Why Students Leave Their ICT Course

Background

ICT generally has a high attrition rate. A survey of students who quit ICT from 4 Australian Universities was carried out as part of an ALTC-supported project.

Method

The online survey asked about:

Course: academic preparedness; the way the course was taught and run; and aspects of the teaching and learning environment

Personal life experiences: chance events; health; finances; travel; accommodation; and work

University: experiences in general

Key Findings – All Students

A total of 154 ex-ICT students (19% females and 81% males) completed the survey:
- For 26% of participants the main reason was personal
- For 19%, the main reason was course related, such as:
  - classes were boring (42%)
  - the pace of teaching was too fast (32%)
  - lack of workplace focus (37%)
  - lack of practical applications (31%)
  - lack of business focus (21%)
- The teaching and learning environment was considered important:
  - it did not suit their learning style (36%)
  - it was not welcoming (26%)
  - 36% felt that they did not belong
- 53% of students indicated that the course did not meet their expectations
- 49% did not enjoy classes
- 44% of participants felt that they had picked the wrong degree
- 28% of students noted that it was difficult to get help from staff when they needed it
- Other than orientation activities (attended by 72% of students), 68% of students did not attend university and/or school functions and 59% of these students indicated that either none were organised, or that they were not aware of any

Key Findings – Gender Issues

- The gender imbalance was noted by 63%
- 19% of females felt that male staff did not encourage them to participate
- 28% believed that the course content was male oriented
- Females were more likely to believe that they:
  - didn't have the expected background knowledge for the course
  - didn't understand the concepts
  - didn't understand the meaning of terms used in the course
- Female ex-students frequently agreed that their results were not as high as they had expected and that they felt they had picked the wrong degree

Recommendations

A combination of factors contributes to the attrition of ICT students; some of these are within the control of university staff.

University Environment

Addressing the difficulty in obtaining help when required:
- provide greater levels of support during the initial enrolment process, and when students need to makes changes to their enrolment to accommodate other changes in their lives;
- provide assistance with strategies to manage the challenges of scheduling study around work commitments, and managing transportation issues.

The Course

The way in which ICT is taught can make a difference:
- Increase the use of small group class activities providing opportunities for:
    - more active learning
    - minority group participation
    - peer support
    - alleviating boredom
- Increase levels of interaction with other students and staff as this reduces the likelihood of students feeling disconnected from the teaching and learning environment, and makes it easier for them to ask for support when they need it
- Improve the balance between application and theory
- Use cases to enable students to understand relevance and context
- Utilise cases and examples that would appeal to all students
- Provide forms of work integrated learning (e.g. industry, government, community related projects or work placements) for:
    - relevant projects to enhance engagement and incentives
    - gaining professional skills aligned with employment needs
- Provide support systems for students lacking the expected background knowledge or skills and confidence

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Addressing ICT curriculum recommendations from surveys of academics, workplace graduates, and employers

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