

Student (re) Engagement Pilot

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Introduction

The Student (re) Engagement Pilot was introduced in response to growing concerns that students were becoming, or were at risk of becoming, disengaged with their studies and university life.

Set within a context of remote learning during the Covid19 public health emergency this pilot adopted a proactive approach to interrupt disengagement, with a focus on enabling and supporting student re-engagement.

With a target of supporting students to achieve their full-potential and succeed in their studies, this pilot initiative sought to identify students most disengaged and focused on reconnecting them with university life in a holistic and meaningful way.

Methodology

Academic Departments were invited to refer students who they had identified as being at risk of disengaging from their studies. Departmental staff self-selected criteria which they deemed as an appropriate indicator of a disengaged student.

An attempt was made to make telephone contact with each student identified, with the aim of checking on their wellbeing and informing of the variety of supports available to them across the campus.

Information provided included personal supports, library supports and academic supports. Unsuccessful telephone contacts were followed by an email outlining support available and information on the access channels.

Findings

In identifying the target group, academic colleagues cited a number of referral reasons, with a significant number of 60% of students being identified as 'general disengagement' as interpreted by the academic departments and schools.

Figure 1 describes the reason for referral from the academic departments.

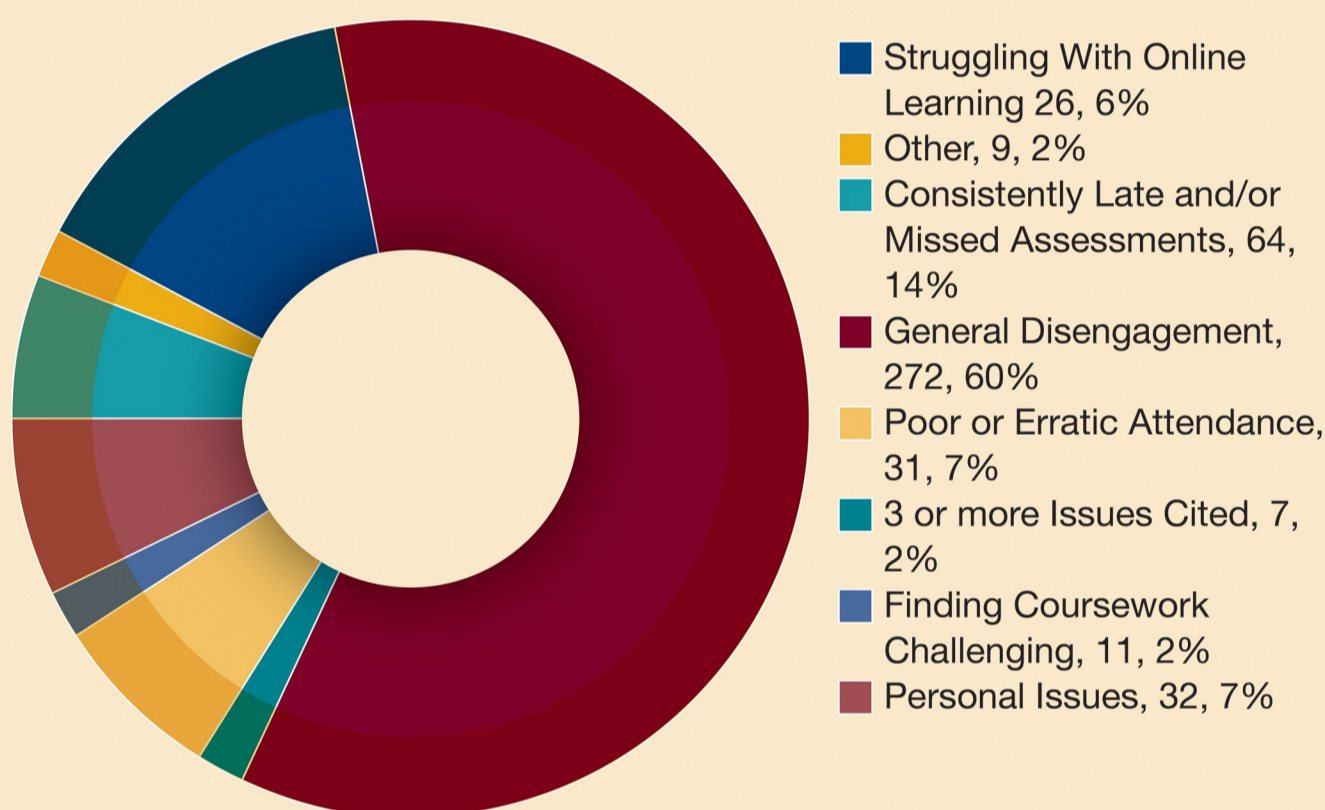


Figure 1

Through check-in conversation, the possible root causes to the general disengagement were identified and appropriate solution focused referrals were instigated.

Figure 2 outlines the challenges being experienced by students, identified through the check-in telephone call.

