

## Welcome

Charles Sturt University (CSU) welcomes parents and partners of new students. During the first year of study, students will undergo many new life experiences; making this transition an exciting and challenging time for students and their families. The Division of Student Services has designed this guidebook to address your needs as a parent or partner of a new CSU student.

Many parents have sons or daughters who are of school-leaving age and who are relocating to begin on campus study at a CSU campus. For partners of new students, your partner is likely to be a mature age student and may be studying by internal or distance education mode. Whatever your circumstances, we hope you will find this information helpful to you.



**Mr. Andrew Callander, Executive Director of Student Services**

## **A Brief Orientation to CSU for Parents and Partners**

CSU delivers quality education to approximately 35,000 students across Australia and around the world. We are committed to the flexible delivery of learning and teaching - most CSU courses are offered in a variety of options, including full-time on campus study, part-time study and study by distance education or a combination (mixed mode). In 2009 approximately 13,000 students will commence studies at CSU.

As the parent or partner of a new student at Charles Sturt University you will be interested in how the University functions and how students access and interact with all the University has to offer.

A good deal of our interaction with students, whether on-campus, distance education or mixed mode, occurs through online and electronic communications, such as the web portal, my.csu (including the e-Box) and CSU Interact, an online collaborative environment for learning and teaching, research and project activities.

**www** ► The CSU public website offers a general introduction to the University [www.csu.edu.au](http://www.csu.edu.au)  
It includes a link to CSU News, which has a subscription service and is a good way to keep in touch with events and activities at CSU.

**www** ► The Division of Student Services has created a website specifically for parents and partners of students. You can access the website at: [www.csu.edu.au/division/studserv/support/chaplain/family.htm](http://www.csu.edu.au/division/studserv/support/chaplain/family.htm)

It is important to understand that CSU will treat all students as adults, regardless of their age. This means students will be expected to sign agreements and adhere to the University's rules and regulations. Parents and partners will not have access to the student's grades, financial information and registration information. However the University recognises the important role that parents and partners play in the lives of students and how you can contribute to their success.

## **The Student Transition to University**

Parents and partners often experience many of the ups and downs of the transition to university along with the student, from the stress of the university application process, to the excitement of the acceptance, and the anxiety of preparing for first semester. Throughout this process parents and partners continue to play a very important part in the students' education and development. This may not be the first person in your family who has studied at university. It is important however, to keep in mind that the transition for each new student is unique.

What first year university students fear the most:

- making new friends.
- university study may be too difficult.
- may have trouble understanding the lectures.
- may not be able to manage time and get everything done.

- may not feel a sense of belonging.
- may not be able to measure up to other students in class.
- may find that they don't like the course they are enrolled in.

For most people these fears will dissipate quickly as they adjust to their new environment and find their feet. Completing and then receiving feedback on the first assignment is an important milestone for most new students and will signal that they are on track, or indicate where they can make improvements.

**www** ► CSU's Division of Student Services offers an extensive range of support to students  
[www.csu.edu.au/division/studserv/](http://www.csu.edu.au/division/studserv/)

What first-year students would like their parents and/or partners to know:

- being a full-time student is like having a full-time job.
- university study demands large amounts of time.
- university is not a 9 to 5 job; evening and weekend study is required.
- administrative processes take time and may not be completed on the first visit or on the first contact.
- there can be a considerable amount of social stress resulting from the change from high school or work to University.
- students may feel considerable academic stress and uncertainty in the first year at University.
- there are expenses other than accommodation, fees and textbooks.

**!** What students say about how parents and partners can offer support:

- give us the freedom to succeed or fail, and take responsibility for our own education.
- give us the freedom to learn how to cope with the new environment.
- give us encouragement and support to keep trying and do well.

**!** How parents and partners can respond effectively and create an environment in which a student may be successful:

- encourage the student to talk about decisions to be made, what he/she hopes to accomplish by the decision.
- encourage the student to ask for help if they have a problem and let them know it is not a sign of weakness to ask for help. There is plenty of support available at CSU.
- allow the student to make mistakes but let him/her know that you will offer what support you can, even if the result is not ideal.
- take a 'wait and see' attitude regarding their new venture.
- help the student to view this time of life as a discovery phase, which is normal and exciting.
- encourage the student to make contact and network with a variety of people at the University.

