

USING SRES AND OTHER STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE BELONGING AND CONNECTION

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A sense of belonging and connection among students and between students and the teaching team is essential for the student experience and has impacts on student success and retention. Challenges to the wellbeing of both students and staff are exacerbated in predominantly online units and in units with large cohorts. For staff there can be a lack of connection with students, often coupled with a lack of feeling supported in the teaching and administration of large units. The prevalence of online learning has meant the use of technologies to provide online “pedagogies of care” has become even more important (Burke & Larmar, 2021).

The Student Relationship Engagement System, or SRES, is an online tool that can be used to facilitate personalised engagement through features such as “getting-to-know-you” and “pulse checks”. Through surveys and focus groups, we expect to assess the features of SRES that have the most impact on the promotion of inclusion, connection, belonging and wellbeing for both students and staff. We will also gather information about the other tools, strategies and pedagogies that are effective for positive student and staff engagement and support, and that have the potential to alleviate staff workload and stress and enhance work efficiency.

Student and staff perceptions are being investigated using separate surveys. Validated surveys that focus on belonging and the three constructs of student engagement: cognitive, behavioural and emotional, combined with bespoke surveys (Wester et al., 2021) are being used to gather information. Staff and students are also invited to participate in focus groups modelled on a semi-structured interview approach utilising focused questions whilst allowing further exploration of ideas (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Quantitative analysis of student attendance, performance, retention and progression data from the targeted units will inform the findings, with these parameters all being indicators of student engagement, sense of belonging and feelings of self-efficacy (Kahu & Nelson, 2018).

We present examples of the use of SRES and other strategies that promote belonging and connection from undergraduate chemistry teaching and from a STEM international experiences unit. We also present results from the surveys targeting staff and students across Curtin campuses who are currently teaching and enrolled in large, online units, comparing the strategies used by those who incorporate SRES in their teaching, with those who don't use SRES.

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