# Common Student Problems with Assessment during the Transition to University: Issues & Implications for Learning Advisors

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Session Overview

- Project Background

- Project Design

- Results

- Activity and Discussion
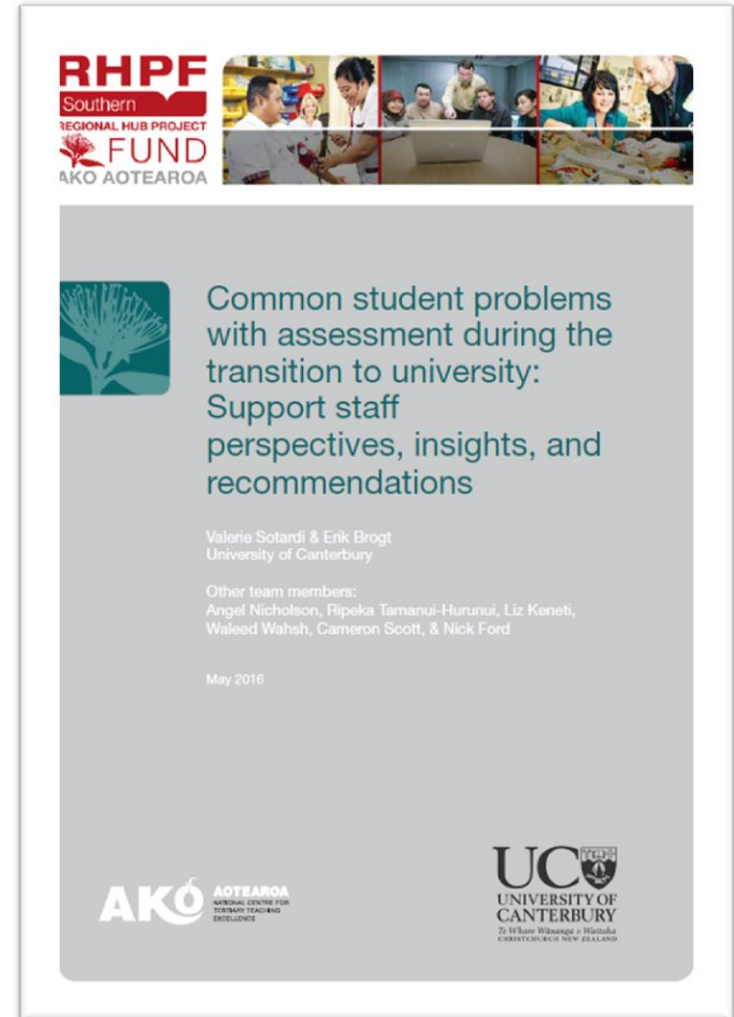
Project Background

- Student Transition to University
    - Social and emotional change
    - Educational change
        - Differences in how/where learning occurs
        - Differences in the assessment of learning

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Project Background

- ## Educational Changes in Assessment
  - The **learning environment** (e.g., large class size) and how teaching and activities are structured accordingly
  - The **nature of information** that students are expected to master (surface vs. deep approaches to learning)
  - How the learning environment + nature of information are to be **assessed**

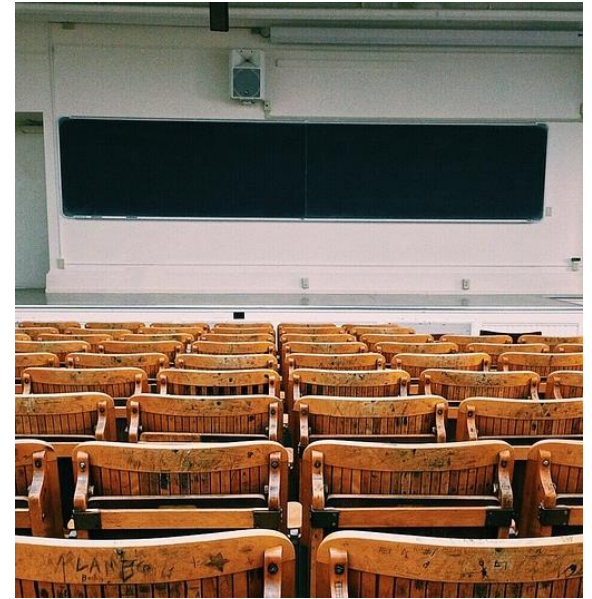https://akoaotearoa.ac.nz/student-assessment-problems

