supporters of the program.

First Generation
The campaign to transform 1,000 lives

First Generation brings together a complete student journey of support for deserving students from Greater Manchester.

Get involved.

mmu.ac.uk/firstgeneration
FINDINGS

This visit garnered a number of findings that are detailed below but importantlly, this institution is a similar size and scope to my own (University of Wollongong) and so the initiatives that were being run by MMU were of particular interest to me.

One of the key findings related to the need to adopt a ‘whole of student life cycle’ approach to supporting and retaining FiF students. This is exemplified by the FirstGen Scheme that is aiming to support 1,000 students from pre-entry through to graduation.

This project leverages the alumni of MMU in a productive and engaging manner, the alumni not only donate money to the scheme but also agree to participate as mentors for the students who are accepted onto the program. In this project, there are essentially three phases of engagement - outreach into schools (occurring in the latter two years of school), then during the degree and finally, postgraduation. These are proactive stages that involve students in preparing for university studies, continued engagement via social networking including specialised workshops and seminars and then finally via mentoring opportunities that increases the social capital necessary for gaining employment (and includes a guaranteed internship or placement for the student).

Another finding related to this was the absolute need to frame these initiatives in terms of celebration and, as Helen Lord explained, the program is represented as ‘something special and elite’. Removing any deficit framing avoids students feeling they have been singled out because they lack skills or knowledges and instead, congratulates them in terms of attainment and success. What was also interesting was the use of ‘positive branding’ to show support and also, increase the profile of the program. This includes the use of pins or badges for staff and others who were supportive of the program - including the Vice Chancellor. This provided a level of visibility and also, indicated to students a level of awareness about this cohort.

The FirstGen Scheme appeals to me on a number of levels - not only does it adopt a student life cycle approach, which includes actively assisting students in that post graduation phase but also, provides strategies for engaging meaningfully with alumni (something I recommend in my Australian Government Teaching Fellowship) - much ‘food for thought’ for future endeavours in this field!

PICTURED ABOVE
Figure 5: Just one example of how the First-Gen Scheme is marketed for exceptionality not mediocrity.
USEFUL RESOURCES

The MMU visit also provided me an opportunity to explore some of the resources that are available for both staff and students - I would like to thank Professor Clare Hamshire and Dr Rachel Forsyth for sharing these resources and their time over the two-day visit.

Firstly, Clare provided me with a series of booklets that have been converted into a larger ring bound book for first year students. The booklets draw upon the narratives of FiF students with brilliant illustrations that depict some of the issues that these students encounter in their journey into HE. All the narratives are based upon actual student stories so there is a realism to the contexts and situations - some images above are from the story of Alice who struggles with loneliness and isolation.

This loneliness exacerbates a sense of not belonging and inevitably thoughts of departure follow (see Figs 6&7).

These booklets have been translated into a larger workbook that will be provided to 4,000 commencing first years - the handbook includes both excerpts from the stories and self-help tips for commencing students. The workbook intentionally breaks down the ‘insider knowledge’ that exists within HE institutions and provides a tangible reference that can accompany the student as they move through their degree.

However, working with students is only part of the process - Dr Rachel Forsyth provided details of the ‘Same but Different’ resources - all of which are available as pdf downloads at the following link: https://www.celt.mmu.ac.uk/induction/same-but-different/index.php. These resources are designed to challenge staff thinking around deficit discourses and encourage ‘outside the box’ reflections about how best to support and engage diverse student cohorts. Rachel also agreed to be interviewed for this fellowship and pointed to the importance of the ‘relational’ in the HE environment and also, the need to develop ‘the cultural competence of staff’.

Finally, MMU were kind enough to invite me to do a presentation for staff on some of the research I am doing with FiF students - the presentation applied Boundary Theory to understandings of FiF transition and retention within HE.

PICTURED ABOVE

TOP RIGHT - Figure 6: Example of the First-Gen booklet distributed to all first years
BOTTOM RIGHT - Figure 7: The booklets are based on ‘real’ student stories
TOP LEFT - Figure 8: An exemplar from the Same but Different training
BOTTOM RIGHT - Figure 9: Presenting on boundaries and border crossing at MMU
Figure 11: The quad at York St John - the middle section once reserved for final year students
York St John University, *YORK*

**OVERVIEW**

After completing the visit to Manchester Metropolitan University, I travelled by train to York to visit York St John University. York is a walled main town with much of the city bordered by a high wall dating back to Roman times - apparently York has more miles of intact wall than any other city in England. This, coupled with winding streets (one of which was the model for Diagon Alley in the Harry Potter films) and of course the breathtaking York Minster, provides a historical backdrop to York St John University.

York St John University is equally situated in history, recognised as being one of the oldest educational institutions in York, established in 1841 as the York Training School. Over the years that followed York St John (fondly referred to as YSJ by staff and students) had various educational guises until it was recognised as a university in 2006. This means that YSJ is a relatively ‘young’ university but this belies its very old buildings and an architecture that reminds you of a small Oxford or Cambridge, complete with quad and class buildings. During a campus tour conducted by a very enthusiastic student, we were told how originally only final year students were able to walk down the middle path (see Figure 11) in the quad and that on-campus residence (the white windows) was limited to male students! Thankfully, as the student explained, this had all changed in years since.

This relatively small university largely targets students in the immediate regions with a recruitment radius of approximately 1 - 1.5 hours travel time. The university has a student population of 6,500 and is largely focussed on teaching (rather than research). Like MMU, this university attracts a diversity of students, many of whom are from low-income households and also, FiF. This institution prides itself on student diversity, which is very clear in terms of their marketing and the inclusive approach that staff both reflect upon and importantly, act upon. YSJ has created a profile based on this diversity and uses it as a way to brand the institution within the market, for example references to the #YSJ Family abound (both in terms of badges and signage).
FINDINGS

This visit also provided a lot of different insights into approaches to supporting the FIF cohort as well as providing further consolidation of existing ideas that I held. Primarily, the visit to YSJ highlighted the importance of framing up any interventions in terms of positive celebration. For example, the YSJ FIF project explains that this is a program designed to enable students to achieve the success they deserve, rather than a remediation activity (see Figure 14). Interestingly, this project is also student-led and designed with the program organisers drawing upon the experiences of existing students to inform each iteration of the program. This is a recursive process with the previous year’s approach being used as a basis for planning. Based on the success of the activities, amendments or changes are then proposed. This enables the program to both stay authentically rooted within student reality and also, provides the student reps a great opportunity to obtain skills in planning, design and development as well as earn money (all positions are paid).

Another unexpected (but interesting) finding was the ways in which the university ‘embedded’ diversity within the ethos of the university. A celebration of this was seen all over the campus, for example staff wearing rainbow lanyards in support of LGBTI students, the Trans only gym times on campus, the case management approach adopted for students entering university from care, amongst many other initiatives. The university has created a community of acceptance and I believe this is reflected in staff attitudes. As one staff member explained: “We live the student led approach.”

Finally, in relation to funding, a number of the interviewees indicated that funding proposals for these initiatives referred to the cost of attrition. Each cited how retaining just 2 or 3 of the FIF students (or others) translated into significant savings for the university. Of course, this type of ‘pitch’ does rely on receptive leadership, and this certainly seemed the case at YSJ where engagement with diversity was demonstrated throughout the executive and the leadership team.

PICTURED RIGHT

TOP RIGHT - Figure 10: The stunning York Minster
BOTTOM RIGHT - Figure 12: The ‘I am, I can, I will’ campaign foregrounding the FIF cohort
TOP LEFT Figure 13: The First in Family Campaign - a students as partners venture
BOTTOM LEFT - Figure 14: Note the celebratory language and the acknowledgement of the effort to get this far
POWERED BY THE POSSIBLE

York St John University is striving to create a fairer society, offering opportunities for the benefit of everyone. We are proud that many of our students are the first in their family to go to university, or come from backgrounds under-represented in Higher Education.
OVERVIEW

In October 2018, after a brief hiatus in the Fellowship, during which I collected data with FiF students located in Ireland, the UK and Vienna, I travelled to Brighton to visit researchers located at the Centre for Higher Education Equity Research (CHEER). The Centre examines and reviews the ‘systems, structures, cultures, experiences and consequences of inequities within higher education’.

