

Best Practice Case Examples

Conversations with Counselling and Equity

Staff of the Counselling and Equity Unit
(Psychologists, Disability Consultants, Migrant Coordinator,
Fee Assistance Officer, Equity Officer)
Canberra Institute of Technology

An online, weekly, thought provoking all staff email (MicroByte) which comes directly from the Counselling and Equity Unit aimed at teaching staff to assist in the understanding of our students. Topics included: Boundaries and limit setting with students; Cultural and religious prohibitions which may impact on learning and assessment procedures; Driven by hope – understanding our refugee students; The student in tears; The vanishing student; I've got a secret: disability disclosure; Oops ... wrong planet syndrome: working with students with Asperger's syndrome; and Bullying.

Issue the initiative was designed to address

To alert teaching staff by way of online, weekly *Conversations with Counselling and Equity* of the expertise which resides in our Counselling and Equity unit and to reach more students via teacher referral.

Desired outcomes

Through enabling shifts in perspective and attitude and in assisting to dispel social and professional isolation and disengagement, the aim of the *Conversations* was to encourage appropriate student referral and to compile a repository of useful advice and direction for front line staff.

Description of initiative

The whole Counselling and Equity Unit is involved – Counselling; in all its various roles, Disability Services (including Hearing Impaired and students with Asperger's), Migrant services and services for refugees, the peer tutoring coordinator, the manager of pastoral care for International students, the fee assistance coordinator, the youth worker.

There is no specific budget. However, time is a factor as staff author the *Conversations*. This is not onerous. It is minimal as it is shared around the Unit with staff conversing about their primary areas of expertise in a sprightly, conversational manner. The office manager supports the process by maintaining and editing the work. The Head of Unit has the final say in what is published.

The purpose to assist students is paramount but uses the staff as the medium.

Evaluation used or planned

Informal feedback from staff has been positive:

"I have often thought that, as we have so many capable staff at CIT, we should look for an avenue in which to forward and share information. This was a useful resource for all staff, particularly teachers."

"Hi there I'm writing to say what a great initiative the 'Conversations with Counselling and Equity' is. It is such an interesting, informative and worthwhile addition to Staff Information System."

"Thank you for the thought and sharing the information with the rest of CIT. It's great to have expert advice. It is very useful and it will make people think about all types of issues they encounter with students and be more 'accommodating'. Great idea!"

"Just wanted to say how interesting I have found this series. It provides me with an opportunity to reflect on my interactions with students – to get new ideas and to validate my existing approaches. I look forward to the rest of the series."

“Thanks for the ‘Conversations with Counselling and Equity’ that are coming through. They’re all very topical for us. As teachers, - busy with planning lessons, assessments, timetables, enrolments, etc, etc. we often don’t have the background, insights, or even an awareness of some of the issues that our diverse student population are dealing with. Looking forward to your take on ‘The Vanishing Student’ we’re racking our brains trying to come to grips with this one!”

“I don't know whose idea it was but I want to let you know I find the Conversations with Counselling excellent. Just a brief snippet, does not require much time commitment from the reader and very useful information.”

A more formal evaluation will be attempted after the next 9 Conversations (end of term one, 2011) when we see this process embedded in the psyche of the organisation.

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