Project Background

- Assessments as a Key Metric…

    … for academic success

    … for retention

    … for progression toward graduation

- Lecturer vs. Student Perspectives
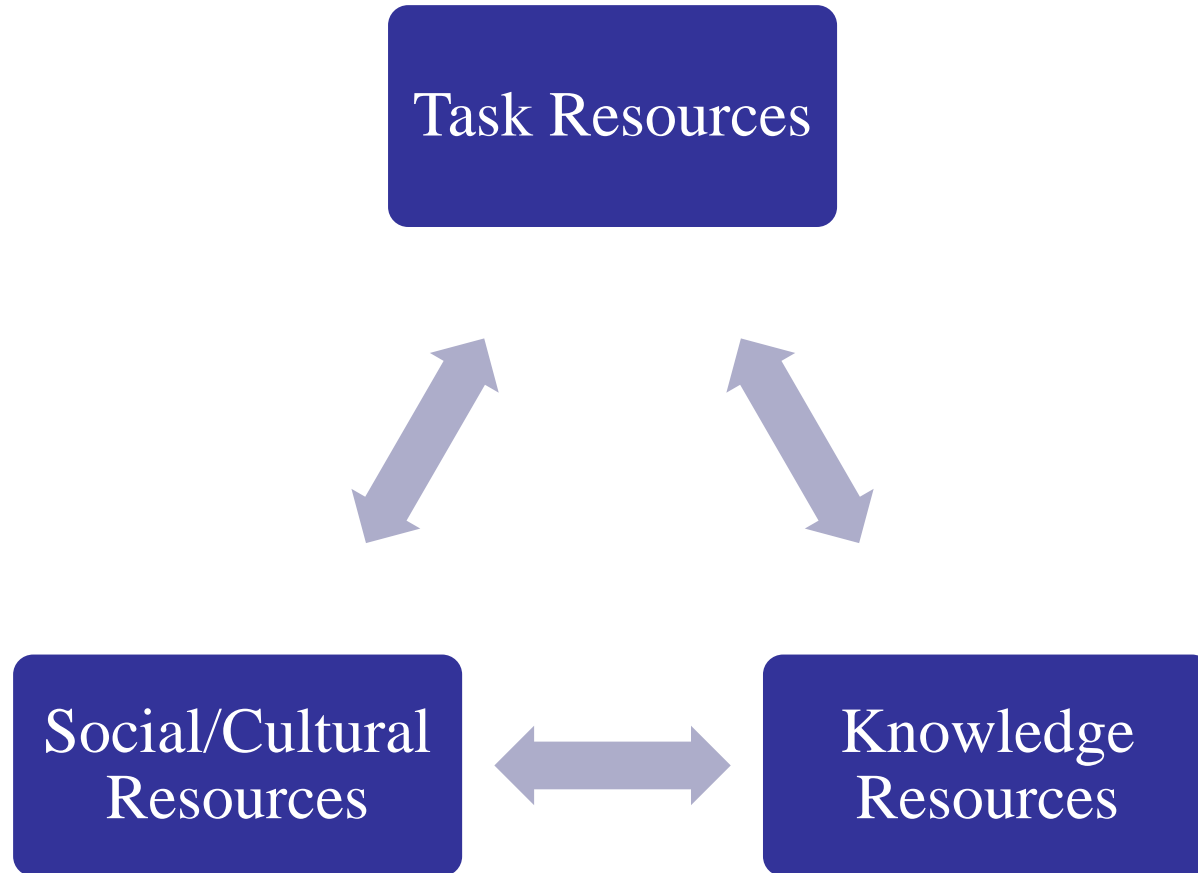
Project Background

- First-Year Students' Struggles
  - Understanding assessment tasks (especially with academic writing)

- Why might this be?
  1. Different assessment methods used in secondary school
  2. Attitudes and expectations toward learning and assessments
  3. Varied levels of preparation for university

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Project Background

- Resources for Student Assessment

Project Background

Project Background

Task Resources (What am I supposed to do?)

Social/Cultural Resources (Where do I go when…?)

Knowledge Resources (What must I understand?)

