

‘It’s almost a mindset that teachers need to change’: first-year students’ need to be inducted into time management

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This article discusses the findings related to a number of research projects investigating students’ expectations and experiences of the first year in higher education. In particular, findings with regard to first-year students’ expectations and challenges with issues of time management are reported. It was found that many students were realistic about having to plan their work independently, and having to spend a good amount of their time during the week on self-study. However, many students found it difficult to regulate their self-study and keep up with the work. They were also not always sure how they were to organise their self-study time. It is argued that universities could and should play a more active role in helping first-year students to make sense of time management.

Keywords: academic acculturation; self-directed; student transition; study habits; student workload

Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that the students’ experiences during their first year in higher education are of enormous importance for students’ commitment to return for the second year and completing their degree (Krause et al. 2005; Pascarella and Terenzini 2005; Upcraft, Gardner, and Barefoot 2005; Yorke 1999; Yorke and Longden 2007).

As more students have entered higher education retention of first-year students and degree completion have become important foci of attention. As most students who leave higher education do so during or immediately after the first year, students’ first-year experiences have been identified as of being in need of particular attention. Furthermore, students’ engagement with universities has changed as a consequence of technological developments and increased numbers of students who work or are enrolled as part-time students.

The massification and diversification of higher education have raised questions of whether approaches to learning and teaching need to be rethought, and whether ‘traditional’ higher education pedagogy is still appropriate. It has been suggested that changes in students’ engagement with university studies, and the more diverse backgrounds of first-year students, need to be recognised in the organisation of the learning environment and student support (James 2001; Kantanis 2000a; Krause 2005a, b; McInnis 2001).

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Although an argument can be made for reconsidering tertiary education pedagogy in general, reconsidering approaches to first-year teaching and learning is of particular importance. One of the central issues is whether universities acknowledge a role in helping students to get used to learning and teaching environments that are different from those at high schools. Prebble et al. (2004), in discussing student support, distinguish between discourses of assimilation and adaptation: are students expected to assimilate into universities, or should universities adapt to the students who enter universities? McInnis, James, and McNaught (1995, 3) argue in favour of institutional responsibility for helping students to adapt: 'The central problem for teaching and learning in the face of increasing diversity in the student population is that of aligning institutional goals with individual needs'. They add that this does not mean that the first year should be without intellectual challenge: 'universities and academics have a responsibility to respond to the problematic nature of the transition process, especially in the face of the wider range of student abilities and experiences following the rapid expansion of the higher education system' (3).

In recognition that the first year, and, more specifically, the first weeks or months in the first year, is a distinct period for students, many universities have developed specific transition programmes. Universities and colleges in the USA have a long history in these types of programmes (see, for example, Barefoot 2000; Gardner, Barefoot, and Swing 2001; Swing 2003; Upcraft, Gardner, and Barefoot 2005). In Australia these programmes are also increasingly part of universities (see, for example, Adonis 2000; Asmar et al. 2000; Clulow 2000; Kantanis 2000b, 2001). In New Zealand, although there are some examples of institution-wide transition programmes (Mason-Rogers 2002), there are few published sources on how these orientation programmes work. In the Netherlands most universities have induction programmes to learn about the university; these programmes include orientation to the faculty and the social environment of the city. However, the impact of those programmes on the student experience has rarely been investigated.

One transition challenge for first-year students is related to effective time management and self-study skills for the particular university teaching and learning context. Time management and self-study, for the purpose of this article, will be understood as part of the same set of skills related to organising and keeping up with a range of study tasks. A study by the UK Higher Education Academy (Yorke and Longden 2007) clearly suggested that students experienced challenges in managing their time. Krause and Coates (2008), in considering the results of a student engagement instrument, commented that being able to 'manage one's time, study and strategies for success as a student is foundational to success in the first year' (500). Furthermore, time management skills are important contributors to study success (Macan et al. 1990). Confidence in long-term planning is a particularly important predictor of successful study performance (Trueman and Hartley 1996). Furthermore, students' time allocation skills have been proven to be related to the acquisition of discipline-specific and generic competencies (Meng and Heijke 2005).