CHEER is a very vibrant research centre that specialises in critically informed research relating to social change and social justice. The overarching objective of CHEER is to impact on society, HE policy, practices and processes. Of note is the Centre’s focus on the broader international HE field. To this end, CHEER has established affiliations with Centres across the world and has an active visiting scholar program that encourages generative debate and dialogue of an interdisciplinary nature. My visit to CHEER was further enriched by the invitation to participate in their conference on Critical Transitions Into, Through and Beyond Higher Education and to speak as the first keynote of the day (Figure 16).

I was also provided with the opportunity to meet with key members of the CHEER team including the Head of CHEER, Professor Louise Morley and also Dr Ana Luisa Muñoz-Garcia, a visiting scholar from Chile who was also able to spend some time discussing the particular contexts of FiF students in Chile. In addition, Drs Emily Danvers and Tamsin Hinton-Smith also generously gave their time for interviews and this diversity enabled me to reflect upon a range of topics in the field.

PICTURED RIGHT

*Figure 15*: Beach huts at the seafront Brighton

*Figure 17*: Meeting with Prof Louise Morley and Dr Ana Luisa Muñoz-Garcia at CHEER, University of Sussex
‘CHEER is a very vibrant research centre that specialises in critically informed research relating to social change and social justice.’
Centre for Higher Education and Equity Research (CHEER)

Examining, exploring and challenging inequalities in higher education

Investigating and interrupting social, educational and epistemic injustices

Building a shared vision of alternative, inclusive higher education futures

PICTURED
ABOVE - Figure 18: Details of CHEER’s mission
LEFT - Figure 16: Program from the Critical Perspectives on Transitions conference in Brighton
FINDINGS

During interviews the focus was on three key areas:

- University of Sussex First-Generation Scholars’ Scheme
- Research being conducted with school students on the impact of outreach programs
- Related research on Roma students and also, postcode indicators

The Sussex First-Gen program is a dedicated program targeted at those students from low-income backgrounds who are also the first in their families to come to university. This program has a monetary bursary as well as dedicated support for those in the scheme. The bursary is substantial and consists of 3,000 GBP in both the Foundation and first year of study, and then 1,000 GBP in subsequent years. Interestingly, the scheme includes supporting a period of ‘Study Abroad’ - providing a bursary of 3,000 GBP should a student study overseas for one year. Aside from financial aid there is a series of dedicated strategies for this student cohort - operated under the Careers and Employability centre. These strategies include a ‘welcome event’, internship opportunities, work ‘shadowing’ opportunities, summer schools and also overseas opportunities Details available from https://www.sussex.ac.uk/about/access-to-education/students.

Dr Emily Danvers and Dr Tamsin Hinton-Smith are currently involved in research with students who have been involved in outreach programs or activities. One of their draft recommendations is the very real need to involve students in the planning and execution of outreach or equity strategies - this is also something that I feel strongly about (O'Shea, 2019). Preliminary analysis of their data indicates how the school students in their study valued a ‘meaningful’ experience that can assist them in the pursuit of HE rather than a ‘hard sell’ about HE or even references to social activities such as ‘Freshers Week’. Both Emily and Tamsin also proposed the need for more programs that directly engage with the parents of FiF students, emphasising the need for these to be ‘honest’ and ‘respectful’ rather than patronising or assuming a deficit or lack on the part of the individual.

Finally, my conversations with Emily, Tamsin and Louise all touched on their research with Roma or traveller students and academics, most of whom are also first in their families (and sometimes communities) to come to university. This cohort is one of the most educationally disadvantaged across Europe and so it was interesting to hear some of their findings and apply these to the FiF context. The term Roma is applied to a number of groups including gypsies and travellers - a population which is estimated at between 10-12 million across Europe. This cohort experience many disadvantages as a result of being particularly vulnerable to social exclusion, poverty, and discrimination.

Of particular interest were the ways in which these students suffer, what Emily termed as, a ‘double disadvantage’ leading to a sense of being ‘out of place in both worlds’. These worlds included the world of HE and also the world of the Roma community. Another issue identified by both Emily and Tamsin was how Roma students were required to explain how they will give back to the Roma community if they receive financial support from the Roma education support schemes. This creates a ‘burden of responsibility’ on the individual Roma learner, who is required to also represent the community and provide tangible benefits in a broader sense. Finally, there is a ‘stigma’ associated with identifying as having Roma ethnicity. A number of different Roma communities / networks would ‘pass’ as belonging to the majority of the population within the country rather than foreground their Roma ethnicity. ‘Border crossing’ was also key in both a physical and symbolic sense, including how difficult it is to move back into the community post-university. Further details of the initial stages of the study can be found at http://www.sussex.ac.uk/education/cheer/researchprojects/rise/resources/romaresources.
University of Toronto (UT) and Western University (Western) - CANADA

OVERVIEW

The next stage of the fellowship involved travelling to Canada where I was fortunate enough to visit the University of Toronto (UT) and Western University (Western), both located in Ontario.

UT has over 90,000 students spread across three campuses within the city. The largest cohort is domestic undergraduate students but there is a significant international student population as well. This university has a diverse student population that spans racial, cultural and linguistic backgrounds - a significant proportion of which are first in the family. At UT I was able to meet with academic staff and researchers in the HE field. Dr David Kim, a recent PhD graduate who studied FiF mentoring programs, also kindly agreed to participate in an interview.
Western University is located about 3 hours southwest of Toronto. Compared to UT this is a smaller institution but still houses a significant number of students. My reason for visiting Western was to meet with Professor Wolfgang Lehmann who has been engaged in a lengthy research project with students from FIF working class backgrounds. Wolfgang’s work has been a source of inspiration and insight for me for many years and so this visit was an excellent opportunity to discuss the implications of this work for the Australian context.

**FINDINGS**

Dr David Kim has just completed his PhD thesis entitled: ‘In this together: The impact of mentorship programs on the first-generation student experience’. David’s research focussed on how participation in mentoring programs impacted on both students’ sense of belonging and also, their identity formation within the university context. While the study had many findings, of particular interest was David’s analysis of how these learners were positively impacted upon when being mentored by other FIF students. This relationship productively created a sense of ‘possibility, direction and opportunity.’ Not surprisingly, David’s participants also reported that being the first limited the ‘navigational skills’ held within the family, which often translated into a sense of being in a ‘race’ but that each was starting at a point that was ‘behind’ others. While the students felt like ‘trailblazers’ of their community there was also a sense of being an ‘outlier’ within the HE sector, with resulting lower sense of belonging for this cohort.

David’s work was of particular interest to me because, as far as I am aware, this is the first longitudinal analysis of a mentoring program that deliberately matches first-generation students with mentors from a similar background. This is a strategy that I have considered but until this visit, had not had the opportunity to access any research that tested out whether this type of relationship would positively...

*Figure 19: University of Toronto signage*

*Figure 21: Selfie with Dr David Kim*
benefit both parties. As David explained, using the FIF mentors alleviated any possible power hierarchy in the relationship as students felt more comfortable asking other FIF students questions than approaching staff members. This also provided a much-needed source of ‘word of mouth’ knowledge, or what Ball and Vincent (1998) describe as ‘hot knowledge’. Such hot knowledge is key to success in HE but needs to be appropriately combined with ‘cold’ or official sources of information such as marketing and university information materials.

During my two day visit to Western, I was also able to meet with Professor Wolfgang Lehmann at various junctures in a very busy teaching schedule. Professor Lehmann is a leading sociologist in the HE field and he has conducted a lengthy and productive study with FIF students from working class backgrounds. This study, funded by the Canadian Government, followed a cohort of students through their degree between 2005 - 2010, touching base with students as they progressed through their studies and after completion. The project had a degree of attrition over the five years and Wolfgang cautioned that those who participated in the entire study (n=37) are probably the most successful of the cohort. Interestingly, he noted that his participants, like my own, had a huge amount of enthusiasm regarding their participation and even now (8 years on from completion) continue to email and ask about this research. This is itself interesting as it confirms my own experience where FIF students that I have interviewed eagerly maintain contact and can see value in the research. In my own case I have deliberately included further stages of input for those who indicate interest (please see https://heaccessforall.com/arc-discovery-project/activities/)

In 2014, Wolfgang followed up with twenty of the students in order to find out their post-degree destinations. This is another interesting element to his study, as Wolfgang was able to relate the students’ post graduation outcomes to their initial goals and desires from when he first interviewed them in 2005. At that preliminary stage, most of the participants indicated that they wished to pursue very traditional middle-class profession i.e. law and medicine. However, nearly a decade later only one had pursued this route. For those who had expressed interest in medicine, all (bar one) had entered this profession but at the level below that of doctor in terms of hierarchy – these roles varied from nurses through to occupational therapists. When he asked the participants about the reasons for changing these goals, it was generally attributed to a lack of appropriate social connections (or social capital) which was seen as integral to success in these highly socially stratified occupations. For these participants, the opportunity to engage in volunteer work or unpaid internships during their studies was very limited due to their need to work throughout their university career. Clearly, for those learners who are financially limited, the need to work to support themselves limits how they can productively forge the social networks that we know are essential to finding employment post graduation.