### **For parents of school-leavers and on-campus students**

Before arriving on campus there are some skills that students may need to have, particularly if they have never lived independently. Basic cooking skills and shopping

for nutritious foods will be essential for those students not living in full catered accommodation. Good financial planning and budget management are important skills that students need to have if they are on a limited income.

University can appear to be unstructured compared to life at home or high school. Some students struggle to find a balance between studying and socialising. Those students who experience difficulty in organising and prioritising a number of competing and often challenging tasks can find assistance through Student Services.

It is normal for parents of school-leaving students in particular to have mixed feelings during this period of transition. There is often a sense of both excitement and loss. It is not uncommon for students to show the same feelings. You may also see unfamiliar habits or traits, such as - changes in eating habits, sleep patterns, how the student sees them-selves and how they interact with family members. A student's expanding worldview, their exposure to new ideas and a diverse range of new people can be the cause of these changes.

A new student on campus during his or her first week will likely arrive without knowing anyone, have to find his or her way around an unfamiliar campus, share accommodation with people they hardly know and try to make some new friends. Understanding and being prepared are the keys to managing these changes as the student adjusts to a number of lifestyle changes in a short period of time. It is important for parents to be supportive of the student and other family members through this transition.

**www** ► This site has a downloadable 'Surviving Homesickness' booklet to help students cope with feelings of homesickness  
[www.csu.edu.au/division/studserv/support/chaplain/family.htm](http://www.csu.edu.au/division/studserv/support/chaplain/family.htm)

### **For partners of mature age and distance education students**

The great majority of CSU students are mature age students studying by distance education mode. However, there are also many mature age students who live local to CSU campuses and study internally.

The impact study has on family finances - time spent with family members, work commitments and the changes in the dynamic of the personal relationships can be considerable. The development of good time management skills is particularly important for mature age students, many of whom are juggling study with work and family commitments.

It can be useful to have a discussion about what activities or routines can be changed or eliminated to make more time for study activities. For example, can ironing be reduced or eliminated altogether? When preparing meals, can larger portions be prepared so the left overs can be packaged and frozen? Consider reassigning household jobs to different family members.

Many mature age students have high expectations of themselves and want to achieve high marks, especially since they may have made considerable sacrifices to return to study. Mature age students generally have more life experience and are willing to take

risks and contribute to class discussions. For this reason, many lecturers and tutors value having mature age students in their classes.

At the same time, many mature age students feel uncertain or anxious about their readiness for study, or how the study environment has changed since they were last a student – the increasing use of computers and information technology is a focus of anxiety for some students.

**www** ► Student Services offers a range of STUDY LINK study preparation courses [www.csu.edu.au/student/studylink/](http://www.csu.edu.au/student/studylink/)

For those students who are studying part time, earning a degree is more like running a marathon than a sprint. It is not unusual for motivation to wax and wane at different stages. When motivation is low, it can help be helpful for the student to revisit their reasons for deciding to study and reconnect with their original vision.

- I** So, how can partners of mature age students help?
- encourage the student to discuss their study commitments with you
  - encourage the student to share their successes and achievements with you – even the little ones
  - encourage the student to reward themselves for their effort
  - take time out together when the opportunities arise
  - don't lose sight of your needs in the relationship, and make these known (it's not all about them!)
  - regularly review and discuss how household routines and tasks are allocated to family members
  - just being available for them to bounce ideas off or share new learning can be very helpful (teaching something you have learned is a great way to consolidate the learning)

**www** ► The Student Support Team in the Division of Student Services has a website for mature age students  
[www.csu.edu.au/division/studserv/support/chaplain/mature.htm](http://www.csu.edu.au/division/studserv/support/chaplain/mature.htm)

**www** ► The mature age students forum is a great source of collegial support, fun and encouragement for mature age students  
<http://forums.csu.edu.au/perl/forums.pl>

## **Family Newsletter**

During the first (autumn) session of study for students commencing at CSU, Student Services will publish several editions of an online Family Newsletter for parents and partners of new students. The Family Newsletter will help to keep you in contact with what's happening at CSU during the crucial first session. You will be able to download the Family Newsletter from the Student Support website.

If you would like to receive notification by email of the publication of the Family Newsletters, please email [gsimmons@csu.edu.au](mailto:gsimmons@csu.edu.au) with the subject line "Family Newsletter notification request".