In this article we will report on research findings from different projects related to first-year students' experiences in two different institutions. The central questions we discuss are: (1) How prepared do students feel in time management and self-study skills before they enrol in university? (2) What do first-year students report as challenges in the area of time management and self-study?

Research projects and development

This article outlines the development of an international research collaboration, as well as reporting on the findings of the different projects. Chronologically, the interviews and survey at the University of Otago preceded the development of the Readiness and Expectations Questionnaire (REQ). The survey and interviews sought to establish first-year students' academic challenges in their first semester. The initial findings of the survey and interviews were presented at the first European First-Year Experience Conference in 2006 (van der Meer 2006).

The presentation at the conference led to discussions about whether students' challenges with, for example, time management resulted from unrealistic expectations, their levels of preparedness or whether universities are not very good at making clear what is expected of students. We concluded that not much was known about students' expectations and sense of preparedness before starting their studies at university.

The result of these discussions was the beginning of a collaborative project between two universities in two different countries to investigate these issues further. We agreed to develop a new instrument. The advantage of these two particular universities collaborating was that we could develop this instrument relatively fast: as the start of the academic year in the Netherlands and New Zealand is at different times of the year, we could trial new versions twice a year.

Interviews with first-year students were also conducted at the University of Groningen. The interviews were part of a project on the transition from secondary education to university. In this project the interviews were used to interpret the survey results. In presenting the interview data, therefore, a much smaller section provides some illustrative comments from this study. The intention is to demonstrate that students in both institutions commented in very similar ways about similar issues.

As we seek to demonstrate that the issues around first-year students' time management seem to be similar in different countries, we present the quantitative data of the Readiness and Expectations Questionnaire first, and then elaborate on the richer qualitative data from students' interviews and free-text survey comments.

Data and methods

To address the questions above we used different data sources: (1) Readiness and Expectations Questionnaire (REQ) data collected in both the University of Otago and the University of Groningen; (2) interview and survey data collected in the University of Otago by the first author (van der Meer 2008); and (3) interview data collected in the University of Groningen by the third author (Torenbeek).

The REQ measures expectations and readiness in a range of fields that were derived from an extensive body of research on the first-year experience. Students were asked to answer a number of categorical questions and a range of questions on a five-point Likert-scale (from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'). These Likert-scale questions related to respondents' expectations of what would happen in the first year at university and their self-perceived readiness for university. The items were composed around several dimensions, including induction and time management. Expectation-related questions included items such as 'I will have to do a lot of independent research tasks'. Preparedness questions included items such as: 'My previous experiences prepared me well to keep up with a lot of readings' and 'I am good at working independently'.

In July–August 2006 the REQ was first administered at the University of Groningen. The survey was sent to students before they started their studies. Based on the analysis of that data (Jansen and van der Meer 2007a, b), some items of the questionnaire were reformulated for the administration at the University of Otago in March 2007. In July–August 2007 a slightly adapted version was administered at the University of Groningen and in March 2008 a further adjusted (much reduced) version at the University of Otago (van der Meer and Jansen 2008). Because this instrument was developed in an international collaborative project, we were keen to find out whether students in two countries with different educational systems differed in their expectations and perceived readiness. In this article we report on the data from the Dutch 2007 and New Zealand 2008 surveys ($n = 1465$ and $n = 440$ respectively).

The other survey, which was only conducted at the University of Otago, was administered in 2004 amongst students enrolled in 100-level courses ($n = 1967$). New Zealand universities distinguish between 100, 200 and 300 level courses; these roughly, but not necessarily, equate to courses followed in the three undergraduate years. To complete an undergraduate degree, students need to have completed a prescribed number of these three different levels of courses. Students can complete some of the lower-level courses in higher year levels. For the purpose of this project, such students were excluded from the analysis. Four open-ended questions were asked that related to students' overall academic experiences in the first semester, such as 'what advice would you give future first-year students?'

