First Week Jitters

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Educators at tertiary institutes would agree that the first weeks of a course, be it a Certificate, a Diploma or a Degree, are critical to the rate of progress – or lack of it – of a new student.

Most institutes hold orientation sessions; some go further and provide new students with 'Study skills' sessions. These can last for one or more days at the beginning of a course. Such courses are 'pressure cookers' in that a lot of information is presented, often in a new and strange language, (computer terms), to the student. It is not surprising therefore that those students quickly forget such information and need to be given further support.

This state of affairs has contributed to the attrition rate; it is important to keep the interest of new students – not confuse them and make them feel inadequate.

The author of this poster felt there was a need for a greater degree of support at the commencement of a course and undertook qualitative research to identify the needs of new students and lecturers in this area.

This poster presents the findings of this research and identifies areas of support and specific examples of both technological and paper based solutions that are more likely to assist the new student when entering the world of study.

Keywords

New students, Support, Computer Terms, Study Skills

1. The Research

For the first two weeks of any course students are overwhelmed with information – often this information is in the form of handouts and/or given to the students verbally and not available electronically. These handouts usually find their way to the rubbish bin or filed somewhere 'safe' and are never seen again.

Research was conducted to examine some ways of helping new students to settle quickly. Investigation was undertaken in the form of interviews and questionnaires (one for lecturers and one for students). The underlying theme of the questions was to find out what resources could be offered to new students to help them to settle into their courses better.

2. The Results

The answers to the questionnaires and the interviews were collated and analysed. The poster shows the results of this analysis along with the steps that were taken to reach these results.

There are many things that both the students and lecturers have indicated would help new students to settle into their courses.

It was established that it was necessary to provide immediate assistance in the areas of administration, assumed background knowledge, how the institution works, how the computing department works and course related material.

An example of these were a glossary of computer terms for all students to access as the computing language is just about a language of its own – after all a RAM is a male sheep – right. Another was the suggestion of basic Word; Excel and PowerPoint tutorials- lecturers expect all assignments to be word-processed.

If these were constructed in electronic form and immediately distributed in hard copy, they could later be loaded onto any Managed Learning Environment that the institution selected for the availability of all students.