These insights suggest a need for alternative perspectives on the co-curricular opportunities offered to students. Such opportunities are generally volunteer positions but are key to building up a good resume or portfolio for future employment. Indeed, a number of institutions also provide additional transcripts or acknowledgements that highlight co-curricular participation. However, such volunteer opportunities are of themselves somewhat privileged, particularly for those students working long hours simply to afford attending university. Without intending to, co-curricular activities create a different type of gap in the HE environment - between those who have the financial as well as cultural capitals to avail themselves of these opportunities, and those who do not.

Finally, Wolfgang reflected upon how we might create a sense of community amongst FIF students, describing how he asked his participants if they thought a club or association targeting those who were ‘first’ was a good idea. All indicated that while they thought this would be an excellent concept, each equally qualified that they probably would not join such associations due to their time constraints. This was further clarified by Wolfgang who suggested that perhaps such clubs or groups may unintentionally silo FIF students into limiting categorisations. One needs to consider what the point of such clubs would be and whether the goal or objective should be to change the individual or should we instead focus on how institutions can change to better accommodate these learners?

These and other insights from Wolfgang’s work have provided me with many insights in terms of my own applications of theory to this field and also, his ideas have informed practical suggestions which are in the conclusions and recommendation section of the report.

**PICTURED RIGHT**

**BOTTOM - Figure 20:** Western University, London

**TOP RIGHT - Figure 22:** Western University’s exhortations to Be Extraordinary

**TOP LEFT - Figure 23:** Pennant for Western University
OVERVIEW

For two days I was lucky enough to be hosted by the National Center for the First Year Experience and Students in Transition. The Center (Thank you Rosa!) organised an incredible itinerary for me, which included key academics and professional staff involved in every aspect of assisting students who are the first in their families to attend university. The Center is located in a residential home - one of many used as Faculty buildings - within the main campus of University of South Carolina (USC). This is a large urban university, consisting of about 32,000 students who are derived from the state and beyond. The campus seems to flow seamlessly from the ‘downtown’ area surrounding it. Some of the buildings are spectacular, and as the photos indicate, includes a mix of Southern architecture alongside modern and newly designed buildings.

PICTURED LEFT

TOP - Figure 24: The National Resource Center which hosted my visit
BOTTOM - Figure 25: USC campus blends the old with the new
The theme across the university and within the Center is one of ‘student success’, a term which cropped up throughout interviews and underpinned many of the initiatives being offered by the university as well as the ethos of learning within the institution.
nearly 20% of new students were 1st generation
Similar to other locations, the theme across the university and within the Center is one of ‘student success’ - a term which cropped up throughout interviews and underpinned many of the initiatives being offered by the university as well as the ethos of learning within the institution. Essentially, there was a consistent theme of ensuring that all students, regardless of their backgrounds or situations, achieve ‘success’. This visit provided deep insight into the various aspects of the success journey. In order to do it justice, I have broken the findings into different themes based on the interviewee’s foci and affiliations.

**FINDINGS**

During this visit I was able to visit a great range of people both across the Center itself and also beyond, including various departments and areas of the main university. Each of these have been detailed under separate headings. In addition to the areas detailed below, I also spoke with Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Professor Sandra Kelly. Professor Kelly’s observations have also been integrated into the sections below.

**National Resource Center for the First Year Experience and Students in Transition**

**Dr Jennifer Keup and Dr Dallin Young**

The National Resource Center was established in 1986 and over the years since its inception, has broadened its focus to incorporate a range of student transitions in higher education. The Center’s mission is ‘to advance and support efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education’. To achieve this, the Center contributes to the sector in a diversity of ways, including organising regular conferences and professional development opportunities for educators, publishing research related work, pursuing a research agenda and also, disseminating online resources / offering online workshops. As a result of comprehensive activities in the field of HE student experience and transition, the Center is regarded as an international leader. It also offers a clearinghouse for scholarship, policy and best practice for the first-year experience and all post-secondary student transitions.

**PICTURED**

**LEFT Figure 26:** Showcasing diversity in a positive and normalised way

**RIGHT Figure 27:** Meetings with both Dr Jennifer Keup and Dr Dallin Young in the National Center
I spoke with Dr Jennifer Keup who provided an overview of broader movements across the sector and how first-gen or FiF students have re-emerged as a major area of focus within the United States. This momentum is both derived from an understanding that this cohort does not necessarily achieve to their potential within the HE sector but also, a recognition that, with a diminishing number of high school students, the first-generation student (who has followed a more non-traditional pathway to university) will comprise a significant proportion of future university populations. Jennifer explained how the key to supporting these students is to create a ‘safe space’ where individuals feel comfortable identifying. Often first-gen students do not have a high level of belonging within an institution and may not feel comfortable reaching out to staff or even other students. For example, Jennifer explained how these learners may well befriend custodial workers or those employed in service jobs on-campus, as these staff and their roles more closely resemble those of important people in learners’ own biographical backgrounds.

Both Jennifer and Dr Dallin Young described how the discourse around FiF or First-Gen is purposely changing to a more positive and celebratory one - the idea is to build pride and safety for this cohort. As a national movement, the global nature of this issue is evidenced in a number of ways – for example, a National Center for First-Generation Student Success has recently been established and on November 8 the second National First-Gen Day was planned for all campuses across the United States. Both the Center and the National Day of Celebration were designed to build a sense of pride in the first-gen status via both Faculty and learning communities on campus.

Figure 28: Image of webpage for the First-Gen Celebration

Both the Center for FG Student Success and the national event have been established by NASPA (Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education) and again, the theme is one of celebration and success. This is exemplified on the website which includes a list of ‘50 ways to celebrate’ the National Day of Celebration (https://www.naspa.org/about/blog/first-generation-college-celebration-50-ways-to-celebrate-on-november-8)

‘…one of the student populations that’s kind of invisible – that is invisible – is first-generation and so a big piece of the first-year experience in particular, I think is how do we create a context and an environment that students feel safe self-identifying.’

Dr Jennifer Keup, Director, National Resource Center
The event organisers encourage universities to leverage and highlight the first-gen (or FiF) status of staff on-campus with public identification through T-shirts and badges. Other examples of foregrounding FiF status in a positive way are available on the website and I have copied just two very simple ways below:

Curate a “we’re glad you are here” campaign to remind first-generation students of the ways in which they contribute to strengthening your campus community.

Create a university first-generation Snapchat filter and ask students to create stories!

USC will be joining this event for 2018 and will host a FiF student / staff panel and also, provide FiF cupcakes for all students. Overall, the theme that emerged during this visit was that students who are the first in their family to come to university are a growing cohort across the US. There is a national push to increase the success rates of this cohort and recognition that universities need to work systematically to ensure that these learners are supported and feel valued for who they are. As Dallin explained, being first-generation should be defined as a ‘point of pride’ rather than being regarded as having a negative or deficit value.

BELOW - Figure 29: Details of the National Celebration day at USC
THE TRIO PROGRAMS

Dr Althea Counts

The TRIO programs are funded centrally by the Federal Government, with each institution in the US able to submit grants that target specific groups, which are contextualised to the particular cultural and geographic setting. In many ways TRIO resembles the HEPPP system in Australia as this is a central ‘pot of money’ that all public institutions can apply to. The grants are offered for five years, which arguably enables them to gather some traction between funding bids.