Interviews were conducted in both institutions. The University of Otago interviews were conducted with first-year students ($n = 27$) in the same year (2004) as the survey. Similar to the survey, the interviews were trying to find out more about first-year students' academic experiences during the first semester. Interviews were conducted at the University of Groningen in 2008 for a project about the transition from secondary education to university in order (among other things) to identify similarities and differences in study approach at the two levels of education. Twelve first-year students from a range of disciplines participated in the interviews, which took place in the second part of the academic year.

A data-mining approach was used to interrogate the three data sources (Castellani and Castellani 2003). Data mining in the context of this article will be understood as the selective use of data sources with particular research questions in mind. For the purpose of this article data related to time and study management was 'mined'.

Results from the REQ

In the two rounds of administering the survey in the two countries, various items were deleted and added to develop an instrument with good reliability scores on the various scales. Of the common questions, the differences between the Groningen and Otago responses were insignificant ($p > .001$) for 21 out of 39 questions. There were, however, some differences between the two universities on the scale means. This could be possibly explained by sample size differences. As the means do not differ in an opposite direction (that is to say that, for instance, the Groningen students scored below 3.0, and the Otago students above) these differences were not deemed relevant for this article.

For this article we are interested in the time-management scale, the induction scale and the similarity with high school scale. Table 1 shows the reliability coefficients (alpha), means for these scales, and the significance of the differences between the means for Otago and Groningen cohorts (independent samples *t*-test). The 'time

Table 1. comparison of scales.

Scales	Items	UoO* α	UoG** α	UoO n	UoO mean	UoG n	UoG mean	Mean diff.	Diff. Sign.
<i>Expectations</i>									
Induction	4	.74	.70	440	2.46	1465	2.64	-0.18	.000
Similarity with high school	5	.66	.63	429	2.29	1454	2.00	0.29	.000
Time management	4	.72	.72	403	3.63	1385	3.73	-0.10	.018

*UoO = University of Otago; **UoG = University of Groningen.

management' scale contained items directly related to managing time, as well as items that related to planning and independent work. The scores for this scale suggest that students in both countries felt well prepared to work more independently once at university. For both groups of students there was a significant correlation ($p < .001$) between expectations of induction and expectations that high school and university would be similar. While Groningen students seemed to have higher expectations of induction, they also considered the similarity between high school and university to be less. For the Otago students there was a lesser expectation of induction and slightly higher expectations of similarity with high school.

The survey also asked students to indicate how much time they anticipated spending on the various activities. Otago students expected to spend on average 19 hours per week on class-related activities, and 20 on independent study; for Groningen these were 18 and 17, respectively.

Overall then, it could be suggested that there were no major differences between the first-year students in the two countries with regard to their sense of preparedness and expectations of higher education on the dimensions included in the survey. The data also suggest that, overall, students understood that university would be different from high school, that they would have to do much of their time planning themselves, and that they considered themselves confident that they would be able to manage their time. Lastly, students were reasonably realistic about the amount of time to be spent on academic activities. Students' responses to the survey questions of the Otago UNI101 survey and the interviews, however, revealed that some students experienced significant challenges.

Results from the survey and interviews in the Otago studies

Students highlighted different aspects related to time management and self-study (or independent study) challenges. One of the main reported concerns was keeping up with the study requirements. Others pointed to the particular challenge of first-year students to understand the new demands, the level of independent study required, the seeming lack of assistance in their transition into more independent study at university, and understanding the study and time management expectations. The following sections will further illustrate some of these challenges, interweaving data from the interviews and surveys.

Keeping up with study

In the 2004 survey, responses to the question about what respondents would advise future first-year students, it was clear that time management was a considerable

Table 2. Comments related to time management.