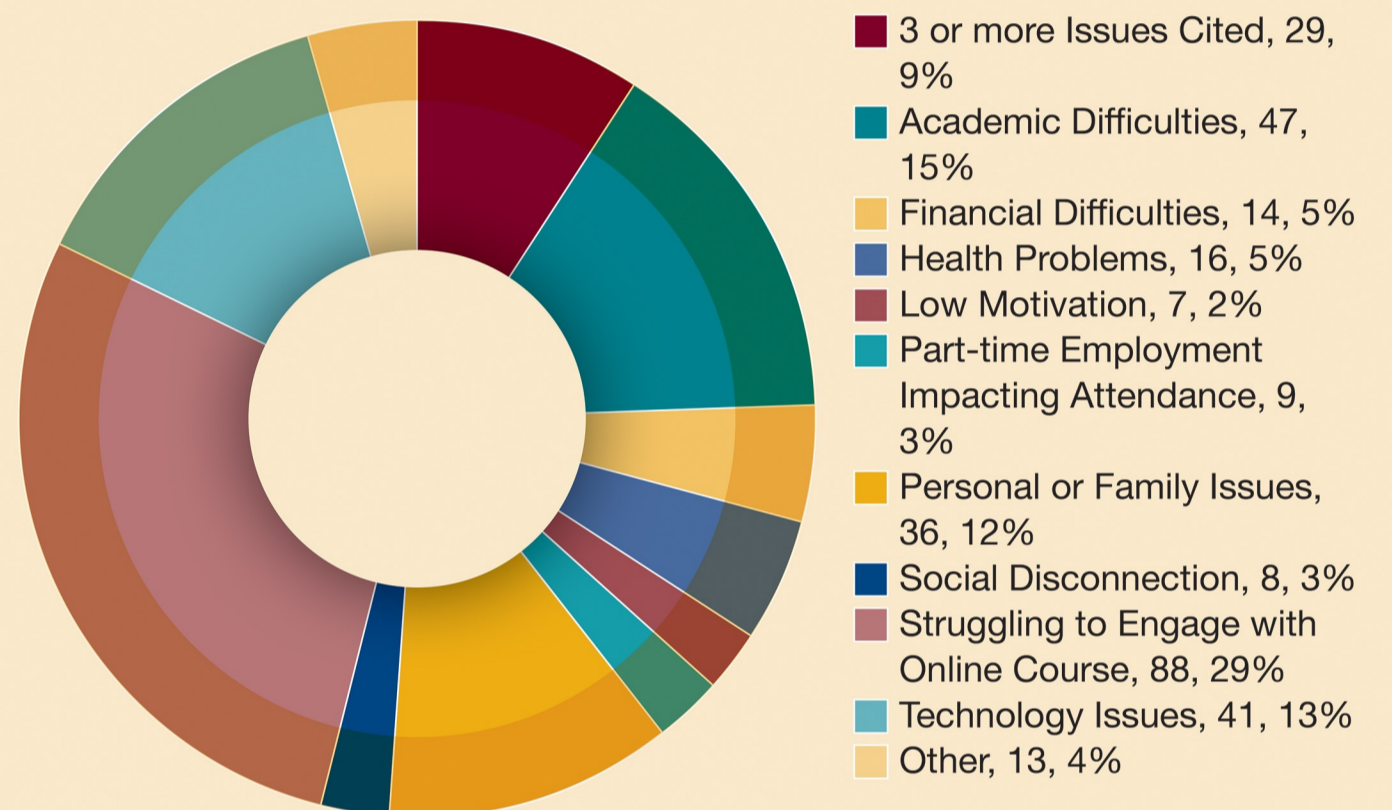


Figure 2

Observations

While the proportion of students contacted were evenly divided between first, second, and third-year undergraduate students, a small portion of fourth year undergraduate students and postgraduate students were identified by their academic departments as being disengaged from their studies.

While most studies, and efforts, in the University are directed towards supporting the first-year student transition, it can be helpful to reflect particularly on the needs of advanced undergraduate students and those studying for postgraduate qualifications.

Just as the issues students experienced were complex and multifaceted, on occasion students were referred to multiple academic departments and/or support units to receive guidance and support.

Limitations

Immediate requirement to engage with students:

Implementing the pilot in response to the COVID-19 public health emergency did not allow for a consultation period with academic departments to provide a rationale for conducting a pilot.

Interpretation of what a dis-engaged student may present as:

Reflecting on the output of the pilot, significant variances in the numbers of students being identified as becoming disengaged, with numerous reasons for referral being observed.

Participation of Schools and Departments with initiatives:

We believe reconnecting with students in a meaningful way delivers an enhanced support package to our students. Commitment and collaboration between support, professional and academic colleagues will underpin this important engagement process, contribute to its success, and reinforce our commitment to student success.

Timing of Exercise:

The pilot was carried out in response to the public health situation, and as such coincided with many competing departmental priorities during a time when operations had largely transitioned to a remote learning environment.

Notable Outcomes

Students who participated in the reach-out campaign had a progression rate of 54% while the general student body had a progression rate of 80% suggesting that the calling campaign successfully targeted students who were struggling with maintaining academic engagement.

The calling campaign also was successful in identifying final year students who were struggling to engage during the pilot year. Final year students who engaged in the calling campaign has a degree completion rate of 69% while the general student body has a degree completion rate of 93%.

A sample of students who were reached provided feedback by way of survey. 95% agreed the process was useful and the personal check-in added to their experience, 29% had been unaware of the range of supports available, 67% learned about some additional supports available, 95% felt that receiving the call let them know that university staff cared about them.