Dr Althea Counts explained how there are two main programs funded by TRIO at USC, which focus on first-generation or first in family students, namely Opportunity Scholars and the Ronald E McNair Program. The latter provides a paid research experience for FiF students who are considering a postgraduate degree. As Althea explained there is a drive in the US to ‘diversify the doctorate’ and this is one attempt to encourage more students from diverse backgrounds to consider postgraduate/research degrees. The research experience is combined with advice and counselling about how to apply for graduate studies and also, access to workshops and seminars to enable this.

Opportunity Scholars is an undergraduate program that provides tutoring assistance, academic advising, guidance on UG research, mentoring by more senior students and also enrichment activities. Students who are accepted into the Opportunity Scholars program are all academically capable, but the university seeks to provide extra support to assist them to navigate the academic culture and provide the cultural capital that will assist them to achieve in their studies. Participants are first in their family and all come from low-income families. The students are grouped within the program and take their first-year classes with their cohort grouping, taught by specially selected Professors and instructors. The subjects are as academically challenging as any others on offer but the classes are kept small in size and students are provided with opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities. Affiliated with the Opportunity Scholars program is a financial program called the Gamecock Guarantee which is detailed later. Importantly, this program also alerts students to other opportunities that might be available, for example The Gilman Scholarship which targets FiF students from low-income backgrounds, providing $5,000 towards travelling overseas for study-related purposes.

Althea reflected upon the various issues that FiF students at USC may encounter and many of these are evident across the sector. For example, FiF students may not seek out help as many already feel that they do not belong in the institution and so, by seeking help, this somehow confirms to them that they are not coping sufficiently. However, Althea explained that when these learners are engaged in a program like Opportunity Scholars then ‘help seeking behaviour’ can be both encouraged and normalised. The program does take a case management approach, which deals with students in an individual and holistic sense. This includes students’ parents and families, who are also invited (and required) to attend certain events, which again, are framed in a celebratory sense.

THE UNIVERSITY ADVISING CENTRE

Ms Claire Robinson and Ms Sandra Varney

My next meeting was with Claire and Sandra who explained the university advising model. This is dual-focussed with nearly all students in their first year having a dedicated academic adviser, who is generally a professional staff member allocated to the student via a personal email of introduction. The latter is an important feature of this initiative, as it again emphasises how students are treated as individuals rather than just en masse. The backbone of the academic advising and coaching approach is again ‘student success’ which is a recent transition in the approach adopted at USC. The slide in Figure 31 indicates how the academic advising roles have developed at USC to include a more rounded and comprehensive approach to student support.

Figure 31: How academic advising has evolved at USC
...the “Opportunity Scholars Program”...works to provide support for first-generation and low-income students. What we try to do is to create a smaller atmosphere to start them off in their freshman year – these are all students who meet regular admission requirements so we know they’re capable academically of being successful but we try to counteract I guess the lack of cultural capital and to provide them with information that will help them be successful.

Dr Althea Counts, Director TRIO Programs, University of Sth Carolina

BACKGROUND IMAGE

Figure 35: A ‘Share your dream’ noticeboard at The Advising Center, USC
At USC there are two forms of academic advising, one of which largely focuses on the main student body but which is personalised and proactive rather than reactive (i.e. it reaches out to the students rather than waiting for them to access the service). Within Australia, a more reactive form of student advising is used, often students need to proactively engage with services, rather than these services reaching out to the learners. At USC the second form of advising is called Academic Coaching, which is a holistic approach to the students, providing not only academic advice but also guidance around goal setting, careers and general counselling. The latter approach uses an Appreciative Inquiry Framework that is designed to encourage students to consider their futures in a more expansive sense. Those FiF students involved in The Opportunity Scholars Program receive one session of academic coaching as well as their academic advising. This is just one example of many where FiF students are able to avail themselves of additional services that already exist on-campus but which are specifically targeted at this cohort. Importantly this is done within a ‘success’ framing rather than a remedial one.

PICTURED ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT
Figure 30: Pamphlet about the Opportunity Scholars Program
Figure 32: Meeting with Mr James Winfield and Dr Dan Friedman
Figure 33: Examples of creative and real-life assessment items
Figure 34: The Famous ‘Gamecock’ where the name Gamecock Guarantee is derived from

UNIVERSITY 101 PROGRAMS

Dr Dan Friedman
Mr James Winfield

University 101 is a leading first year seminar program that beginning students can undertake as part of their electives but also, is a required program for the Opportunity Scholars. This is essentially a very student-centred approach to academic skills that aims to ‘foster a sense of belonging, promote engagement in the curricular and co-curricular life of the university, develop critical thinking skills and help to clarify purpose, meaning and direction’. The program is very clearly paced to match the critical stages of the student life cycle. Interestingly, it focuses on the students themselves to generate the knowledge and also to initiate actions that encourage their integration into campus life.

I particularly liked the student-centred focus of the program where instructors allow students to adopt the position of expert in the field. For example, all the assignments required an action-based approach to learning. My favourite assessment task would have to be one that requires the student to organise a social activity with a Professor or academic member of staff. This task indicates an awareness of how many students, particularly those from FiF backgrounds, may feel both intimidated and also, insecure about approaching staff in HE (see Figure 33).

The student-centred focus requires a certain
approach to pedagogy which James was able to explain in terms of the training and ongoing support and PD offered to instructors. The key is that instructors have to be able to involve and engage students, not through direct instruction, but rather through discovery learning where the students themselves locate the solutions to the issues they are facing.

THE GAMECOCK GUARANTEE PROGRAM

Mr Joey Derrick and Ms Ashley Bailey-Taylor

The final meeting I had was with Joey and Ashley who spoke about the Gamecock Guarantee Program. If (like me) you are a little confused as to what a ‘gamecock’ is – it is a rooster which is the national emblem for USC.

The name is used to indicate a commitment to local students and a guarantee of financial aid for those who are from FiF and low-income backgrounds. This support is both extensive and case managed according to the needs of specific students. As the Federal Loans system is very complicated, students are provided with individual support to apply for federal support and, if successful, the university provides additional support for the duration of their degree. This can be a significant financial input that will ensure that the degree is literally free for those most disadvantaged and is guaranteed for four years.

This scholarship program does not simply offer money though – it is intrinsically integrated into the other support services offered on-campus and is targeted specifically at FiF students (most of whom are from low-income backgrounds). Those students who are on the Opportunity Scholars program (see previous) are also eligible for the Gamecock Guarantee and so this is a very synergistic relationship that ensures that the FiF cohort receives the most comprehensive and appropriate support.

The visit to USC provided a range of insights and also confirmed what ‘good practice’ around supporting FiF students should look like. The integration of the services echoes what other institutions are striving to achieve and it was very interesting to hear that the FiF cohort in South Carolina encounter very similar issues to those learners in regional Australia. The recommendations derived from visiting this Center are integrated into the conclusions and recommendations section. However, the opportunity to visit the university and meet the staff there was hugely enriching for me personally and cannot be adequately captured in this report.
Figure 36: Professional running track at University of Georgia

48 | Professor Sarah O’Shea, 2019 Churchill Fellow
Institute of Higher Education, University of GEORGIA

OVERVIEW

The University of Georgia (UGA) is located in the little town of Athens. This is a Land Grant University that was charted in 1785 and is one of the oldest public institutions in the United States. The campus is enormous and has amazing facilities including a huge 80,000+ seat baseball stadium, three swimming pools and a running track. The campus is like a small town in its own right and it flows seamlessly into the downtown area. Again, the architecture is a real mix of old and new with old plantation style mansions amongst more modern buildings.

Figure 38: The Institute of Higher Education hosted my visit to the University of Georgia
UGA is a large institution with a huge residential population – in fact first year students are required to live on-campus unless there are very specific reasons not to. For students of the Georgia state, all tuition is free under the Hope Scholarship. This scholarship is not means or income tested and is simply available for all State residents.

**FINDINGS**

This visit also provided a diversity of perspectives on how students from first-gen or FiF backgrounds are supported and engaged within the institution. As each State in the US administers their own higher education system, the State governing body of Georgia has created the Hope Scholarship which provides free tuition for all students who are citizens of the state. This obviously makes a huge difference to many students, particularly those from low socio-economic backgrounds but equally UGA, as a research-intensive institution, has a very competitive entry program. During my visit, I was able to discuss broader HE movements and issues at a roundtable at UGA’s Institute of Higher Education and also participate in meetings with staff involved in support and outreach programs.