Nature of comment	Number of comments
Keep up, stay on top of work, don't fall behind	164
Start early	100
Pay attention to time management	22
Revise all the time	19
Work all the time	13
Total number of student comments related to time management	318

concern. Of the 1179 students who responded to this question, 318 students commented on time management issues. Table 2 shows the different categories of responses. The common theme was advising future students to start working from day one, and to work consistently throughout the semester. Some students specifically mentioned the importance of time management.

The top category of 'keep up' comprised comments such as: 'keep up with work, don't leave everything to last minute – workload gets too much and catch up gets impossible', 'keep up with readings', 'stay on top of work, do assignments early, go to classes, do the readings before lectures', and 'try not to fall behind, ask questions when you need help'. Survey comments related to the other categories included some of the following comments: 'start working early in the year as otherwise you will drop behind and all of a sudden it will be the exams and you will be wanting to leave', 'revise from day one, SERIOUSLY!! [*sic*] Otherwise it's really hard', and 'work all the time to make you understand everything at the time'. One respondent mentioned attending a workshop on the issue: 'make sure you go to a time management workshop at the student learning centre'.

Responsibility for keeping up and remembering

There were few indications, however, that students considered the university as having a responsibility in the area of self-study planning and time management. One of the interviewees, Natasha (a pseudonym), for example, commented: 'I don't think anyone really gives you a lot of help with that. It's just you're just expected to figure out a lot of things like that'. Some survey respondents suggested the university could provide some help: 'not a single mention of upcoming essays/assignments. First years need some degree of spoon-feeding after seventh form [final year of high school in New Zealand]' and 'lack of info on how to prepare earlier'. Where the topic of students struggling with their workload came up in interviews, the initial reaction of some students was to blame themselves. The assumption seemed to be that the university as an institution was not expected to play a role in this. It was only when an interview question was phrased in such a way that they were invited to think of other perspectives that interviewees considered alternative explanations. Pamela, for example, initially put the responsibility on students themselves: 'I guess it's easier to say they [university] could do this and do that, but really, most of it's on your shoulders whether you do it or not. I don't know how you can change that'. She then wondered if there was something that could be done, like in class: 'I guess time management would be, I don't know if they, they probably do run tutorials'.

Although few students directly suggested that the university had a responsibility in students' time management, some ideas were mentioned of how teachers could be of help. Susan had come to realise during the semester that she should have started much earlier with some of her work. She felt that 'people need to know that ... realising that'. She implied that it would have been helpful if they were told. As far as she herself was concerned, she had learned a lesson through experience: 'I know next semester will go better because I now know, [to] get on top of my work straight away'. Some students also considered it helpful to be reminded of upcoming assignments. This can be seen, for example, in the following survey comments: 'give notice in lectures [of] upcoming assessments' and 'mention assignment due dates in lectures'. One survey respondent also seemed to suggest that this would be a caring thing to do: 'reminders of important dates etc, helpful, caring, personal'. One interviewee, a school-leaver, very soon realised that university was different from high school. She felt that teachers at university should emphasise a bit more the short time frame for most courses. Sandy commented on one course, where they were reminded by teachers and through Blackboard (a proprietary electronic course management programme): 'generally they do remind you yeah they're pretty good'. Veronique too, had some good experiences of being reminded. She thought it was particularly important to be reminded about the importance of time management in courses where students had to achieve a certain grade point average for admission to their preferred second year course: 'I think they need to keep on reminding people that the first year is what determines you to get into second year and so, rather than the first year being a muck around year, it almost needs to be the year that you work the hardest, so you can get into what you want'. She then added that 'It's like almost a mindset that they [teachers] need to change'. What she seemed to suggest was that first-year students are not used to thinking in terms of regular work if there is no immediate deadline looming.

