

ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION PLAN 2019

SOUTHERN CROSS UNIVERSITY

1 **Equity outcomes and strategies:** for improving outcomes for people from a low SES background.

Outcomes

- Continue to exceed national access and participation rates for students from low SES backgrounds.
- Improved retention, completion and employability for students from low SES backgrounds.

Strategies

Pre-access (outreach to schools and communities)

- Continue to deliver school outreach programs throughout northern New South Wales and the Gold Coast regions targeting schools with high levels of low SES students and students from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background.

Access (pre-entry and admissions)

- Provide alternative entry pathways for students particularly those from non-traditional educational backgrounds.

Participation, Progress and Attainment

- Offer financial support for students experiencing high levels of financial disadvantage.
- Deliver targeted strategies aimed at improving the retention, completion and employability of students from low SES backgrounds.
- Enhance academic and non-academic support services for on-campus and online students, recognising the diversity of students' backgrounds and experiences (including first in family at university).
- Affirm diversity, inclusion and cultural competency through workshops, materials and events.

2 **Key activities:** which will deliver an increase in the access, participation and success of people from a low SES background.

Pre-access (outreach to schools and communities)

- Deliver the UniBound / Stellar Outreach programs in partnership with fifty schools (covering Years 6 – 10) selected on the basis of high concentrations of low SES (ICSEA Indicators), Indigenous enrolments and regionality.
- Maintain support programs delivered by the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) across the three campus locations (Coffs Harbour, Lismore and the Gold Coast).
- Academic Skills workshops delivered for school programs such as Year 10@SCU, Year 11@SCU and Gold Coast Extension Day.

Access (pre-entry and admissions)

- Provide pathways for prospective students (including non-school leavers) needing to enhance their study skills for university-level studies through the Preparing for Success Program (PSP) available on-campus and online and a suite of Associate degrees.

Participation, Progress and Attainment

- Offer Equity Scholarships to financially disadvantaged commencing and continuing students.
- Deliver an increased focus on the Orientation and Induction of new students in order to connect, prepare and support them throughout their first year of university.
- Enhance the quality of the relationship between UniMentor participants while maintaining participation rates across student cohorts.
- Implement a suite of online and on-campus initiatives aimed at building more positive student experiences across the university life-cycle, recognising the high proportions of low SES students and other equity groups at the University.
- Deliver innovative and accessible mechanisms of academic support geared to the needs of the student cohort including after-hours and Peer-to-Peer support.
 - Studiosity is an outsourced service providing free online after-hours study support to students seeking extra help with foundational knowledge, study skills and support for assignment writing.
 - Enable students from lower SES backgrounds to reflect on their student experience and develop study skills needed to manage their transition into university study by connecting with peers through programs such as Peer Support and Study Buddi on all campuses.
- Deliver a university transition support program co-designed with students with disability and transitional/special education support teachers to enhance the participation and success of students with disability in higher education.
- Continued development of School and program level initiatives for heightened student employability.
- Recognise and celebrate diversity and inclusion through cultural events and ceremonies.

3 **Evaluation:** how the university plans to evaluate the effectiveness of the equity strategies.

Equity strategies are evaluated and revised using a variety of methods:

- collection of participation and baseline data (numbers, equity groups, events);
- conducting post event surveys (school and university students, teachers and stakeholders);
- gathering qualitative feedback through interviews and focus groups;
- equity research such as that conducted by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education and internal research; and
- analysing and benchmarking trend data on key indicators.

An independent evaluation of the UniBound / Stellar Outreach programs was undertaken in 2018 and its findings will help inform the ongoing roll-out of the Programs. The Equity Scholarship and Strengthening Participation scholarship offerings will be reviewed during 2019 to ensure they are best targeted to supporting students with financial need to succeed at university.

4 **Partnerships and collaboration:** who the university will partner and collaborate with and how this will improve equity performance.

Southern Cross University will maintain and, where appropriate, strengthen its extensive partnerships to widen university participation across disadvantaged communities. Partners include:

- local primary and secondary schools (and their parent/carers community) in regional NSW and the Gold Coast;
- government agencies including the Department of Education and TAFE,
- community based organisations (such as the Clarence Valley Industry Education Forum);
- Indigenous communities; and
- the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) to support increased access and participation in higher education by Indigenous students.