University College Program
Executive Summary Evaluation Report  August 2010
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The University College Program Pilot

The University College Pilot Program (UCP) began in 2008, as part of the University of Tasmania's EDGE2 2008 – 2010 strategic plan, to “Develop the UTAS college model, in partnership with the State Government, to provide an integrated year 11 to PhD educational framework for Tasmania.”

It is a joint venture between UTAS, the Tasmanian Academy and senior secondary schools/colleges which allows capable and motivated students to undertake university study either in conjunction with (extension) or alongside (full UTAS units) their studies towards the Tasmanian Certificate of Education (TCE) or the International Baccalaureate (IB).

Students undertake a TCE subject extension where the TCE subject curriculum closely aligns to a UTAS first year or Foundation unit. TCE extension is available in selected language, visual and performing arts, arts and business studies.

Students complete UTAS units undertaken either through the High Achievers Program or with a college or campus based facilitated class. These units are best suited to high achieving students whom the Academy or college assesses as capable of completing work at first year university level.

The UCP Evaluation Methodology

The UCP evaluation involved:

- A scan of the literature and approaches taken by other universities to increase participation and social inclusion
- Quantitative analysis which examines student participation and outcomes and the destination and performance of UCP students who have articulated to UTAS
- A range of questionnaires including a survey of the UCP Languages students in 2009; and an online survey of Principals, UTAS Heads of School, Senior Secondary Staff and UTAS staff.
- Qualitative analysis of three focus groups of students who have articulated from the UCP to UTAS as full time students (Ethics approval number H11280)
- An analysis and discussion of a range of meetings interviews symposia and reports during the two and a half years of the three year pilot program

The context for the program

The current Australian Government Higher Education reform agenda places an emphasis on participation and social inclusion based on the knowledge that education is a key determinate of individual and community wellbeing. The low socio-economic status and low level of educational attainment of many Tasmanians means that, like other rural and regional areas of Australia, Tasmania needs to increase the number of people staying in school and progressing onto higher education in order to maximize individual opportunity and ensure
regional sustainability. Universities nationwide have implemented a variety of programs which aim to do this. It has been shown that these programs are most successful when developed and delivered in partnership.

Initial Surveys Reports and Feedback

Throughout the pilot program a range of developmental processes have been conducted including the establishment of a Quality Assurance Plan, the conducting of two Symposia with involved staff from the secondary sector and UTAS, a range of meetings with key discipline and administrative groups, interviews with Deans and Heads of School and an online survey of UCP language students. The outcomes of these processes as documented have been summarised to track the developmental process of the UCP.

The issues of quality assurance procedures in relation to unit approval; student engagement; communication; examining the role of college teachers; and student services are all canvassed and the two annual reports identify student and college participation and student outcomes.

Information provided by the Tasmanian Qualifications Authority (TQA) demonstrates that students who undertake full UTAS units whilst in senior secondary school perform better than Tasmanian Certificate of Education (TCE) students in general students although they are more likely to be from mid to high socio-economic status (based on geo coding) and more likely to be female.

Survey responses

UCP Languages student survey of forty one students (35% French, 57.5% Japanese) indicated that most students were satisfied and that the program benefited their language learning. The main issue of concern is that students did not identify strongly with UTAS.

Quantitative Analysis

Information in this section is divided into three sections: student participation and outcomes with data derived from annual extraction and reporting over three years

Student participation and outcomes

Student unit participation and outcome data and senior secondary school of origin has been compiled from UCP annual reports with data derived from annual enrolments and academic results.

The annual data capture demonstrates that numbers of units offered and student participation has increased over the three years of the UCP Pilot. Withdrawal numbers have fallen and student performance overall has improved with the percentage of students performing at credit level or above rising from 50% in 2008 to 58% in 2009.

These data however must be treated with caution given the limited scope of the units offered and the short time the program has been offered.

The 2008 – 2010 summary demonstrates the growth in the program.
### UCP Summary 2008 - 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Students:</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>588</td>
<td>652</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Unit Enrolments:</td>
<td>473</td>
<td>872</td>
<td>515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number Participating Schools/Colleges:</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Units Offered:</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>16**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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* Enrolments till end of semester one only.