**INSTITUTE OF HIGHER EDUCATION (IHE)**

The IHE is a multi-focus organisational unit, which includes a policy focus, research-based interventions, teaching focus and outreach activities. The IHE is separate to the School of Education, with its own budget and its own Director with reporting lines to the President of the UGA. I was asked to present on my work, which was followed by a roundtable with staff, most of whom were active researchers and scholars in the field of HE with particular reference to FiF students.

There was much discussion during this meeting, including the difficulties associated with defining this cohort. Professor Toutkashian provided his recent article on this very topic, which explored eight different definitions of FG status and how each definition impacted statistically on the analysis of college entry as well as outcomes (Toutkoushian, Stollberg, & Slaton, 2018). While the entire paper cannot be summarised here, importantly Toutkoushian et al. (2018) recommend that phrases such as ‘parent’ and ‘college educated’ need to be carefully unpacked and explained to students, as these can be easily misinterpreted. Another interesting point raised by A/Professor Amy Stitch related to the extremely stratified nature of the American HE system, likening this to a pyramid shape where most of the access occurs within the middle and bottom end of this pyramid rather than amongst the top ranked institutions. Amy made the very valid point that, given this stratification, there are very different discourses across different institutions according to their status in the hierarchy.

A/Professor Greg Wolziak spoke to his research which quantitatively explored the learning outcomes of FiF students and found that developmentally, FiF and non-FiF have little variance. However, Greg explained that significant differences emerge in relation to specific experiences, including contact with faculty and engagement outside of class, which tend to be less for the FiF cohort.

During this meeting, the presentation of my own work also helped make connections between Australia and the US specifically with regard to supporting FiF students.

Excerpt from NASPA’s Center for First-Generation Student Success website.
THE COLLEGE ADVISING CORPS

Ms Jessica Robinson

This ‘near peer’ college advising program is organised out of the IHE. The term ‘near peer’ recognises how many of the students involved in this program come from similar demographic and socio-cultural contexts to the young people they are working with. In my meeting with Jessica Robinson, the Director of the Program, she explained that this is a national not-for-profit (NFP) organisation. It relies largely on alumni donations to employ outstanding college graduates, who are then placed in High Schools to work with the students and staff within the schools (usually located in highly disadvantaged regions). They are placed in the schools for one or two years to work as college advisers and currently there are over 700 across the nation who partner with various HE institutions.

The ‘near-peer’ aspects of this program are particularly interesting as it ensures that the graduates placed in the school have some understanding of the types of issues and contexts that learners are dealing with during high school, when they are making critical decisions about going to university. Being ‘near peer’ also feeds into the ‘aspirational capital’ of the school students as it provides these learners with an example of someone who has succeeded in the system. So, a key role of these advisers, as Jessica explains, is to simply sit down with the young people and say ‘I did it, I believe you can so let me help you with this.’ Support is both emotional and also practical – for example, aiding with applications for state funding or scholarships. In addition to one-on-one support, these advisers assist in ‘building a college-going culture’ at the school in the form of events and celebrations, as well as having initiatives. One of these initiatives is where teachers wear T-shirts highlighting the college they attended to foreground college-going within the school environment. Jessica also explained that going to university is not the only option, as peers also assist with other vocational and educational ambitions that students may have.

Importantly, participation is largely voluntary in nature. The ‘peers’ are paid a very base living wage ($25,000 USD) as an allowance for their service. Jessica explained that this is a ‘big ask’ as the organisation relies on individuals being committed to their community and being passionate about assisting and ‘lifting up’ others to enable them to pursue their ambitions. The organisation reaches out to student organisations that pursue social justice agendas. Participants in this college advising program also offered ‘growth and networking opportunities’ to assist their future professional goals and provided an education award that can be used to pay back student loan debt or as a contribution to graduate studies.

THE COCA-COLA FIRST-GENERATION SCHOLARS PROGRAM

Ms Erin Thompson-Podvin

Situated in the Division of Academic Enhancement, which is focused on ‘success’ for all students, this program provides initiatives that enable all learners to persist and ultimately graduate. The program is sponsored by Coca-Cola (Atlanta is the home of Coca-Cola) and it supports academically outstanding students who demonstrate a financial need and represent the first generation in their families to attend college. The First-Generation Scholars program offers a range of supports for students which includes $5,000 USD per year for four years, access to additional assistance, such as support in adjusting to life, as well as many opportunities to grow, both as an individual and as a member of the university community. The latter includes access to Faculty mentors who can provide academic advising and insights into the discipline being studied. Participants also have a peer mentor who is a second- or third-year student who is also part of the FG Scholars Program.

I spoke with Erin Thompson-Podvin the co-ordinator of this program who explained that the university has made ‘needs based’ financial assistance a key priority, which has led to cohort-modelled scholarship programs such as this one. This is not an expansive program and currently works with approximately 50 participants in each year of undergraduate study (so approximately 200 overall). For many of these participants, their family members may not speak English as a first language and so the students require support both navigating entry (i.e., completing scholarship forms etc) as well as support as they proceed through university. As Erin explained, when working with students from diverse backgrounds it is better to consider each student as having a ‘tool box’ with different tools in this box. For those who have parents or family who have been to university they simply have a greater array of

52 | Professor Sarah O’Shea, 2017 Churchill Fellow
relevant ‘tools’ for the job, as these family members have put tools in the box. However, ‘when there is no one that has walked that path before there are a lot of tools you did not even know that you are missing’. This program is simply trying to add some of these key tools for success.

How the Faculty mentors are chosen is also interesting, as each student is asked what they would like to get from the mentoring relationship and their preferences for a mentor. Based on this information, Erin carefully chooses mentors from across the campus who suit the students’ needs – this applies to both academic and peer mentors. While the commitment to this relationship is one year, Erin explains that many stay connected with their mentees for the duration of their degree. Erin also described how slowly Faculty are being invited to identify as first in the family which has led to the First at the First campaign. The campaign name references UGA’s claim to be the first Land Grant university, so being the ‘first’ is positively imbued by this interrelationship – clever and effective branding!

What also struck me about this program was that it focuses on a case management approach which nurtures students, not only by providing advice and knowledge, but also via free food available at all events, organising a ‘study jam’ that provides free pencils and exam booklets (which have to be bought) as well as a ‘space to relax and chill’. It is often little things that make a huge difference to a student’s decision to stay enrolled in a program or depart, hence providing a ‘safe’ space where not only physical needs are met but also financial ones, as free resources can be essential for some populations.

...when there is no one that has walked that path before there are a lot of tools you did not even know that you are missing.

Ms Erin Thompson-Podvin, Coordinator: Coca-Cola First-Generation Scholars Program
A New American University

Design Aspirations for a New American University

01. Leverage Our Place
02. Transform Society
03. Value Entrepreneurship
04. Conduct Use-Inspired Research
05. Enable Student Success
06. Fuse Intellectual Disciplines
07. Be Socially Embedded
08. Engage Globally

ASU Charter

ASU is a comprehensive public research university, measured not by whom it excludes, but by whom it includes and how they succeed; advancing research and discovery of public value; and assuming fundamental responsibility for the economic, social, cultural, and overall health of the communities it serves.
ARIZONA State University

OVERVIEW
The final stop on this Fellowship tour was Arizona State University (ASU), which has four campuses in and around Phoenix, Arizona. This is a very large and modern institution, with a student population nearing 100,000 and is the largest public university in the States. ASU is also world-renowned for its innovation and entrepreneurship, creating a very different institution to many others in the US, demonstrated by its diverse goals and ambitions. Understanding the ASU approach requires understanding its Charter which holds ‘access’ at the core of its goals and values. This Charter is showcased everywhere - in large billboards, posters and also, campus artefacts as seen at Figure 41.

PICTURED LEFT
TOP LEFT - Figure 41: The ASU Charter is publically displayed across the campus
BOTTOM LEFT - Figure 42: Defining the ethos of ASU
RIGHT - Figure 48: ASU monument at the main campus entry
For ASU this ‘charter’ is more than just words, as the institution strives to increase access and participation amongst diverse and disadvantaged groups. The concept of inclusion is embedded both in university ethos and institutional discourse. The university is pursuing an intensive expansion in online delivery and has already attracted over 30,000 students to the online environment.

