Introduction

Most research follows student journeys in the transition to University, exploring the emotional (Christie, 2009), identity work (Briggs, Clark & Hall, 2012), and gendered (O’Shea, 2014) factors in the move, just as examples. This is a period of immense change and growth, though this does not stop here. There is limited research that considers the impact of within-degree transitions, especially when the move from year 1 to year 2 has a significant impact on the overall degree classification, and usually entails more critical engagement with academic work. Some research has considered the impact of attrition on the student experience across the life of their degree (Willcoxson, Cotter & Joy, 2011), where they acknowledge that the latter years of the degree are related to higher levels of stress, and potential withdrawal. More specifically, Willcoxson (2009) identified personal factors as playing a key part in the second year of degree courses – health, finances, and social integration were specifically discussed. Career options and clarity of a direction were also mentioned factors that related to stress within the second year.

This project will help in identifying the factors that could be at play for second year psychology students at the University of Northampton, feeding into future planning by the department to provide the best student experience for continuing students, whilst being aware of what the specific problems facing this cohort are. Through addressing the problems and giving students guidance on the things that matter to them, we can work in retention levels for this year of the degree course.

Results

Theme: Lack of confidence within academia

Throughout the interviews, it was clear that students were lacking confidence within University. When talking about accessing help within University, Saskia said:

“I feel really scared to go to them”

It also seems that Saskia is not confident with the independent working style that is so important in University. When speaking about lecturers, she says:

“I feel like they like, I’ve done my lecture now it’s up to you to do all the rest of the work”.

Kate also suggested this lack of confidence, suggesting that she is not confident with her work and wants lecturers to look at a draft before she hands the final assignment in:

“you can’t submit a draft to them and say this is right, I am following the right lines and stuff like that I think it is just a lot of pressure.”

Although there is a suggested lack of confidence for the participants, this seems only to be within University. Although Saskia suggested that she was not confident seeking support within University, she stated that she had been confident enough to gain help outside of University:

“i went to the doctors and got diagnosed with depression”

Both participants also spoke about getting support from their friends and therefore suggest that they are socially confident outside of University. When speaking about what helps with the work load, Kate says:

“I think if I didn’t have the friendship groups that I have I really feel like I definitely would’ve struggled”

Linking with a lack of confidence is the lack of engagement that the students suggested throughout the interviews. Although the student has a clear need for support, they failed to engage with lecturers. Saskia repeatedly says throughout the interview that she has never discussed issues with a lecturer or other support systems within the University such as learning support:

“I haven’t used them because I’m scared they’re gonna be like we can’t work miracles”

Kate also suggests a lack of engagement with her lecturers:

“my attendance has not been great on a Thursday. One of the main reasons it has not been great is because car parking”

Conclusion

Overall, this project so far can teach us that students may lose confidence within the transition from year 1 to year 2. The project suggests that one reason for this may be the increasing expectations and pressures applied to young people to go to University, causing them to struggle with a learning style and environment that is not made to suit them. The debate must therefore be discussed in terms of whether University should be limited to only students who can deal with demands or a place of inclusion where everyone has the chance to take part in future education. If the latter is the case, this project can teach us that instead of the jump to exclusive independent working through the transition, more support should be put in place for those students who can not deal with this working style. Another reason given here is the lack of engagement from students which can be improved through student-faculty interactions. This can therefore teach us that during the transition, faculties should find ways to connect with the students as they move in to second year so that they are comfortable and willing to engage. If this is successful, students may engage with learning and therefore gain confidence.

It is important to note that this project is a working progress and the results so far are based on 2 participants. This project should therefore be finished with the use of more participants to increase the reliability and validity of the results and look further in to the transition. Aside from this project, research in to both transitions within University and year 2 of University is very limited. These areas should be focused on by more researchers in order to improve the experience of University for students.

References