** From 2010 language units have been converted into one 25% unit instead of 2X12.5% units as in previous years.

### UCP students- summary histories

Admissions and enrolment data show that UCP students were overwhelmingly female (67.8%) and domestic Australian (98.7%) students. Students typically did two units and undertook these units within one year (89.1%). As the program continues it is expected the number studying for two years will increase. Students typically also studied within one discipline areas (94.5%).

Two hundred and forty-two UCP students have articulated to UTAS. A detailed analysis of destination and outcomes for 227 was undertaken.

Overall, up to now, only 32.9% of students have or are currently taking units with the same unit prefix as their UTAS College discipline(s). However, 57.9% took or are taking at least one unit in the same school.

A total of 88 students have completed at least one UTAS unit subsequent to their UCP participation (on average 1.9 UCP units). The grade point average (GPA) of students’ UCP units were compared with their GPA for their subsequent UTAS units. The mean grade point average for this group was 5.44 for their UCP studies an 4.78 for their UTAS studies. While the UCP and UTAS grade point averages are positively and moderately correlated (Pearson product-moment correlation, r=0.328, p=0.00018), the $r^2$ is 10.8 which means that the two have only about 11% of shared variance, which is low. However, because withdrawals (genuine fails and those who did not complete) are removed from the administrative data statistical comparisons need to be treated with caution.

The analysis of admissions and enrolments data suggests that UCP students do successfully articulate to UTAS and are likely to study in the same School as for their UCP units. However caution must be taken in drawing any conclusions at this stage because of the short time frame which necessarily limits the time in Degree programs for UCP articulants and thus the analysis of their performance at UTAS. As also noted the number of students who have articulated at this stage is also limited. A complete picture may not be possible for some years when longitudinal data will be available. Ongoing monitoring is recommended.

### Online survey (Principals, Heads of School, Senior Secondary Staff, UTAS staff)

Seventy-eight people attempted the survey (36 senior secondary staff, 18 principals, 18 UTAS staff, 6 Heads of School). All respondents bar one indicated that they thought the
program should continue. The detailed analysis of responses provided in the report provides a guide to key issues of concern and future development opportunities

A range of benefits and limitations were identified by the respondents (asked for three each). Responses from school/college staff centred principally on the benefits previously canvassed, focusing on the opportunity to challenge capable students and introduce them to university-level life and study. There were a range of comments which had not previously been identified as benefits of the program, these were that the UCP:

- Provided students opportunities to interact with native speakers in language courses
- Provided an opportunity to get credit for a first year language unit where previously they would have just gone into a 2nd year unit without the first year credit
- Enabled students to study subjects not available or discontinued in the TCE
- Introduced students to online learning through MyLO
- Provided professional development opportunity for school/college teachers
- Increased the standard of performing arts in Tasmania

Response by UTAS staff focuses strongly on the benefits of interaction between school-colleges and UTAS and the role of UCP in breaking down barriers and creating shared understandings of the higher education environment by the school-college sector.

Issues identified in this section by school-colleges staff centred around the difficulty of fitting this program in with the already high demands on both teacher and students in the year 11/12 environment. Issues of adequate resourcing both physical and human were raised. Other comments include that the connections between UTAS and school-college staff could be better; the opportunity to participate in the decision making process could be increased; and a greater variety of units could be offered, particularly those outside the arts area.

School-college principals identified issues relating to access for non-metropolitan based students, a lack of differentiation between the standard of Year 12 courses and first year UTAS units offered in UCP, low points recognition in TCE, enrolment and timetabling issues, particularly that they did not always suit the school-college environment. One principal felt that the UCP was a thinly veiled marketing attempt by UTAS. Other principals, however, expressed the view that the program was useful in extending students’ knowledge and skill and in familiarising them with university level learning.

UTAS staff members were also concerned about ensuring the program was adequately supported and resourced and that UTAS was sending out a mixed message with the program if it failed to do so. There was also concern about proper support for staff from their relevant departments and the difficulties working with schools/colleges who systems did not necessarily mesh with those of UTAS. There was concern expressed about the organisation and coordination of the program. One respondent felt that Year 11/12 students were not emotionally or cognitively mature enough for the content and self-directed learning required by UTAS study.