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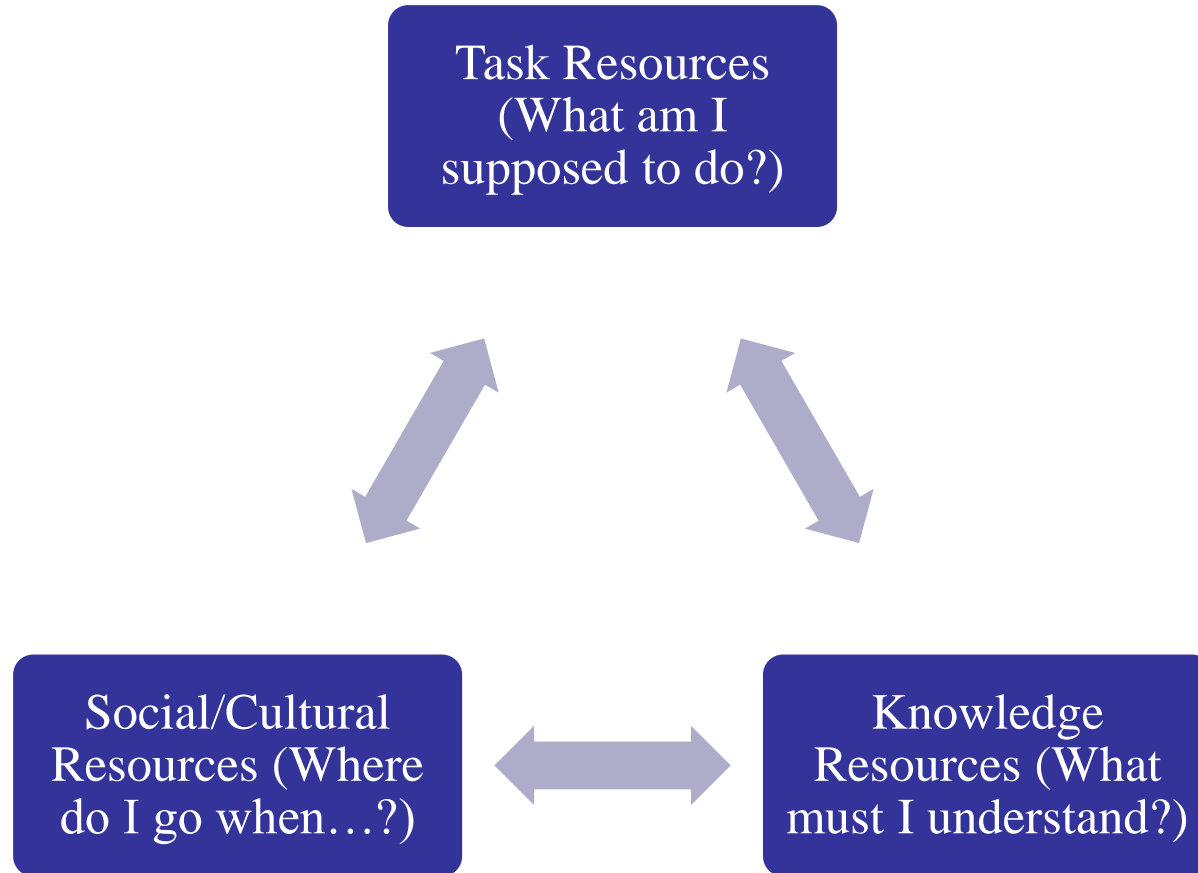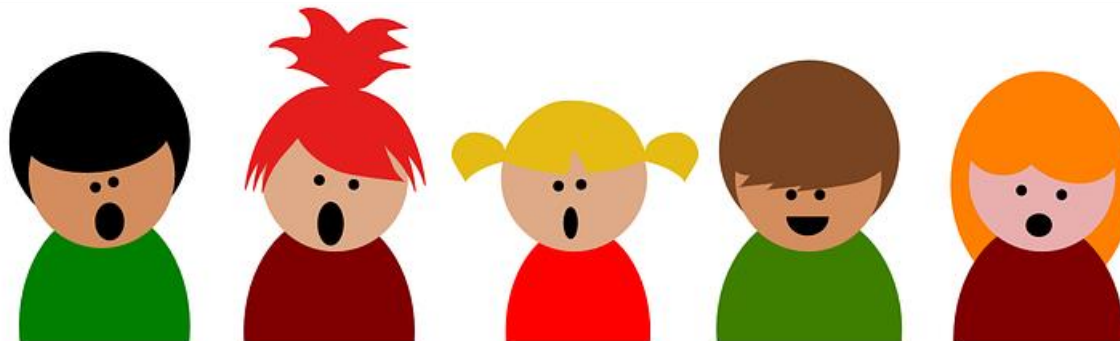
Project Background

- Rising demand for student assistance from academic support units to meet these diverse student needs

- Support units as valuable for the first-year transition

Project Goals

- To identify common problems that first-year university students encounter with assessment (according to support staff)

- To develop ways in which students, lecturers, support staff, and institutions could mitigate these problems

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Project Design

- **Sample:** 23 staff members in student support units

- **Data Collection:** Semi-structured interviews

  1. What, in your view, are the most common issues first-year students have with assessment?

  2. What, in your view, are the underlying causes for these issues?

  3. What can we (lecturers, support staff, the university in its processes and regulations) do to alleviate those issues?

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Results

1. Assessment Shift from High School is Abrupt, Unclear, and Substantial

– Major differences in types of assessment

– First-year students may hold unrealistic or inaccurate expectations about university

- National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) standards/qualifications may contribute to ambiguity

– Level of thinking that university students need to perform on academic tasks is more advanced than in high school

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Results

2. Lack of Transferrable Skills

- How to learn (which influences students' communication and task completion)

- Being an independent, self-regulated learner

- How to ask questions and seek assistance

- Time management skills

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Results

3. Inadequate Discipline-Specific Skills

- Not having appropriate coursework in HS
    - Students may be unaware of these deficits until after the course has begun

Results

4. Assessment Design Issues

- Poorly written or ambiguous instructions

- Lack enough information for the student to fully understand task criteria or, alternatively,

- Provide too much information so the student is overwhelmed with details

- Limited inclusiveness

- Mono-cultural designs

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Results

4. Unsupportive Learning Climate

- Students do not feel comfortable asking the lecturer for clarity

- Pastoral care issues

- Lack critical information about university processes and procedures

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Results

Activity & Discussion

1. As a TLA, **does each factor relate to your regular work** in supporting first-year students?

2. If yes, **what strategies might you do recommend?**

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Results

Final Thoughts

- Emphasis on information, communication, and integration

- Current project involving assessment anxiety during the transition to university

- Thank you!

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