Evelyn provides a good illustration of a student who started to make sense of time management and assessment as the first semester progressed. Her first experience was that she nearly forgot she had a test: 'I didn't really know about the test until the day before but it wasn't a problem ... it was a Tuesday they told us, they reminded us'. She had remembered that they were told at the beginning of the year, but it had escaped her as the weeks passed. She then mused on the issue of having to be responsible for remembering when assessments take place: 'Because they don't sort of tell you at uni. Like remember this, remember that. It's all up to you to realise that you've got to do your own work'. When she came across her course overview, she realised that all the details were in it, and she started her time management by putting all the dates on a time planner: 'At first I didn't really read through any of the stuff but then when you do read through it, you sort of use the information quite well'.

Independent study

The level of independent study required, and the seeming lack of assistance to make the transition into more independent study at university, was another theme. One survey respondent made a comparison with the type of learning expected before coming to university: 'different compared to school, a lot more independent work – not always knowing exactly what is required in your work'. One of the interviewees, Emily, was somewhat surprised that they were being left so much to study without specific guidance. The lack of direction left her uncertain. She wondered whether this related to a particular teaching style at the university: 'I just thought you'd spend more

time within the university being taught rather than so much left to yourself'. One survey respondent seemed to appreciate that they had to be independent learners, but also pointed out that first-years have particular needs: 'for first year students it's important to be integrated into self-teaching slowly, instead of just left to try and attempt it with no advice guidelines'. This respondent seemed to suggest that there was nothing wrong with a different way of doing things, but that first-year students needed to be assisted in making sense of how things at university worked. Brad, however, did not seem to expect the university to play a role. Although he himself struggled to get clarity on how much to study, and how to approach his study, he thought that it was up to each student: 'I thought well maybe it's sort of down to your own personal beliefs on what you should do and what you shouldn't do, due to the fact that you're at university and it's, you know you're there to learn, if you want to learn you learn and if you don't you don't'.

Workload expectations

Students also experienced more specific challenges related to workload expectations. Students' awareness that they had to do a lot of work did not necessarily translate into knowing how to approach the study load. Linda, for example, had appreciated that there was going to be a lot of work, but did not know what that meant in practice: 'at the end of the semester we all panic, freak out ... it's during those times that when you look back you said ah how I wished I did this, or that or that, but just no one really tells you how to do it'. She did not try to suggest that there had been a lack of information on workload: 'Like they will say there's going to be lots of work etc, and you just have to start from day one, but nobody really gives you the idea of what is expected of you'. She seems to suggest that being told about the quantity of work does not translate into workable knowledge on what this means, and how to translate this into planning her time. It is interesting to note that this was a mature student in her mid-twenties who had already completed a bachelor's degree in Australia. Linda's experience was echoed by some other students doing a similar course. They had heard that it was going to be a lot of work, but found it surprising that they were asked to do so little. They had expected that they would be given weekly work, or assignments to be done at home. They did not count the weekly exit tests in laboratories as 'real' assignments, because they were in the laboratory anyway, and did not have to take the assignment home. One health-science student, Candy, 'sort of' knew that she probably had to do more than she did, but was not sure how to go about organising her self-study: 'some Tuesdays I have nothing from 9 till 3, so it's kind of like the whole day I'm doing nothing, and it feels like I've got no work to do but I guess we're just supposed to read through our text books, it kind of freaks me out'. She had thought that '[course A] would be like a lot of work you know, like they give you a lot of work like you have to do a lot of assignments or whatever, and they haven't like'.

Candy's comments, and those of other students, could suggest that only take-home assignments were equated with study expectations. Revising and studying towards examinations were not necessarily considered as something they should be doing throughout the semester. Evelyn's remarks about ongoing study also seemed a good illustration of this: 'A lot of people, my friends have a lot of work that they're doing but it's just it is optional at university, like they're not going to tell you off if you haven't done your homework, it's just a good idea to do work'. Evelyn's idea was that study at home was optional, unless it was an assignment. It was not obvious to all

students, then, how they were supposed to conceive of the time that was not spent on assignments or in classes.

