

# Learning Strategies, Performance Indicators and University Student Satisfaction:

*What Can Psychosocial  
Variables Tell Us?*

Edited by  
Nerina J. Caltabiano  
Marie L. Caltabiano  
Agnes Au



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## Author Biographies

*Nerina Caltabiano* is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Psychology, James Cook University and has teaching responsibilities at both the Cairns and Singapore campuses. Both her Honours and PhD were in Social Psychology, namely nonverbal behaviour in children and attitudes towards compulsive casino gamblers. She is the coordinator of the Honours and Postgraduate Diploma program. She is a member of both the Australian and the American Psychological Societies. She has a good publication record within the area of social and development psychology and also supervises higher degree research students in these areas. Together with her collaborators, she has been the recipient of several grants including some internal faculty grants, an Australian Rotary Health Research Fund, a Cairns Campus, JCU Student Association Grant, Education Queensland grant, and an ARC Discovery Grant. She was a recipient of the 2009 Docemus Award for Volunteers given by the Cairns Catholic Diocese in recognition of unwavering commitment to Catholic Education. Her current research interests are in social cognition, socio-emotional development of children, and well-being.

*Marie Caltabiano* is an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology within the School of Arts and Social Sciences at James Cook University Cairns campus. She is a Member of the Australian Psychological Society, the American Psychological Association, the Public Health Association of Australia, and the College of Health Psychologists. She is the Membership Secretary on the national executive of the APS College of Health Psychologists. Marie has 20 years of teaching experience in clinical health psychology and is a recipient of both a 2010 ALTC Citation for Outstanding Contribution to Student Learning and a James Cook University Faculty Teaching Citation. She is co-author of *Health psychology: Biopsychosocial interactions* now in its 2<sup>nd</sup> Australasian edition. Her principal areas of research are psychosocial aspects of health, stress and coping; organizational aspects of job burnout, health promotion and disease prevention, women's health in particular the climateric, Type 2 diabetes, emotion self-regulation, prototypes for physical activity, adult attachment and health processes, social self-efficacy within the doctor-patient relationship, caregiving in dementia, and resilient ageing. She has published five books and close to 100 papers in refereed Conference Proceedings and journals, both national and international.

*Agnes Au* is a lecturer in the Psychology Department at James Cook University. She completed her First Class Honours degree in the B.Sc and PhD at the University of Wollongong with the support of the Australian Development Cooperation Scholarship and a University Postgraduate Award. She then did her post-doctorate in Hong Kong and managed a \$5 million government-related project on experimental education and neuroscience (2000-2003). Her research supervision covers areas like: multilingual competence, perceptual and cognitive processes in reading, learning disabilities and academic performance, cerebellum and music on higher cognitive functions, multiple intelligence, and application of neuroscience in education. She is currently serving on the editorial board of the journal "Annals of Dyslexia" and is a regular reviewer for many international journals. She is a member of the Australian Psychological Society, American Psychological Association and an Associate Fellow in the Hong Kong Psychological Society.



## List of Contributors

*Swaran Austin* completed her Bachelor of Psychology in 2009. She also holds a Bachelor of Arts (Sociology) and Bachelor of Business. She is currently registered as a probationary psychologist with the Psychology Board of Australia. She is a member of the Cairns Health Community Council and sees herself well placed to provide a supportive environment in which consumers can have their questions or concerns about quality of health care addressed. She hopes to make a difference by engaging with the community and ensuring that the community are consulted and informed on health issues.

*Marama Forster* completed a Bachelor of Psychology in 2009 at James Cook University and a Graduate Diploma of Education (majoring in School Psychology) at the University of Western Australia in 2010. She has a great interest in the Educational Psychology field in terms of increasing the learning outcomes of students through the use of psychological strategies. The provisionally registered School Psychologist currently holds a professional position with the Department of Education and Training in Western Australia servicing rural schools in the Mid West District. Marama is currently a member of the School Psychologists' Association of Western Australia which ensures the maintenance of her current professional development.

*Jessica L. Neilson* has been studying in the field of psychology since 2004, initially at the University of Newcastle (NSW) where she undertook studies in Quantitative Methodology and Sociology, before proceeding to undertake a Bachelor of Psychological Science degree at Griffith University (QLD). She then completed her Post Graduate Diploma of Psychology at James Cook University (QLD) in 2009, with main interests in neurological and organisational psychology. Previous research she has been involved with has explored the neuro-visual phenomenon known as the Flash Lag Illusion, as well as constructs of satisfaction including time management, self efficacy, program structure and skill acquisition behaviours. Jessica is currently employed as a Project Manager for Ross Human Directions, based in Sydney Australia, where she oversees all aspects pertaining to the management of a national business outsourcing project.

