# Toolbox for Piloting a Success Coaching Program at an Australian Higher Education Institute

## What are Success Coaches?

Success coaches are used by many Higher Education groups in Australia and overseas. Their aim is to help students achieve their academic and career goals by providing the foundational tools needed to successfully navigate their new academic environment. They offer individualised guidance, feedback and motivation to assist student engagement and success. Coaching can complement student support services such as mentors, academic skills advisers and counsellors by helping students select which support services they need. Coaches can also clarify for new students the ingredients for early academic success and how best to manage the transition into a Higher Education environment (Capstick et al., 2019).

## Why trial a Success Coaching Program?

Success coaching is known to be effective as a strategy for improving student retention and achievement. Several studies have found that coaching is particularly useful for at-risk students and adult learners, and their participation in Higher Education is widening (Capstick et al., 2019; Ryan et al., 2020). Domain 1 of the Australian Higher Education Standards Framework (2021) requires “equivalence of opportunities for success irrespective of a student’s background or mode of participation” be provided when a student enrols at an Australian registered tertiary provider and Success Coaching Programs can contribute to meeting that requirement.

## What is required for a Success Coaching program?

A pilot program of Success Coaching was established at an Australian University Pathway College in 2020.

**Student recruitment**: In this pilot, 50 commencing first year students in a Health Science Diploma were recruited (10 per Success Coach). The program was later adapted to an “opt-in” model. It is recommended that where possible students are allocated a coach that is also a tutor or lecturer in one of their subjects. This improves coomunication and student perceived value in the program.

**Time commitment**: Four x 15 minute meetings between a Success Coach and an allocated student across 12 weeks. Therefore every coach required 1 hour per semester of their time for each student they were allocated.

**Resources needed:** Four checklists (below), each to be completed at meeting 1,2,3 and 4.

**Checklists:** Items on checklists have been chosen based on common difficulties faced by first year students in adjusting to tertiary study (eg Baik et al., 2015; Brooker et al., 2017). These include having to develop academic and digital literacies needed in Higher Education and clarification of the institutional stuctures/processes that are unfamiliar to many new students. Academically vulnerable students have been shown to benefit from creating social relationships, clarifying aspirations, understanding expectations in Higher Education, and helping in overcoming life challenges (Karp 2011). Sources of personal support (eg joining the course facebook page, checking if they had made any friends in their course) were therefore also included.

Checklists for meeting 1,2 3 and 4 across the first 12 weeks of their time at College are at the end of this document.

**Outcomes to measure:** Suggested outcomes to record are student retention, pass rates/Weighted Average Means and qualitative student and coach feedback on the program.

In this pilot program, only 1 student of the 50 enrolled in it 1 withdrew from the College, and the average WAM for participating students was 61% versus 56% for non participants. Feedback showed 87% of students felt the program was quite or very useful; and 93% felt that all new students should be offered it. One sample of student feedback reads

“*I think success coaching can be improved by offering it to all students. When I let other students know it was something I was involved in, they were very interested and keen to have that support too. I think it is a great program and should definitely be continued and expanded”.*

One staff member felt the program saved two students from dropping out; others commented on the improved class interactions as the coached students were more confident in participating in class discussions as they already had a relationship with the lecturer.

Based on this successful pilot, the program has since been expanded to all students at the College who are deemed to be at Academic Risk due to a low academic entrance score.

Checklists are below to reproduce the program. It can be easily adapted to the resources available at an institution. The program was trialled using academic staff as the Success Coaches, but high achieving more advanced students could potentially be used instead.

Checklists

Success Coaching Meeting 1 Name:

# Goal Setting

What is their career goal?

Which Bachelor degree/major are they completing? (Check it matches the career goal.)

[ ] Are their units correct for their chosen Bachelor degree? *Use Enrolment variation form if changing units*

[ ] Have they looked at majors in that Bachelor and which units they require?

# Tools for academic success

Have they been referred for a LAP if they have ongoing physical or mental health issues?

[ ] NA [ ] Yes (If LAP needed make sure they know how to contact Student Equity)

[ ] Do they understand that attendance matches performance so is tracked and under 80% they will be contacted?

[ ] Have they put their assignments in their study planner?

[ ] Do they know what an assessment map is?

[ ] Do they understand that time management is one of the most important parts of university success as things cannot be left to the last minute? *(Refer to Academic Skills team for a session on time management)*

[ ] Do they understand that class participation is expected in College? *(The good student is an outgoing student, not a quiet student!)*

[ ] Do they know where to get help with assignments?

* Lecturers
* Academic Skills team
* Student mentors

[ ] Do they know how to access help with Academic Writing?

[ ] Have they made a friend at College yet?

Success Coaching Meeting 2 & 3 Name:

# PROGRESS CHECK

How are they finding their course?

[ ] Do they need to drop a subject? *(International students must do a minimum of 3, locals can do a minimum of 1) Provide Enrolment Variation form if dropping subjects*

[ ] Have they completed the Academic Integrity module?

# Tools for academic success

[ ] Do they check their College email daily? Is it set up to forward to the account they usually use?

[ ] Do they need help with referencing?

[ ] Do they need help with using the library?

[ ] Have they booked an appointment with the student learning advisors?

[ ] Do they know how to book a Student Mentor?

[ ] Do they know how to submit to turnitin and what turnitin is for?

[ ] Do they know how to access their feedback on assessments and how to use it?

[ ] Do they know that the College has counsellors they can use for personal issues and how to book an appointment?

[ ] Do they know they can use the University Medical Centre?

[ ] Do they have a good study routine and support network at home?

Success Coaching Meeting 4 Name:

# PROGRESS CHECK

How are they finding their course?

[ ] Is there attendance over 80%?

[ ] Are they passing most of their assessments?

# Tools for academic success

[ ] Have they checked the draft exam timetable?

[ ] Have they made a revision plan for all their subjects?

[ ] Do they know the importance of summarizing notes and doing practice exams?

[ ] Have they booked an appointment with their lecturer if they feel they need extra help?

[ ] Have they planned time into their diary to study for each subject?

[ ] Do they have a good study routine and support network at home?

[ ] Have they thought about how they will manage stress during the exam period?

[ ] Do they know that we have counsellors they can use for personal issues and how to book an appointment?

[ ] Have they decided which subjects to do next trimester? Do they need help with that?

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