Teachers' expectations

Participants in this research reported variable attitudes of teachers in communicating course expectations. Kate commented that teachers in one course had been very clear about the time required for a particular assignment: 'they told us it would be about 30 hours outside of class. They told us about two, three weeks before, and they reminded us every time they saw us'. When another interviewee, Harriett, contemplated what had been helpful for her, she remarked that: 'I find it helpful where they've basically just said like you know we've got four hours of lectures, but I expect you to be doing another four hours out of lectures ... give you sort of mainly just a timeframe'. Although the University of Otago equates each course with a particular weekly workload, including both class time and self-study, there were few indications that students had an understanding of this.

Although few participants mentioned specific time expectations, some students were given 'broad' indications that they had to do some study outside of classes. However, these indications were at times a source of confusion. Teachers referred, for example, to 'extra' readings, or exercises that were 'optional' or 'recommended'. Sometimes doing something 'extra' was offered as a suggestion rather than requirement, such as Evelyn's account of what one of her teachers said: 'when you have a spare bit of time you can look through the notes, or there's an extra website here you can have a look at if you've got some extra time'. Rita commented on one of her lecturers who did remind them every now and then of what they could 'study up' about: 'Like every now and then the lecturer might say "you guys should be looking at this, studying up on this"'.

Sometimes teachers were perceived to be saying one thing, but meaning something else. For example, Sandy, who studied one of the modern languages, found it difficult to establish how much studying was expected from her: 'she [the teacher] said, you know, we can choose to do as much as we want, we would like. But really she does actually expect you to do it'. In this case Sandy perceived a mismatch between the articulated expectation (there is a choice), and what was 'really' expected (do it all). Emily hinted at a similar mismatch between what they were told and what it meant. In one of her courses, she said, they had told students: 'we recommend you do this, we recommend you do that, and nothing's actually told you should do this. And when it comes to the exams you should have done it, but they've never really said so and so that's kind of a big issue'. These examples, too, suggest that teachers' intentions were not always clear to students.

In summary, what comes through the data is that some teachers seemed to understand that first-year students need more guidance (e.g. regular reminding of upcoming assignments) and others did not. In other words, the issue is not about 'contradictory evidence' with respect to students' challenges, but about variability in teachers' awareness of the needs of first-year students (as reported by students).

Findings from the Groningen interviews

Similar to the Otago interview findings, many students at the University of Groningen experienced a distinct difference between high school and university time management. One student, for example, emphasised that: 'Different from high school we are

not reminded what to do ... that doesn't happen here ... you have to do it all yourself'. Another student mentioned that 'The biggest difference is the level of independence in managing your studies, your time planning, sorting out time tables, what you have to read etc'. Consequently, one student identified that '[the important skill to develop is] is independent study skills, that is very important, otherwise you won't make it I think'. However, some experienced a degree of support from their teachers: 'I find that in medicine they do seem to guide you. They are keen to point out what to learn, and when to do it by, just like at high school ... I find it really clear, I hadn't expected that, I thought you would be left to your own devices'.

Discussion

The responses to the Otago survey question about what respondents would advise for prospective first-year students suggested that time management and study-related issues were a concern in the first semester. Interview data in both the Otago and Groningen studies confirmed this. Responses to the REQ survey suggested that students had realistic expectations about the time to spend on their study; they also felt ready for more independent study before they arrived at university, but apparently the reality at university seemed different for them.

Considering the findings as a whole, we want to suggest that students' struggle with time management has less to do with being unrealistic about university expectations or students' unwillingness to work hard, but more with a lack of understanding how to organise their study at university. This lack of understanding, we would argue, cannot necessarily be attributed to lack of high school preparation, but could also be considered as a lack of appreciation by some university teachers as to the need of first-year students to be appropriately inducted into what is expected of them, and how to organise their study in a university environment.

