

Teaching and Supporting FiF Undergraduate Learners 3

Recognise obstacles

	Strategies	Some Student Comments
1	Rejoice or celebrate this journey to university – simply asking how many are first in family and making this a point of celebration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>I guess a lot of people are very proud of me and I don't know why because it's just uni; it's not like I've saved the world from hunger or something. You know what I mean? I don't know. I guess they're proud of me, yes. (Liz, 24)</i>• <i>Returning to study I think is the biggest milestone for me. It was a very intimidating prospect I guess because I'd already actually failed at it so actually not just thinking or saying that I wanted to do it; actually doing it, actually, you know, managing to complete the subject the second time around.(Natalie, 26)</i>• <i>I think my daughter has been amazed that I've passed...I had two [distinctions] with Aboriginal Culture and because that really sits well with my own beliefs and she just said "Mum, I'm just beyond proud". She just couldn't get over that, you know, because I think she thought "Well yes mum's getting passes" but when I actually got a distinction or two that amazed her. (Sharnie, 47)</i>

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2	<p>Normalise fears and obstacles for example, dropping a subject is not a sign of failure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I think I'm very stubborn sometimes and I just assumed that it wouldn't be hard being away from my family. I had this feeling of independence but I wish that someone had have just been like "Okay Nelson, it's going to be hard being away from your family and you will feel very lonely at times" and I did. Even though I had lots of people around, I would feel very alone and I felt like there was nobody that I wanted to call because there was nobody that would understand. (Nelson, 22)</i> • <i>Around about Week 9 and Week 10 of this semester, because it was the peak of assignments, I started to think to myself "Why am I doing this? I hate this. Why am I here" but then ... that passed (Marlee, 19)</i> • <i>See, it was such a huge learning curve, everything was a milestone for me. It's one of those things where I felt like I was hanging in by my fingernails at times and then you'd get through it and you'd be just so proud of yourself for doing it and then you'd know next time you did it wouldn't be so bad because of just that steep learning curve of it all. Nothing was easy (Ally, 39)</i> • <i>And then of course trying to explain to her [Mum] that "No, I haven't dropped out of uni; I was just dropping a few units"...it did take me a while to sort of explain "No, mum, I haven't failed at university. I'm just dropping some stuff so that I can pick it back up later". (Barbara, 21)</i>
3	<p>Recognise there is a lot of 'stuff' going on in their lives – in our study participants reported mental health issues, addictions, caring responsibilities (not only children but siblings and parents too), severe financial distress, limited support, very low confidence...</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>My dad and I, we dealt with mental health problems and depression (Marlee, 19)</i> • <i>But, you see so many smart people here like so many very intelligent people to be honest that you think "How can I ever be as smart as that" and then you push yourself and then you're like "You know what, I beat them. Like wow, I did it. Maybe I can be like them sort of thing". I don't know, it's just something in your head, you always have...(Daniel, 30)</i> • <i>...I've got no kitchen or anything in my room so I've got to go out and use the shed one and you've got to sit there and wait for it. With accommodation... the internet and the telephone, it drops out all the time so most of the time I don't have any internet so I've got to find a way around that and stuff like that. (Emily, 22)</i> • <i>I need to work three jobs. It's not as if I can not do one of those things; I've got to work one job as a requirement for my degree and the two others pay the bills so yes, there are certainly difficult times but I just do it. I mean I don't really think about it. I just "Okay, this is due then, let's do it and get it done with" but I think that certainly I would concede that I would like some more time. I wish there were more hours in the day because I think I could do a better job and get better marks at uni if I had the time but it's just one of those things. You get on with it I guess. (Lachlan, 24)</i> • <i>Before coming to uni I sort of got closer and closer to orientation, I'm like "Oh my goodness, what have I gotten myself into because university is for rich, smart people; I'm neither rich nor smart. The amount of work, I don't have time for. What am I putting myself up against? I'm going to have to try and become smart and try and compete. I don't know how to write an essay, I don't know how to read, I don't know how to do any of this". (Asha, 34)</i> • <i>I was quite intimidated to begin with. university was not something I thought I would do. (David, 34)</i>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I also have depression as well and anxiety so, it's ok at the moment but like, especially in those points, I was definitely in crisis point when I was feeling....other things in my life were happening as well. I was definitely going really bad in uni kind of thing and I felt helpless and....but that was mostly just last year, that was the worst point (Ashleigh, 21)</i> • <i>I'm struggling. I'm struggling. I've applied... well, my doctor actually wanted me to before I started because I've always suffered from anxiety and a bit of depression but he said to me to apply and (0:03:30.8) as well because when I came on orientation day I couldn't stop shaking and I couldn't get my name badge on and they said "Go and get some support. You know you need it". Then when I started I thought "Oh no, I don't. No I don't" but about a fortnight ago I just hit rock bottom and went "I need support" and so I went and saw them and I've got an appointment at the end of the month with them. (Emma, 32)</i> • <i>It's been difficult because going to uni at the moment has caused a few things to happen in my life that were going to happen later on but they've happened sooner rather than later. It's brought on, for me, some mental health issues, some anxiety, depression, suicide – these type of things where it has affected my experiences at uni, affected my study load to the point where now at the moment I've currently got things under control which is fantastic but I'm having to withdraw out of all my subjects for this session because I'm failing them at the moment and I'm having to defer for two months or whatnot and start again fresh mid-year. (Sam, 19)</i> • <i>Fear, lack of education, lack of money. I had to be set up with my own car; there's no public transport to get out there around the class times that work in. Each semester, oh my God when I see some of the prices of the text books. I've had a few classes where I've had some really snobby people who talk down to you. Some of the classes you are required to share things so I've learnt now not to sort of share all my history, if that makes sense. I'm a bit discreet in what I share now, because that first year I had a few older ladies be quite nasty. (Yvonne, 38)</i>