*Carla-Renee Sherwood* commenced her studies in 2004 with Business at James Cook University, Cairns. After the first semester, she soon realised that her interests were within the field of Psychology. She completed a Post Graduate Diploma of Psychology at James Cook University in 2009. Whilst studying full-time at university, she gained employment as a Contract Youth Worker and provided services for children and youth with complex and extremely challenging needs, through the Department of Child Safety Services. Currently, she is employed with the Drug, Alcohol, Brief Intervention Team (DABIT) within Alcohol, Tobacco & Other Drug Services (ATODS) under QLD Health. This position requires high quality administrative support in order to meet project objectives and state reporting requirements to ultimately assist with a DABIT evaluation research project. Additionally, she recently became an associate member of the Australian Psychological Society (APS). Carla-Renee's future career aspirations include becoming a nationally registered counselling psychologist to facilitate personal and interpersonal functioning across the life span.

*Jacqueline E Swain* graduated from James Cook University, Townsville, in 2005 with a Bachelor of Biomedical Sciences and subsequently gained employment through Queensland

Health as an Assistant in Nursing. Enjoying working in the emergency department and Mental Health Unit, Jacqueline graduated from James Cook University Cairns with a Bachelor of Psychology in 2009, with the primary interest of merging the physiological and psychological aspects in a counselling setting to aid people regain their health and their independence. During 2009-10 she was a student member of the Australian Psychological Society (APS) and attended Child and Youth Mental Health and Red Cross First Aid Courses. Currently she is employed with the Department of Communities as a Child Safety Officer; specifically in the Placement Services Unit, working with foster carers, liaising with service providers, and matching children to carers for placement permanency and cultural appropriateness. Through the Department she is undertaking a vocational certificate of Child Protection, completed in January 2011. Her ambition is to become a nationally registered psychologist working predominantly with young adults to enhance their lives.

*Allison J. Tunstall* completed her Bachelor of Psychology degree at James Cook University, Cairns in 2009 and formally graduated May 2010. Her interests within psychology include both developmental and educational psychology and the impact that both of these areas have on children and teenagers growing up in the 21st century. Allison is currently working at CRS Australia as an employment rehabilitation counsellor, working with people with disabilities, and helping them return to the workforce as quickly as possible.

*Jules (Juliane) Wone* achieved a Bachelor of Community Welfare in 1992, Bachelor of Psychology in 2009, and is currently enrolled in the Post Graduate Certificate in Mental Health Practice at the Townsville campus of James Cook University. Juliane is a Graduate Member of the Australian Psychological Society. Her professional interest is in adolescent mental health. She is currently provisionally registered with the Psychology Board of Australia and is undertaking a supervised practice program. Jules is employed as a psychologist at CYMHS. Her previous employment for 2.5 years was with Child Protection (Department of Communities - Child Safety).

## Acknowledgements

We would like to express our thanks to all the participants who willingly gave their time in completing the questionnaires. These papers would not have happened without their participation.

We would especially like to express our heart-felt thanks to the contributors of this book: Swaran Austin, Jessica L. Neilson, Allison J. Tunstall, Jacqueline E. Swain, Marama Forster, Carla-Renee Sherwood and Jules Wone. These researchers' dedication and hard work in trying to better understand ways in which universities can be more than centres of learning were admirable to witness. Their one unifying conviction was that places of higher education should also provide enjoyable and memorable experiences.

We also would like to acknowledge the helpfulness of the people at POSTPRESSED for their guidance in producing this book.

Finally, we would like to thank our families for their patience and understanding for the time that this work took away from our family time.



## Foreword

A common challenge that tertiary education sectors face nowadays is the increasing variability in students' background and academic ability that affects their satisfaction and completion of their tertiary education. This is of particular concern when considering the role education is playing in social, cultural and economic change. Creative and imaginative futures for schooling may well be a promise for the future in global education. Here is the reason why the current book is launched.

As a colleague of Dr. Nerina Caltabiano and Assoc. Prof. Marie Caltabiano, their enthusiasm in assisting students to learn has inspired me tremendously. Although my expertise mainly focuses on students' learning, I am more concerned about the objective side of academic performance such as literacy and numeracy skills. As a matter of fact, there is now growing awareness of the application of psychological principles to enhance student learning in the university setting. Developments in education and training in psychology across the world, and sharing of world best practice are also focuses in psychology education.