Issues of time management and self-study have been highlighted in many other studies on first-year students. For example, Kantanis (2000a), in a large study with some 1600 students at Monash University, found that 38% had not come to terms with independent learning after the first semester. Other studies have also highlighted first-year students' concerns with time-management and self-study issues (Haigh 1999; Maguire 2001; Prescott and Simpson 2004; Ramsay, Barker, and Jones 1999; Sidle and McReynolds 1999; Smith 2003). Haggis (2006) emphasises that problems with organisation of time and study can affect all types of students. Lowe and Cook (2003), in their study with first-year students at the University of Ulster, reported that 21% of the students at the end of two months had experienced greater difficulty with self-directed learning than they expected, whilst a third reported that they were experiencing some difficulties with this. The results of the first-year experience study in the UK (Yorke and Longden 2007) clearly indicate that time management was a concern. In both the open questions asking students to mention the worst feature of their experience, and features they thought should be changed, time management was the leading category. Concerns related to time management and self-study from first-year students' perspectives, then, were by no means unique to this study.

Whereas high schools often have set expectations for students about when students have to complete certain tasks, and when particular milestones have to be met along the way, students experienced this as less so at university. This was especially the case with regard to tasks for which there was no direct assessment component. This was,

for example, the case where students were given suggestions for reading, or problem-solving exercises.

Another task that students seemed to have little comprehension of was allowing and planning time for ongoing revision towards the examination period. The many blocks of unscheduled time between scheduled class times were a new experience for many students. Some interviewees, for example, reported that they felt they should do work all the time, but did not seem sure how to organise a routine; and some ended up not doing much at all. One interviewee blamed herself towards the end of the semester for not having started revision of material earlier. In some of her courses the assessment was heavily weighted toward the final examinations. Another interviewee had mentioned that she was surprised early in the semester that there was so little work to do; she had expected it to be more difficult. These experiences suggest that it was not obvious to all students that things were done differently at university. For some students, realisation happened as the semester progressed.

Students' report of the manner in which some teachers communicated may have contributed to students not being clear on how to make sense of study expectations. The seemingly 'optional' nature of some activities, such as 'extra' readings, was experienced as confusing. Advice from staff at times seemed too tentative or indirect for students to apprehend their importance. Where first-year students had to come to terms with a range of demands on their time, seemingly discretionary activities may, therefore, not have been appreciated as important. Amongst these apparently discretionary activities in some courses 'readings' figured prominently.

Another reported difference with high school was the lesser emphasis on reminding students about forthcoming tasks and deadlines. Some students, for example, mentioned that this had a particular impact on assignments and examination revision. This often resulted in last-minute work. A comment from one interviewee suggested that students had had assessments sprung on them. At the University of Otago, all courses are obliged to inform students at the beginning of the semester how and when they will be assessed. It would, therefore, be unlikely that assessments were completely sprung on students. A number of students mentioned that they probably had been told of assessments, but they assumed this was at the beginning of the year. This could suggest that at that moment the student had not realised that they had to take note of that as being relevant and important. One particular interviewee, for example, started to put assessment dates on her wall planner after she had some earlier experiences of being surprised by upcoming assessments. This student also commented that she had realised that at university students were not told. This seemed to be something she had come to realise over time, rather than something she knew at the start of the year. Students' experiences in some courses suggest that some teachers may have been aware of first-year students' needs in respect of time management and study organisation. In some tutorials and laboratories, for example, students were given weekly Blackboard tests or weekly homework. Whether this was done intentionally in recognition of students' needs could not be established. However, these weekly routines gave students a sense of being on track. Practices of this kind were found helpful by students, and would be worthy of consideration by other teachers.