During my visit I was hosted by the Mary Lou Fulton Teacher’s College, which also translates these access imperatives into their own core values and practices (See Figure 43).

While ASU is also doing a number of things already replicated in other institutions there is an additional flavour to these endeavours which I have outlined below.

**FINDINGS**

Overall, ASU is similarly engaged in promoting a success discourse in relation to their support and engagement activities. Again, the focus is on student case management and the university also draws on student coaches to maximise the achievement of all learners, based on their individual needs. I was told that all students have at least two coaches or advisors who are available to assist with program advice, as well as support in gaining employment or internships etc. Again, like other universities I have visited this is a very personalised service that treats each student as an individual and case manages each to ensure their success in and beyond HE.

The state funding that ASU receives is almost all channelled into cohort-based scholarships and funding. This excludes extra-curricular activities, such as Study Abroad which have a range of scholarships available to those who are first in the family to come to university. Study Abroad is then a fully funded opportunity for students from these backgrounds. Such financial support seems key to ensuring that everyone is able to access similar opportunities regardless of their backgrounds or financial resources.

As you can see, the ethos of success and achievement permeate the institution’s support environment.

In my meetings with Mary Lou Fulton academics, Professors Iveta Silova and Molly Ott, both also reflected upon the access charter of the university, explaining how this had influenced their decisions to come to ASU (both had previously worked at small private institutions). As Iveta explained, the ethos of accessibility is ‘embodied’ within the university, embedded within the institutional culture. This diversity is perceived as positive and has brought students from a range of backgrounds into the institution.

While the university collectively strives to enable access for students from diverse backgrounds, as Professors Silova, Ott and Mishra each explained (independently), the focus is also on academic excellence. Hence ASU expects and supports each learner to achieve academic excellence (the rankings of the institution reflects this), rather than sacrificing access for lower educational standards.

ASU also actively pursues an access agenda through innovative partnerships with organisations to enable those in service industries to attend university free of tuition fees. For example, staff at Starbucks can access the Starbucks College Achievement Plan which will provide free tuition for a range of undergraduate degree programs at ASU. Whilst I was at the university, another partnership with UBER was announced, which again funded a degree for UBER drivers or, if they wished, this eligibility could be passed to a member of the family. While these programs are only offered online, such partnerships do indicate the innovative nature of ASU and its progressive educational agenda.

In my interview with Professor Punya Mishra, he explained how all state funding is directed towards targeted scholarships, so it is necessary for the university to be innovative and agile in terms of locating additional funds for other support and interventions. This has led to a range of partnerships across the private industry to enable ASU to fund a range of interventions.

**PICTURED LEFT**

**TOP - Figure 44:** Just two examples of very visible ‘success’ coaching that are displayed at the Tempe campus

**MIDDLE RIGHT - Figure 47:** Assistance for all students regardless of their migrant or documentation status

**BOTTOM LEFT - Figure 46:** It certainly was ‘Sun Devil’ Country even in early Autumn!

**BOTTOM MIDDLE - Figure 43:** Translating the university ethos at the local school level

**BOTTOM RIGHT- Figure 45:** Success, success, success everywhere you look!
Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the fellowship tour overall, the following section provides a thematic analysis of findings from across the institutions that I visited. These findings are designed to inform both practitioners in the field and also policymakers in terms of how we can ensure that our FiF university cohort are resourced for success.

Findings have been grouped under themes, which are followed by the relevant recommendations, each of these recommendations is also collated at the end of this section for easy reference.

**CELEBRATORY DISCOURSE**

Overwhelmingly, the fellowship provided extensive evidence of the need for a celebratory or positive discourse when acknowledging students from diverse backgrounds. We need to remain vigilant that marketing and the ways in which we present initiatives and strategies do not slip, however unintentionally, into deficit discourses. The need to celebrate is particularly pertinent for the FiF cohort as this is a group that so clearly has much to have recognised. This celebration should occur at critical stages of their journey into and through university in recognition of the very long distances, not only geographic but also emotional and relational, that many of these individuals have had to transverse. Such celebratory discourses should be pervasively embedded throughout the student life cycle and avoid engaging with the student only as a decontextualized individual. Instead, celebration should regard each student in a holistic sense and situate them within their relational and social networks – celebrations then should acknowledge the ‘others’ in their lives who are often cheering, perhaps quietly, on the sidelines.

**Recommendation:** Consider how the family and significant others of FiF learners can be engaged with in a meaningful manner, not only in the pre-enrolment stage but throughout the student life cycle. This engagement should always be framed in a celebratory way rather than in punitive or deficit terms.
FOREGROUND OUR FIF POPULATIONS

There is much to be achieved from the acknowledgement of diverse student cohorts through pins, buttons and posters. We have seen the success of campaigns like ALLY and the ‘Wear it Purple’ day in Australia. These days are designed to show support and respect for gender diversity, so translating this to the FIF cohort could be equally successful. Such campaigns not only create a ‘safe space’ for students but also identifying FIF staff actually can help to normalise this status and provide possible mentors or role models. This might seem a little simplistic but if you examine the discourse around the FIF student in relation to the Australian HE sector, this student cohort retains a level of invisibility. This needs to change.

Recommendation: Make the success of the FIF student everyone’s business rather than sidelining it – this relates to foregrounding FIF in university business rather than this remaining an ‘invisible population’.

CAUTIONARY TALES: POSSIBILITY OF LABELLING

We need to remain aware that some students may not wish to adopt the FIF nomenclature and for some, this may seem to embody a deficit form of labelling. While I did not encounter this across the institutions I visited, nor did it appear to impact the participants involved in these programs, it is important to remain mindful of this possibility. It does require careful handling for institutions but could be managed through enrolment procedures where students opt into supports rather than being contacted without permission. Such an approach requires an institutional commitment to adopting a clear definition of what ‘being the first in the family’ actually means and also, consideration of how this can be integrated into the enrolment process in a meaningful way.

Recommendation: Clarity of definition around what ‘being the first’ actually means. This requires the development of one universal definition that must be applied across the institution and ideally, common across the whole HE sector. This definition needs to be foregrounded in enrolment processes and also, within equity and outreach services to ensure that this is universally understood. Terms such as college, parent, degree, family member etc should not be assumed to have one universal meaning and need to be clearly defined.

There’s a lot of flipping the deficit model, flipping the shame into like, “No, this is a point of pride and there are lots of us and it’s a piece we value in our community at large”.

Dr Jennifer Keup, Director National Resource Center
First Generation college students are very proud of being here. They want to get their degree but they don’t ask for help when they should. The goal is to open the door so they feel comfortable asking for help. The door can be opened by hearing a faculty member talk about what they would have done if they knew what they did now or about the situations in which they wished they had asked for help. The key is to start the conversation.

Professor Sandra Kelly, Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Office of the Provost, University of South Carolina
STUDENTS IN PARTNERSHIP AND AS COLLABORATORS.

I have previously reflected upon the coalesce of ‘students as partners’ approaches to the equity field but had not yet encountered anyone actually doing this. My visit to York St John (YSJ) provided insight into how a ‘student as partners’ framework might be applied to a mentoring program involving FiF students, and so I have provided an overview of the particular approach adopted by YSJ below for other interested practitioners:

Overview: The over-riding theme of the program is that this is success focussed - the supports are not necessarily new or bespoke for the FiF cohort but rather these are packaged in an overarching framework that is proactively geared to contact students rather than wait for the students to contact the program. Some of this ‘success’ framing was very simple in its approach - for example highlighting existing academic skills courses and stating that FiF students had ‘priority placing’ on these etc.

Planning: Recruitment of the student reps occurs before the start of semester and this relatively small group are then invited onto campus to plan for the events that will occur in the next term. This planning involves a critical reflection on the previous year’s activities and how successful these events had been. The student reps had ultimate decision on what activities should occur and these were largely social in nature but also including an information session on a key aspect of student life (again decided by the student reps) and also a 15 minute slot of anonymous questions about aspects of uni life (again this proved to very successful and so was going to be repeated through all the sessions in 2018-2019).

