

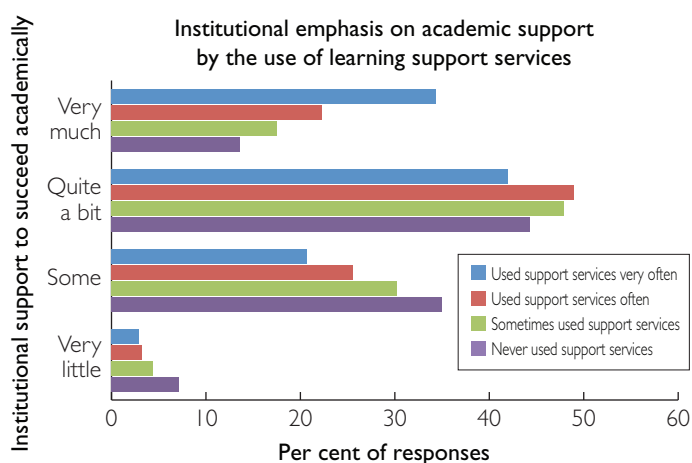
Engaging students through academic skills development

This AUSSE Enhancement Guide makes suggestions about how Language and Academic Skills advisers can enhance student engagement.



How can academic skills advisers advance student engagement?

Language and Academic Skills (LAS) Advisers help students' develop their capacity to participate effectively in learning. Our assistance may be direct, through the teaching of academic skills. It may be indirect, through a referral to other services that promote wider aspects of student engagement. Knowing about the range of services and other avenues that support student engagement is an important part of every LAS Adviser's role.



LAS Advisers may work one-to-one with a student, supporting them to develop strategies to more actively contribute to tutorial discussion: asking questions, critically analysing information, and volunteering answers. We can help students understand why attending lectures and reading materials before the tutorial are keys to effective participation. We might draw the attention of a shy or lonely first year student to university clubs and societies. We are in a position to identify for students volunteering opportunities that may help them develop confidence, make friends and feel more engaged with the university community.

The graph above uses the 2008 AUSSE data to illustrate the relationship between students' use of learning support services and how supported they feel to succeed academically.

Design language support programs to build student engagement

LAS Advisers can play an important role in student engagement by creating, and helping to maintain, support programs that extend beyond the traditional classroom or advisor relationship.

One possibility would be working with community agencies to integrate a volunteer component into language support programs. Through

community involvement, students can practice communication skills, develop wider personal networks and contribute directly to the university's engagement with its region.

Another example would be to design and support, perhaps in concert with a faculty or academic program team, a conversation club for international students that enlists domestic students as facilitators. LAS Advisers could provide training to the domestic students in how to lead the group effectively.

This kind of exchange is both fun and rewarding. International students can make connections with domestic students and learn more about local culture. Strategies like this have benefits for domestic students too. They become more engaged with university life through contact with fellow students, academic and professional staff. They develop professional skills that will benefit them in future study, work and community activities. Local students can gain valuable leadership experience, and at the same time develop cross-cultural awareness.

Offer writing support programs that generate interaction with other students

Connecting first year students with later year students produces higher engagement outcomes for both groups.

You could develop a peer writing program as an extension of traditional, and still important, one-to-one support services. Engage volunteers – later year students who are good writers – to talk with first year students about their academic writing. Your volunteers will need initial guidance about their role, what to look for, and how to refer first year students to other services. From time to time they may need your support.

LAS Advisers could extend the writing program for honours students by setting up a mini-conference for students to present their research. Teach oral presentation skills as a lead-up to the conference. Encourage peer feedback, questions and debate.

Formal programs like these frequently lead to informal contacts – friendships develop, wider personal support networks are established, and rich sources of feedback and collaborative learning emerge.

Put your advisory skills to work in clubs and societies

LAS Advisers have a range of capabilities that can directly support student engagement and academic skills development. We can connect our capabilities to the needs of clubs and societies and other student services. For example, if the student computing society or Malaysian students' club is planning an event, you could contribute by using their planning phase as an opportunity to teach team work and project management skills.

About this guide

This AUSSE Enhancement Guide forms part of the suite of resources developed by ACER and the broader AUSSE community to enhance students' engagement in effective educational practices. This guide was written by Laurie Ransom, General Manager of the Academic Skills Unit, University of Melbourne. Visit www.acer.edu.au/ausse for further information about the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement.