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# ACADEMIC LITERACY STRATEGY

## STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT - BACKGROUND

The Studiosity Advisory Group's review of the University's academic skills support (including the surveys of staff and students) in 2022 highlighted a range of limitations of our current approach. For example,

1. The current approach to academic skills support initiatives is fragmented, with multiple university-wide initiatives and some School-based support. There are a dozen separate initiatives that operate within a loose coalition, rather than as a mutually reinforcing ecosystem.
2. There is limited central visibility of School-based support or curriculum-embedded academic literacy activities, which presents challenges in the identification of gaps in support.
3. Our students are often unaware of the central academic skills support initiatives that are available to them. Some students complained that they struggled to successfully navigate the University's website or schedule appointments with advisors.
4. There is limited visibility of academic literacy outcomes for students referred by academic staff to central support services.
5. The combination of curriculum-embedded approaches with well organised central support services are widely recognised as the most effective means of enhancing students' academic skills.

Addressing these issues will require (1) a sustainable and strategic approach to embedded academic literacy in key subjects, and (2) a coherent range of complementary academic literacy support services.  A clear strategy for integrated support – an academic literacy ecosystem – will ensure students' experience of academic skills development is rich and comprehensive. As a first step in responding to these highlighted issues around student experience and how support is delivered, the Studiosity Advisory Group Chair, under the direction of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President, Academic, commissioned the development of an Academic Literacy Strategy, with the Studiosity Advisory Group acting as a Reference Group in the strategy development process.

The Strategy development has been informed by consultation with the Academic Integrity Working Group and operational leaders on the Studiosity Advisory Group. The draft Strategy has gone through a process of consultation and feedback with VCAB, Education Committee and Executive Committee.

# Academic Literacy Strategy

## PURPOSE

The strategy purpose is to outline and provide a coherent and integrated approach to academic literacy practice and student academic skills development for Western Sydney University.

## STRATEGY GOALS

1. To ensure the adoption of **whole-of-institution approach** to academic skills development.
2. To achieve uplift of the academic literacy of ALL our students through the creation of **a streamlined ecosystem of mutually reinforcing academic skills initiatives**.
3. To prioritise delivering **a coherent program of academic skills support initiatives**, aligned to the student learning journey and designed for a range of learning channels (on campus, online, hybrid)
4. To prioritise commitment to **embedding academic literacy** in curriculum design, informed by the *Curriculum Design and Approvals Policy* and the *Graduate Attributes Guidelines*.
5. To use **internal tracking, outcomes measures, and scholarship** to ensure that continuous improvement of central academic literacy support services and program approaches is informed by student experience and evidence-based practice.

## DEFINITION

Academic literacy is 'the ability to communicate competently in an academic discourse community; this encompasses reading, evaluating information, as well as presenting, debating and creating knowledge through both speaking and writing' (Wingate, 2018, p.350).

For the purposes of this Strategy, student academic skills development will focus on nine key areas,

- writing,
- reading,
- information and research literacy,
- academic integrity,
- study planning,
- collaborating,
- speaking and presentation,
- mathematics and statistics,
- assessment and exam preparation.

These key focus areas reinforce that academic literacy is more than writing. It encompasses a broader array of capabilities including reading, critical thinking, note-taking,

collaboration, communication, research, referencing, and in some cases, mathematics or scientific literacy.

Digital skills are also recognised as an important enabler of academic literacy and development academic skills in a digital environment contributes to the uplift of students' digital fluency and literacy.

## STRATEGY ACTIONS

The Strategy is structured around three pillars: Governance, Support Initiatives, Curriculum Initiatives. The three pillars are aligned with the *Education Futures Strategy 2022-2026* (Western Sydney University, 2022) and are designed to enhance education quality and contribute to the objectives of the Academic Literacy and Integrity Initiative in the *Education Futures Strategy* (Western Sydney University, 2022, p.15).

1. **Governance**

   The Academic Literacy Advisory Group will have carriage of implementation, resourcing, and reporting on the Strategy actions. The Academic Literacy Advisory Group will report through Senate Education Committee.

2. **Support Initiatives**

   The University will provide a range of complementary support initiatives. Building on the Academic Literacy Initiatives Stocktake (Appendix B), the Study Smart service will represent a consolidated approach to academic literacy support, which brings together the following and other relevant initiatives:

   - Study Smart Librarian consultations (online and on campus) (Library),
   - Study Smart website (Library),
   - Academic Literacy workshop program (Library),
   - Maths Education Support Hub (MESH),
   - Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) (Student Services),
   - Studiosity (external provider via Library),
   - Endnote workshops (Library),
   - New and innovative technologies, for example, generative AI.

   These initiatives will be accessible to ALL students and HDR candidates. Communications to students will be tailored for different activities and cohorts, including targeted communications for specific needs. Better connection and complementarity between central academic literacy support, School-based approaches (e.g. PCALs), and curriculum initiatives is key to establishing a streamlined ecosystem of mutually reinforcing academic skills initiatives.

### 3. Curriculum Initiatives

The University will promote routine embedding of academic literacy development, scaffolded throughout programs through curriculum design. Embedded approaches are proven to be highly effective, and their benefits are well-documented [see Hattie, Biggs, and Purdie (1996); Tinto and Pusser (2006)]. To support Schools in this endeavour, the University will provide professional development opportunities for academic staff to enhance understanding, share challenges, review practice, and facilitate the development and implementation of engaging academic literacy learning experiences.

These pillars guide a series of actions (see appendix A) that will join up central support initiatives and school-based initiatives to shape and support student academic skills development. The actions will draw on new technologies and student networks to optimise student retention and progression, and to build student confidence and success.

## IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The Strategy actions (see Appendix A) are designed to be implemented in two phases from February 2023 to December 2024.

| Phase 1: February 2023 - June 2024 | Phase 2: June 2024 -December 2024 |
|---|---|
| • Governance - Actions 1.1 - 1.3<br>• Support Initiatives - Actions 2.1 – 2.6 | • Curriculum Initiatives - Actions 3.1 - 3.5 |

## REFERENCES

Hattie, J., Biggs, J., & Purdie, N. (1996). Effects of learning skills interventions on student learning: a meta-analysis. Review of Educational Research, 66(2), 99–136. doi:10.3102/00346543066002099

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Western Sydney University, (2022). *Education Futures Strategy 2022-2026*. https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/dvcacademic/dvc_academic

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## APPENDIX A Strategy Actions

| Pillar | Actions | Responsibility | Timeline |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. **Governance** | **1.1 Academic Literacy Strategy development/consultation/approval path**<br>    **1.1.1** Development: Studiosity Advisory Group<br>    **1.1.2** Consultation: VCAB<br>    **1.1.3** Approval: Executive Committee<br><br>**1.2 Establish an 'Academic Literacy Advisory Group', reporting to the Senate Education Committee, and enhance the functions of the group so that it is empowered to**<br>(a) provide oversight of the University's academic skills initiatives,<br>(b) provide recommendations and advice to support the implementation of the Academic Literacy Strategy,<br>(c) identify opportunities to enhance the delivery of academic literacy initiatives, and<br>(d) guide the strategic direction of academic literacy support.<br><br>Note: The role and functions of the Studiosity Advisory Group will be subsumed by the new Academic Literacy Advisory Group.<br><br>**1.3 Establish and recruit an Academic Literacy Coordinator role to act on the advice of the Advisory Group.**<br>The coordination role will be resourced by the Library. | Executive Director, Library Services,<br>Senate Education Committee,<br>Executive Committee. | Phase 1<br>February - August 2023 |

| 2. Support Initiatives | **2.1 Re-establish 'Study Smart' as a highly recognisable visual identity for the University's academic skills ecosystem and as a 'one-stop-shop' for**<br><br>    **2.1.1** online academic literacy support services, and<br>    **2.1.2** on campus academic literacy support services.<br><br>For example, the following services will be part of 'Study Smart'<br>• Study Smart Librarian consultations (online and on campus) (Library),<br>• Study Smart website (Library),<br>• Academic Literacy workshop program (Library),<br>• Maths Education Support Hub (MESH),<br>• Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) (Student services),<br>• Studiosity (external provider via Library),<br>• Endnote workshops (Library), and<br>• HDR skills development (Library), and<br>• New technologies (e.g. generative AI)<br><br>**2.2 Build on the Academic Literacy Initiatives Stocktake (Appendix B) to map the new academic literacy ecosystem and transform the University's academic literacy web presence** - to simplify navigation and better connect students and staff to academic literacy support services.<br><br>**2.3 Develop a comprehensive communications and marketing plan for 2023** - to improve student awareness, engagement, and experience of academic skills support services.<br><br>**2.4 Develop a coordinated referral, tracking, and outcomes mechanism to measure impact of academic literacy initiatives and reach out to students who need specific support services.**<br><br>**2.5 Evaluate and report on outcomes** of the consolidated approach to academic literacy support.<br><br>**2.6 Explore the academic literacy support needs of prospective learners** in collaboration with the Microcredentials Advisory Group | Academic Literacy Advisory Group,<br>Academic Literacy Coordinator<br>Microcredentials Advisory Group | Phase 1<br>May 2023 – June 2024 |

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| 3. **Curriculum Initiatives** | **3.1 Work through Schools to identify and target strategic units of study and support program coordinators to embed academic literacy in high-load programs.**<br><br>**3.2 Highlight the disciplinary specific academic literacy priorities within each course/or discipline to inform the scaffolding of academic literacy across the span of a program in alignment with the Transition and Retention Strategy initiative outlined in the *Education Futures Strategy*.**<br><br>**3.3 Develop a series of templates to assist markers in the standardisation their academic literacy feedback to students.**<br>A recent survey of students confirmed the importance of feedback in developing academic skills. In recognition of this finding, we will develop templates to help academics to improve the quality and consistency of their feedback and incorporate associated links to a relevant web resource.<br><br>**3.4 Build better connections between embedded approaches to academic skills support and Study Smart central support initiatives.**<br>The embedded approach is an opportunity to introduce students to the wider suite of support initiatives. By better connecting central support initiatives to classroom activities, the University will make visible such initiatives and demonstrate their utility to students in need of additional support.<br><br>**3.5 Establish a professional program designed to build staff capacity for embedding and teaching academic literacy in their subjects and programs.** | Academic Literacy Advisory Group,<br>Academic Literacy Coordinator | Phase 2 June 2024 – December 2024 |
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## APPENDIX B Academic Literacy Initiatives Stocktake 2022

| Initiative | Description | Resources | Students |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Library Study Smart** | Study Smart Librarians provide f2f support, in-depth assistance (resources and referencing). The Study Smart website is home to a wide array of study resources. | 1x Academic Literacy Coordinator<br><br>School Librarians, Academic Services Librarians | |
| **Studiosity** | Studiosity is an online academic literacy support platform (accessible 24/7). Students can access writing feedback and live chat functionality via the LMS (vUWS). | $880K (SSAF/T&L Strategic Funding) (2022)<br>$540K (SSAF Funding 2023) | 2,350 unique students (YTD) |
| **Academic Literacies Support** | The ALS program (The College) provides support to University students via the bridging program. Support is provided in the form of on-campus and online workshops (writing and improving grammar) | | |
| **Maths Education Support Hub (MESH)** | MESH provides Western students with mathematics and statistics support. MESH has four key initiatives: (1) MESH online tutoring service, (2) Maths and Statistics Help, (3) Workshops, and (4) Maths Start Program | 1x Head, MESH<br>2x Lecturer<br>4 x Learning Advisors | 3,116 students (2019) |
| **Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS)** | PASS gives students an opportunity to collaborate in the development study strategies to help improve academic performance. | 140 student PASS facilitators (2018) | 3,105 PASS sessions (2018) |
| **Professional Communication and Academic** | The School of Nursing and Midwifery has | 2x Skills Advisor + 1 x Literacy Support | |

| Literacies Support (PCALS) | established a small team of PCACs to support academic literacy for students in the School. | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Graduate Research School** | GRS supports HDR candidates through four academic literacy initiatives: (1) 24/7 Writing Room, (2) Show Up and Write, (3) First Friday of the Month, and (4) Writing Spaces at Western Sydney (WS@WS). GRS also provides a statistical consultation service and online workshops to HDR candidates. | 1x Academic Literacy Advisor + 1x Statistics Consultant (0.4 FTE Level C) | |
| **Badanami Centre** | Tutoring for Success Program affords Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students access to academic skills tuition (essay writing, study techniques and research skills). | 1x Academic Literacy Advisor | |