Costs: This was quite a cheap program to operate, it simply incurred some student wages (each of whom had 2 hours of dedicated office time per week) and also, the cost of some social functions (tea, coffee, snacks). All in all, this represents great value for money but also provides a ‘joined up’ approach to engaging this cohort and providing targeted support within a celebratory environment.

Recommendation: Consider how mentoring programs could deliberately match FiF students and mentors, but do this in a positive way that avoids implicit deficit framings. Mentors (particularly those from FiF backgrounds) have an important role in normalising stages of the academic year and importantly, the fears and anxieties associated with those critical stages.

REFRAMING STAFF PERSPECTIVES: DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The need to engage with not only FiF learners but also the family, particularly caregivers, is vital in this work and something that has been detailed earlier. However, this support also needs to be offered in positive ways that avoid stereotypical framings or unintentional ‘othering’ of participants. This is sensitive work that may need staff to review or reframe their hidden assumptions about the FiF population and the types of supports they may have access to within their community. Offering professional development opportunities such as Manchester Mets Same but Different training provides a productive forum to discuss possible or unintentional bias. Such training programs need to be sensitive in intent and provide a safe space to reflect upon assumptions or unacknowledged bias.

The increasing numbers of casualisation and also, high teaching loads means that teaching staff are often underprepared for how to cater effectively for these diverse cohorts. Often it is the casualised staff in the workforce (or those in the most tenuous roles) who are expected to support and engage our most at-risk populations. This is not only an issue for the Australian HE system but equally an issue for the American HE system.

Recommendation: Develop highly accessible staff resources that seek to dispel myths or stereotypes relating to students from diverse backgrounds, particularly those who are highly intersected like FiF students. Ensure that training undertaken is recognised in a meaningful way by the institution and also directly applicable to the teaching or learning contexts of the participants.

EMBRACE COMPLEXITY RATHER THAN ADOPTING A ONE-SIZE FITS ALL

Our students are complex and need to be contextualised according to diverse social and cultural milieu. While the category first in family (or first-generation) is adopted here, it is necessary to remain aware of the intersectionality of these learners. Equally, notions of stigma and identity management may also impact on how certain learners are reached and supported. We cannot assume a one-size fits all approach. This is particularly important when designing interventions or initiatives, these need to be explicitly meaningful.
to the participants perhaps contributing to their long-term goals and ambitions rather than only social in nature.

Recommendation: There is a need for more empirical research that adopts broader conceptualisations of FiF students that consider the unique biographical, historical and cultural situatedness of this cohort.

**DEVELOPING NECESSARY SOCIAL CAPITAL**

Like Australia, the US focuses on the employability of its graduates but we cannot assume that students only desire an instrumental or job focussed education. Instead many want, or may benefit from, a more traditional ‘rounded’ education that includes self-development and learning. However, to gain an understanding of HE, students who are the first in their families to come to university may be relying on the marketing or job focussed rhetoric. This may differ to their second or third generation peers who have a broader, more developmentally focussed understanding of what a HE learning experience should be - not just focussed on vocational goals but an embodied understanding that involves self-development. Taking a broader perspective to learning can translate into social and cultural capitals that are important in the job market but often, knowing the importance of such offerings is implicitly assumed, rather than explicitly part of the degree program. The importance of these capitals needs to be foregrounded and explained to FiF students in particular so that they avail themselves of such opportunities.

A number of the institutional visits indicated a proactive approach to ensuring that these learners have the opportunity to nurture and develop key academic, social and cultural capitals necessary for post graduation success. While it is not possible for institutions to provide excessive extra-curricular activities, some considerations about how to do this in an economically effective manner are needed. These could include partially funded internships that will allow these learners to participate in necessary social capital building, or perhaps, better collaboration with businesses to foreground the various skills and experiences that these learners bring to their university studies, recognising these not in deficit terms but in terms of strengths. In other words, reframe the discursive around FiF students so the focus is not on what individuals lack but rather how their experiential capital can be harnessed productively in the workplace.

Recommendation: Mentoring is key but avoid creating a FiF ‘ghetto’ where FiF students only have access to other FiF students. Ensure that mentoring is available from a variety of sources at a range of stages of life to ensure a more rounded approach to succeeding at university and beyond.

Recommendation: Create meaningful relationships with FiF alumni that do not rely solely on financial imperatives but instead productively leverage their personal experiences and also, create possible internship opportunities for students. This could be a professional mentoring scheme but also, needs to value the alumni as people rather than in terms of their potential fiscal worth.

**SHOW ME THE MONEY!**

Related to the point above, within the Australian context there is a clear need to think through the financial aid and scholarships available to equity cohorts. This could include considering how financial aid for students can be timed at critical points during the academic year and that this is always expansively focussed, considering not just on-shore activities but also international experiences. For example, the MMU First-Gen Campaign and USC’s Opportunity Scholar’s program both recognise the need to support students across the life cycle and include funding for extra-curricular opportunities that the wider student population enjoy (i.e Studying at an overseas institution).

Given the very real cultural and social capital that students require to achieve success post graduation, attending university without access to these experiences may unduly stratify their employment opportunities beyond the degree. In a number of the institutions I visited, targeted scholarships and aid existed for FiF students to enable them to take advantage of overseas study opportunities, unpaid internships and also, additional cultural or social experiences throughout the degree. This sort of experiential learning is recognised as being fundamental to success and yet often remains unobtainable to those students who do not have the necessary financial and social resources to engage in such undertakings.

Recommendation: Explore sources of funding that would enable students from FiF backgrounds (and intersected by various equity factors) to take advantage of study abroad or internship opportunities to increase their social and cultural capital. This type of experiential learning is a key element to a university learning experience but remains largely the remit of the financially secure (those who can afford...
to relocate for a lengthy period) rather than those who must maintain consistent paid work in order to remain at university.

INTEGRATION, INTEGRATION, INTEGRATION.

Many of the institutions I visited were successfully joining the dots as far as support is concerned and this is key to effective support for students from diverse backgrounds, including FiF students. Rather than ‘reinventing the wheel’ it is more effective to reframe existing programs to include a focus on the FiF cohort. The over-riding objective should be the creation of an integrated model of support that provides various touchstones throughout the student journey, ensuring that the support offered remains relevant and meaningful to the cohort it is targeted at. This includes the importance of checking enrolment data and proactively contacting students who may fit certain criteria such as first-generation. For example, UGA offer the Scholars’ Success Day before semester commences that requires all students in receipt of any sort of financial support to attend. This day is designed to give the students a ‘head start’ by providing opportunity to meet their course coordinators and other scholars more advanced in their studies and the program.

Recommendation: Explore the ways in which the solitary nature of the FiF student transition and engagement can be acknowledged, but importantly embedded within an integrated and networked series of services.

Recommendation: Don’t forget the ‘human touch’. Many of the programs I studied were characterised by a ‘human’ touch where there is a key person who really ‘cares’ about the students. This individual is aware of the students’ personal circumstances and also ‘checks in’ regularly to see how they are faring. This may include providing food or coffee or simply sending an email to check that these learners are okay. The human contact is vital – so that students feel they are not just a ‘number’ but humanised as individuals.

... how do we create a sense of safety and a sense of place in the first year in that transition to college that allows these “invisible populations” to self-identify to the degree that somebody can refer them to services?

Dr Jennifer Keup, Director National Resource Center
I think when I started initially, students were very hesitant to seek professional counselling services because of, I guess, the way they see it. They saw it as being weak, not being able to handle your issues and they’re taught to be able to handle things so they don’t usually utilise help-seeking kind of behaviours but as time has gone by, they’ve been more willing. If I say, “I need you to go to the counselling centre; this is beyond what I can help you with”, those students are willing to do that.

Dr Althea Counts, Director, TRIO Programs, USC
**KEEP IT VISUAL**

Ensure the FiF experience remains highly visual, by foregrounding this in terms of assets to the university rather than in deficit terms. Remember words are important. In both the US and UK, the use of posters was key and also, campaigns where academic staff were asked to identify as FiF. According to the USC Vice Provost Professor Sandra Kelly, one of these ‘call outs’ was met with a huge response and resulted in a database of FiF staff members who are interested in contributing to future events and initiatives. Equally these staff are the public face of the FiF cohort (including the President of the university) with many agreeing to wear badges and displaying stickers that indicate they are FiF friendly. This theme of reaching out to staff at the university was reflected upon strongly at a number of the universities, particularly in the States. It involved leveraging staff to provide very obvious and public displays of the first in family status in their professional profile. Beyond the institutions I visited, other institutions doing this particularly well include University of Carolina (Carolina First Program) and UCLA, the latter has a very moving [YouTube movie](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQw4w9WgXcQ) exploring this theme.