The quantity of academic readings in some of the courses presented students with another challenge that they had not encountered to the same extent at high school or elsewhere. The survey results suggest that many students were challenged by the amount of reading suggested in the first semester. Their advice to incoming first-year students further suggested that they considered this 'just' to be a matter of 'keeping

up'. Perhaps they did appreciate that there are different ways to approach reading, and that being provided with a reading list does not necessarily mean that they had to read everything from start to finish, and 'know' everything. One of the interviewees, for example, described how she was overwhelmed by the process and amount of reading. Maguire (2001) remarks that one factor that negatively influenced students' confidence was not being able to do all the set readings. First-year students in their study were surveyed early in the year. At that point in time they were confident that they would be able to manage their time with regard to reading. When they were re-surveyed at the end of the year, there was a remarkable loss in confidence. This, Maguire says, suggests that these students 'need to adopt a more strategic approach to learning tasks, with an emphasis on time management and effective reading strategies, in order to succeed' (2001, 103–4). Students, however, cannot be assumed to 'just' understand what a strategic approach to readings means.

These challenges for first-year students cannot be underestimated. Thomson and Falchikov (1998) identified time management in the context of assessments as one of the main concerns that came out of their surveys and interviews with students. Time management was a concern for all their interviewees. They pointed out that 'Early in their university career the students may not yet have "tuned in" to the institution. Learning the ways of the institution requires considerable time and effort' (387). This 'tuning in' could be an apt description for some of the problems experienced by some of the interviewees. The gradual awareness of students as the semester progressed that they had to organise themselves differently could be considered a 'normal' process that students eventually come to grips with. However, when students come into the university they have to get used to, or adjust to, a wide range of new practices and environments, both academic and social. Nearly two-thirds of students, in the case of Otago as well as Groningen, will for the first time have a much higher level of autonomy and/or live away from home. This can be a considerable upheaval. Some students indicated that pressures to make friendships and integrate into new social environments, such as residential colleges (halls), occupied much time and energy. At the same time, first-year students were expected to learn, or further develop, skills of time management and self-study. There was very little time for them to do so in the short period of a 13-week semester, with assignments often due within the first four weeks. Interviewees' accounts of having difficulty keeping up, or being surprised by assignments, therefore, are understandable.

Conclusion

Time management and self-study are clearly challenges for first-year students. It was also clear that this was not always appreciated by teaching staff. The authors of the UK study into the first-year experience (Yorke and Longden 2007, 2008) seemed of the opinion that time management difficulties are not something that universities should have to take responsibility for. In categorising the open question responses, time management is placed under 'student responsibility', rather than 'institutional responsibility' or 'dual responsibility'.

Although it could be argued that students have the ultimate responsibility to plan their time and study in an effective way, we argue that universities have an important role to play in assisting students to develop the required skills. Students cannot be expected to apprehend straight away what teachers expect from students, what skills students are meant to employ to, for example, read 'around' a subject, and how to

effectively respond to the changed teaching and study time patterns in the context of a semester.

Even where staff generally would consider that students' time management and self-study skills had nothing to do with them, it could be argued that the particular context of the first semester of the first year are exceptional enough to warrant special consideration by staff. Kantanis (2000a, 6) remarks that 'given the very nature of transition – that it is a process of adjustment requiring the passage of time – to expect first-year students' transition to take place speedily is a contradiction that causes considerable consternation for first-year students'.

Considering the challenges first-year students experience in managing their time, and the considerable transition students go through on entering university, we argue that teaching and other support staff should play an active role in helping students to make sense of the expectations related to time management and self-study. Furthermore, teaching practices or curriculum planning that recognise the time planning challenges for first-year students can affect students' time allocation. For instance, Jansen (2004) and van der Hulst and Jansen (2002) showed positive effects of organisational actions that directed students to regular study efforts on study progress. The University of Groningen has highlighted the importance of the first year by allocating a reasonable amount of money to improve the first-year pedagogy, for instance to increase the number of contact hours, to stimulate small group teaching and to stimulate students to regular study behaviour. Virtual learning environments, such as Blackboard, offer great opportunities to support students in their journey in the first year at university.

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