This book includes a collection of papers examining how certain psychosocial variables interact with student's academic background to affect their learning behaviour, satisfaction, and retention in university studies. This book offers a unique point of view on learning in tertiary education.

Being a first year coordinator in the university for years, I am fully aware of the increasing variability in tertiary student's academic ability upon entry and its impact on subsequent academic satisfaction and performance. This book provides a comprehensive overview on how certain psychosocial factors affect students' learning strategies, performance and satisfaction with tertiary studies. This would definitely help advance the direction in teaching and learning in tertiary education. This book is worth reading and is strongly recommended to colleagues working in the tertiary education sectors. It provides valuable insights on how to assist students' learning, given the challenges the tertiary education sector faces nowadays.

*Dr. Agnes Au*



## Introduction

Although the primary audience for this book is other researchers, management personnel may also find the issues raised in this volume helpful in setting agendas for both staff and students. However, readers are cautioned that the authors are final year undergraduate students and therefore their research papers may contain inadequacies in writing styles and bold conclusions where more experienced researchers may have exercised prudence and moderation.

This collection of papers is more poignant by the fact that it is written by final year students who have come to the end of their undergraduate student days. As students graduate and look back on their time at university, they will think of this time as either being productive and satisfying or somehow not quite meeting their personal expectations. As we are dominated by an age of accountability it is often too easy for students to blame the institution and its educators for the lack of satisfaction they may have experienced during their course. In this collection of papers the authors shift the focus somewhat from the institution and educators to some personal student attributes as they explore learning strategies, performance indicators and student satisfaction. The contributor's own personal journeys and those of their fellow students have made it obvious to them that student satisfaction and success cannot be divorced from the individual factors that students bring to the educational setting. This edited work is an attempt at trying to understand some of the multitude of factors that impact student learning.

The research teams were responsible for the respective ethics proposals and their submission to research ethics, questionnaire design, data collection, coding, and data entry. Each student was responsible for her own individual research analyses and write-ups. A modified version of the research papers these students submitted as part of their fourth year assessment requirements are reproduced here. While the Methodology regarding each of the surveys is provided under either Part One or Part Two of this text, each individual author will outline their specific research questions within their papers.

The book has been organized in two parts. The four papers that appear in Part One of this edited work are based on the *Overall Student Satisfaction with University Learning Experiences Questionnaire* that appears in Appendix A. Part Two contains three papers that are based on the *Key Factors Influencing Student Satisfaction Questionnaire* that appears in Appendix B. The papers appearing in Part One mainly focus on learning strategies and performance indicators. The focus of the papers in Part Two is student satisfaction.

The four authors that appear in Part One are: Carla-Renee Sherwood, Jessica Neilson, Allison Tunstall and Jacqueline Swain.

Carla-Renee Sherwood's paper investigates time management and coping and how it affects perceptions of learning behaviours. Furthermore, she determines how importance of teaching strategies and perceived university performance are influenced by time management and coping.

Jessica L. Neilson considers the connection between self-efficacy and perceptions of learning behaviours for academic success. These are further explored by trying to understand how these are related to course expectations and whether the course has actually met these expectations.

Allison J. Tunstall's paper focuses on self-efficacy and three styles of coping, namely, task oriented, emotion focused and avoidance, and whether these impact on expectations students have of their course. Also of interest was whether the university course met learning objectives and helped to develop students' competencies.

Jacqueline E Swain looked at whether coping, in particular, task-oriented coping and good time management led to academic self-efficacy. Furthermore, she was interested in determining whether self-efficacy, time management, task-oriented coping and study load predicted perceptions of learning behaviours for academic success.

The three authors that appear in Part Two are Swaran Austin, Marama Forster and Jules Wone.

Swaran Austin's paper tries to address the issue of retention as measured by the years to completion of degree. Specifically, she was interested in whether academic self-efficacy skills, overall position scores, grade point average and semesters already completed were predictors of students completing their degrees.

Marama Forster was interested in determining how the three personality variables of locus of control, self-efficacy and trait hope are related to academic satisfaction.

Jules (Juliane) Wone was concerned with elucidating the factors that determine student's confidence to manage study and employment commitments. In particular, she was concerned with the dual role responsibilities of employment and caring for children and or parents.

*Nerina J. Caltabiano*

*Marie L. Caltabiano*