**Recommendation:** Examine institutional discourse carefully. Remove references to ‘support’, ‘help’ or ‘assistance’ and instead focus on ‘success’, ‘celebration’ and existing capability. Ensure this language is apparent in written materials and also embedded in the language used by staff. These foci should come through in all facets of the approach, from the naming of programs right through to how the staff conceptualise their approach and attitude to these learners.

**LEAD RATHER THAN FOLLOW**

During this trip I also learnt the importance of good leadership and the need for an ethos of inclusion to be woven throughout the overall strategic direction of the institution. For example, ASU have successfully and positively ‘badged’ themselves in relation to the social inclusion agenda. As Professor Punya Mishra explained, that while ASU is not a Land Grant university (institutions that received land from the state in order to give back to the community), it has a ‘land grant spirit’. This translates into practice in terms of the application of research as well as the commitment to inclusion. The applied nature of research is assisted by diverse interdisciplinary connections that innovatively combine an eclectic range of discipline foci to explore solutions to big world problems.

**Recommendation:** Seek out innovative and entrepreneurial funding models. Funding social inclusion and access is an ongoing and challenging venture, and public funds for this type of work will always be limited. However, there are possibilities in the private sector that can be carefully utilised to assist our equity programs. Perhaps the best example of this was the ASU entrepreneurship model that has created partnerships between the public and the private. Sometimes these partnerships might seem questionable but ultimately, they do create opportunity for individuals to access a university degree regardless of their financial or educational background.
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<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Summary Description</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Whole of Family Engagement. Consider how the family and significant others of FiF learners can be engaged with in a meaningful manner not only in the pre-enrolment stage but throughout the student life cycle. This engagement should always be framed in a celebratory way rather than in punitive or deficit terms. For tips on how to engage with family productively please see: <a href="http://www.firstinfamily.com.au/OLT-3.php">http://www.firstinfamily.com.au/OLT-3.php</a></td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Make it Everyone’s Business. Make the success of the FiF student everyone’s business rather than sideling it; this relates to foregrounding FiF in university business rather than this remaining an ‘invisible population’.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Clarify what ‘First in Family’ actually means. Clarity of definition around what ‘being the first’ actually means. This requires the development of one universal definition that must be applied across the institution and ideally, common across the whole HE sector. This definition needs to be foregrounded in enrolment processes and also, within equity and outreach services to ensure that it is universally understood. Terms such as college, parent, degree, family member etc are not assumed to have one universal meaning and should be clearly defined.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Revisit your approach to peer mentoring. Consider how mentoring programs could deliberately match first in family students and mentors but do this in a positive way that avoids implicit deficit framings. Mentors (particularly those from FiF backgrounds) have an important role in normalising stages of the academic year and importantly the fears and anxieties associated with those critical stages.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Develop highly accessible staff resources. Develop highly accessible staff resources that seek to dispel myths or stereotypes relating to students from diverse backgrounds, particularly those who are highly intersected like FiF students. Ensure that training which is undertaken is recognised in a meaningful way by the institution and also directly applicable to the teaching or learning contexts of the participants.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Make contextualised research a priority. There is a need for more empirical research that adopts broader conceptualisations of FiF students that consider the unique biographical, historical and cultural situatedness of this cohort.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recommendation</td>
<td>Summary Description</td>
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<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td>Avoid unintentionally creating a FIF ‘ghetto’</td>
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<td>Mentoring is key but avoid creating a FIF ‘ghetto’ where FIF students only have access to other FIF students. Ensure that mentoring is available from a variety of sources at a range of stages of life to ensure a more rounded approach to succeeding at university and beyond.</td>
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<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td>Recognise the importance of funded internships opportunities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Explore sources of funding that would enable students from FIF backgrounds (and intersected by various equity factors) to take advantage of study abroad or internship opportunities to increase their social and cultural capital. This type of experiential learning is a key element to a university learning experience but this remains largely the remit of the financially secure (who can afford to relocate for a lengthy period) rather than those who must maintain consistent paid consistent paid work in order to remain at university.</td>
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<td><strong>9</strong></td>
<td>Create meaningful relationships with FIF alumni</td>
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<td>Create meaningful relationships with FIF alumni that do not rely solely on financial imperatives but instead productively leverage their personal experiences and also, create possible internship opportunities for students. This could be a professional mentoring scheme but also, needs to value the alumni as people rather than in terms of their potential fiscal worth.</td>
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<td><strong>10</strong></td>
<td>Foreground the solitary nature of the FIF student transition</td>
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<td>Explore the ways in which the solitary nature of the FIF student transition and engagement can be both acknowledged but importantly embedded within an integrated and networked series of services.</td>
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<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td>Don’t forget the ‘human touch’</td>
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<td>Many of the programs I studied were characterised by a ‘human’ touch where there is a key person that really ‘cares’ about the students. This individual is aware of the students’ personal circumstances and also, ‘checks in’ regularly to see how they are faring. This may include providing food or coffee or simply sending an email to check that these learners are okay. The human contact is vital – so they feel they are not just a ‘number’ but humanised as individuals.</td>
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<td><strong>12</strong></td>
<td>Examine institutional discourse carefully.</td>
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<td>Remove references to ‘support’, ‘help’ or ‘assistance’ and instead focus on ‘success’, ‘celebration’ and existing capability within institutional discourse. Ensure this language is apparent in both written materials and also embedded in the language used by staff. These foci should come through in all facets of the approach, from the naming of programs right through to how the staff conceptualise their approach and attitude to these learners.</td>
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<td><strong>13</strong></td>
<td>Seek out innovative and entrepreneurial funding models.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seek out innovative and entrepreneurial funding models. Funding social inclusion and access is an ongoing and challenging venture. Public funds for this type of work will always be limited. However, there are possibilities in the private sector that can be carefully utilised to assist our equity program. Perhaps the best example of this was the ASU entrepreneurship model that has created partnerships between the public and the private. Sometimes these partnerships might seem questionable but ultimately, they do create opportunity for individuals to access a university degree regardless of their financial or educational background.</td>
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Dissemination: Sharing the Findings

No fellowship is complete without ongoing and strategic dissemination. I started sharing my findings whilst I was engaged in the Fellowship tour, taking advantage of Penzu to create regular blogs during my travels. These short blogs were distributed via my LinkedIn account and also via Twitter with some response (See Figure 49).

However, these early blogs were only the beginning of an ongoing and reiterative dissemination strategy that will draw on a number of online and face to face modes. The online dissemination will include a digest of these blogs distributed via an online newsletter that I have been writing for the last two years. The newsletter is sent out to an e-list comprised of 500 subscribers who are all involved in the HE equity and student experience field in some capacity.

In addition to this, I intend to send personal emails to key stakeholders within the field which will invite them to view my report and distribute it to staff and interested parties within their institutions. In this way I hope the report will be read and applied to new initiatives within the FiF context with recommendations usefully informing future policy and practices in the field.

As an academic, I am also constantly involved in presenting and publishing my work. This fellowship coalesces with my research focus and so the report will naturally be referenced in future publications, particularly the recommendations which echo practically what a lot of my research data reflects. This program of engagement equally includes presentations and seminars, the fellowship findings have already been integrated into future conference workshops and presentations (e.g. The National First in Family Network I convene at the STARS conference; an invited workshop at the upcoming Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia (EPHEA) conference in 2019). The findings from this fellowship will also usefully inform a 2019 Equity Fellowship funded by the National Centre for Student Equity in HE which will explore the post-graduation outcomes of FiF students - details available here: https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/2019-research-fellowship-professor-sarah-oshea/

Finally, this work is my passion and so findings ways to 'spread the word' will always be a priority; like a persistent stream which eddies and flows between and within gaps and crevices, this work will continue to flow, making inroads (however small) to ensure that the HE experience is equally accessible and beneficial to all.

Below - Figure 49: Early dissemination from the Churchill Fellowship
References


