

THEME: RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Tū Kahika Program

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Introduction

The University of Otago's Tū Kahika program supports young Māori students interested in a career in health through the University of Otago's Foundation Year (pre-undergraduate) Health Sciences course. The program is targeted at Māori secondary school students and provides funded places for up to 25 students who have completed their Year 13 of study. The program was launched mid 2009 with the aim of increasing Māori student recruitment, retention and achievement in health sciences to increase the Māori health workforce in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Tū Kahika provides students the opportunity to build their knowledge of the core sciences in a tertiary setting, become familiar with life on campus and adjust to the requirements of university study by providing students with wrap-around academic, cultural, pastoral and financial support (both on and off the campus) throughout the duration of their studies.

Tū Kahika is overseen by the Māori Health Workforce Development Unit (MHWDU), which sits within the Division of Health Sciences at the University of Otago. MHWDU staff work collaboratively with key internal staff across the University (Foundation Studies, Te Huka Mātauraka (Māori Centre), Residential College Wardens, Office of Māori Development, Accommodation Office and School's Liaison) all of whom are integral in ensuring the successful delivery of Tū Kahika and wrap-around support for Tū Kahika students.

Why was this project/program initiated?

Māori are under-represented in both tertiary health study and the health workforce in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The culturally responsive Tū Kahika program was developed to provide Māori students with targeted support to equip them with the necessary skills to progress from secondary school, through Foundation Year and into further tertiary study in health.

Aims and objectives

The overarching goal of the MHWDU is to increase the Māori health workforce in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Tū Kahika aims to contribute to health workforce development by increasing the number and preparedness of Māori students entering into and successfully graduating from the competitive professional tertiary programs such as Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy, Physiotherapy and Medical Laboratory Science.

Specific aims of the Tū Kahika program are:

- To recruit up to 25 Māori secondary school students each year into Tū Kahika
- To enhance students' first year experience by supporting their pathway from secondary school, through Foundation Year and into further study in health
- To increase the number of Māori students choosing health professions as a career
- To assist student learning of core sciences, maths, academic English, university processes and increase preparedness of students for further tertiary study
- To identify effective strategies to increase Māori student recruitment, retention and achievement in health sciences
- To provide culturally responsive, individualised wrap-around support for students and whakawhanaungatanga (forming meaningful relationships) amongst students and staff to increase the retention rate of Māori students at the University of Otago.

Approach to achieve aims and objectives

Our approach to achieve the program aims and objectives are quite 'simple' yet effective. Informed by Māori philosophies and values, we recognise the importance of building and maintaining relationships with the students and the effectiveness of collaboration between staff across the campus.

- Whakawhanaungatanga is one of our core practices, that is, we form meaningful relationships with the students at the individual level and 'know' our students. This is done formally and informally through setting tailored learning plans for the students, regular group activities and ongoing staff contact. Meals together, and the fact the students are housed in one of two residential colleges maintains a strong sense of whanaungatanga within the group.
- High expectations: Each Tū Kahika student is interviewed with his/her whānau (family) prior to selection (in their home region) and program staff members have high expectations of the students and make these known to students and whānau. The interview process also establishes a relationship with student's whānau and assists with the ongoing support for the student.
- Dedicated support: Tū Kahika students are supported by a Kaiārahi (guide/mentor) who assists the students with their transition from home, through Foundation Year and beyond. The Kaiārahi works closely alongside the Academic Dean and is one of the key contacts for the students.
- Recruitment: MHWDU staff has strong networks internally and externally to the university that enables recruitment of students into the program through a variety of sources and mediums.
- Collaboration: Collaboration with key staff from across the campus is integral to the successful delivery of Tū Kahika and the high level of support and guidance students receive. Students are known as individuals and have a strong network of staff to assist them with various aspects of their transition through university.

Challenges

Perhaps the most significant challenge for us is how to provide the students who are educationally disadvantaged (lower decile school, no University Entrance, limited exposure to maths and science, extremely limited knowledge about tertiary study) the necessary skills to progress through their studies in the short time allocated (24 teaching weeks). We strongly feel it is the collaborative way that the program is delivered, the targeted support and the students' support of one another that enables most of the students to progress through their studies by scaffolding alongside other students and taking advantage of the added academic and pastoral support provided to them.

Successes

The Tū Kahika program is currently in the second year of delivery, so whilst results are positive, further research is needed to measure success against all key indicators. To date Tū Kahika has evidenced a number of successes in terms of Māori student recruitment, retention and achievement in health sciences alongside positive outcomes for students. The program is evaluated using both quantitative and qualitative research including longitudinal tracking of student progress and outcomes, and student and staff satisfaction of program delivery and implementation.

What are the impacts?

Research shows a high level of student and staff satisfaction, particularly the support and opportunities provided. 'It [Tū Kahika]...gives us a sense of belonging because they're [program staff] acknowledging who you are and what you're doing.' Of significant impact has been the student's desire to continue to pursue a career in health with 89% (n=33) of the two Tū Kahika cohorts currently studying towards a health qualification. Furthermore the program has provided 'second chance' learning opportunities for students who entered Foundation Year without University Entrance that are now either progressing through further university study with a chance of gaining entry into a professional program or, near completion of gaining University Entrance via Foundation Year. There is also evidence to suggest Tū Kahika enhances students' preparedness and confidence for further health related tertiary study into professional programs. Student evaluations have highlighted the wrap-around support students receive as perhaps the most critical success factor of the Tū Kahika program.

How has the project developed Indigenous leadership?

Tū Kahika is part of the newly developed MHWDU. Associate Professor Joanne Baxter is the Associate Dean Māori Health Sciences and Director of the MHWDU; Dr Baxter is of Ngai Tahu and Ngāti Apa ki te Rā Tō iwi and directly contributes to the strategic direction of Māori development within the Division of Health Sciences. Zoe Bristowe (MIndS) Ngā Puhī, Ngāti Pōrou has a key role in program management and implementation and in the development and implementation of the recruitment, support and evaluation aspects of the program. The growth of successful projects within the MHWDU pertaining to Māori student recruitment, retention and achievement in Health Sciences has seen the expansion of the MHWDU and an increased level of Indigenous leadership and positive outcomes for Māori students at the University of Otago.

Program sustainability

The development and implementation of Tū Kahika has involved funding support primarily from the Ministry of Health and the Tertiary Education Commission alongside the support from the University of Otago and Foundation Studies. Currently planning is underway to secure future funding of this initiative.

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