UTAS Heads of School comments also included concerns about organisational issues, the net benefit to UTAS in terms of student impressions and enrolments if the program is not delivered properly, inequities with other first year students (HECS feels, withdrawing without penalty), flow-on enrolments and general confusion about a range of issues associate with the program.

Seventeen recommendations were made by respondents.
Student Feedback

Generally most focus group participants felt that the early exposure to the University of Tasmania, through the various program activities and interchanges, facilitated an easier and less stressful transition to university and gave them a starting advantage over other students. The impact of the program seems to have: expanded their learning opportunities; 'demystified' University; and facilitated the first steps in building a relationship with the institution and the people – both lecturers and fellow students – they would encounter when they began their first year of tertiary studies.

Students studying Languages appreciated the opportunity to speak with more advanced and/or native language speakers. The students who undertook units of study with the School of Visual and Performing Arts were particularly enthusiastic about the colloquium. They seemed to really enjoy the on-campus experience. It provided them with an opportunity to interact with students from other schools with similar study interests; provided a broad exposure to different aspects of visual and performing arts; and enabled feedback from people other than their teachers at school.

The students who studied Critical and Creative Thinking found the unit of study challenging but valued being stretched intellectually and could see how the skills learned could have wide application:

Most students, participating across the range of UCP units studied, valued the positive impact on TCE scores and the acquired credit for UTAS units upon enrolment in an aligned UTAS Degree

Before beginning the University College Program most students had already formulated ideas about future studies and many students used the UCP units to explore these interests. Others used the UCP to explore new areas or undertake units they thought would assist with general academic development

Although most UCP students already intend to come to university, there is some evidence of the UCP assisting in the raising of aspirations to attend university. One student in the Launceston focus group indicated that she had not thought of going to University but after participating the School of Visual and Performing Arts UCP she is now enrolled in the Bachelor of Contemporary Arts. One participant indicated that participating in the UCP meant that she came to UTAS rather than an interstate university as she had originally intended.

The complex pressures on year 12 students and uncertainty about tertiary education can create unnecessary anxiety for students who intend to progress to University. The University College Program appears to have bridged a gap in knowledge about UTAS/University for many of the focus group participants; and provided useful experiential learning that may have alleviated some of the transitional stress for some of these students. Some students would have liked more on-campus activities and others were focused on workload—either too much (Critical and Creative Thinking), or not enough (some of the Arts and Language programs).

There was also some uncertainty regarding unit guidelines and assessment criteria that confused a number of students involved in the Conservatorium and SVPA

For some students the learning is significant, others tend not to have reflected on their learning experience at all. This situation is most likely when their university unit has been delivered entirely distant from the university and they have little connection to university lecturers. The more frequent the interaction with the university (face-to-face or online) the more students appear to have been connected to the learning.
Regardless of the apparent issues and challenges encountered in the University College Program all of the students said they would do the program again and/or recommend it to prospective students. They have indicated areas where changes/improvements could be made but overall they expressed a belief that the program had been of benefit to their ongoing education, and eased the transition to university.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

The UCP pilot has had many positive outcomes including student participation and performance, developing relationships with the secondary sector and broad support from involved staff.

The evaluation research has shown that further development in regard to the UCP student experience, curriculum and overarching program development is required. It has also demonstrated that some administration, communication, equity and quality assurance issues need to be addressed.

In particular issues for further and priority consideration relate to:

- Social inclusion and participation given the current participant demographic;
- Working in partnership - acknowledging the developing role of senior secondary staff and establishing a strong professional development program for UTAS staff and college staff;
- More equitable statewide provision of the UCP the maintenance of HECS scholarships and the sanction free opportunity;
- Overarching consideration of the number and discipline areas of the units offered through the UCP;
- The mapping of TCE and UTAS first year units and clarification of standards; and
- Strengthening University preparation and the student connection to UTAS.

Understanding of the collaborative environment has grown within UTAS and much has been learnt through trial and error, but it is clear that any ongoing development needs be underpinned by UTAS Policy that puts the UCP in the context of the wider collaborative UTAS participation and social inclusion agendas.