

The Southern Cross Model: Revolutionising teaching and learning and uplifting student outcomes

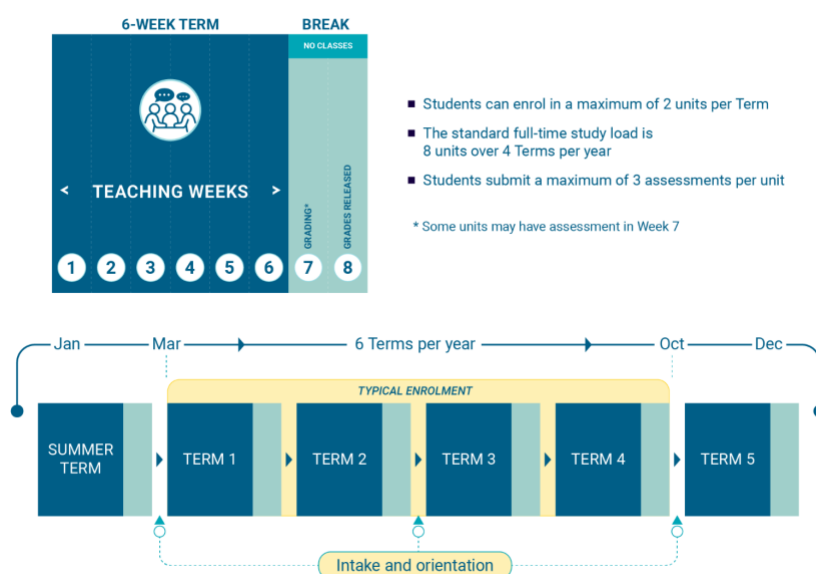
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The Southern Cross Model

An immersive block model inspired approach to Higher Education (HE), the Southern Cross Model (SCM), was implemented across the host institution from 2021–2023. Southern Cross University is a regional, public institution in Australia with around 19,000 students enrolled in a range of undergraduate, postgraduate, and enabling/pathway courses. Programs are delivered through four Faculties and two Colleges in the disciplinary areas of health, science, engineering, laws, business, information technology, education, Indigenous knowledge, and the arts. These courses are offered at its three main campuses, as well as at metropolitan capital city campuses and offshore via strategic educational partnerships and collaborations. Typically, only 25% of its students gain admission based on high school results; 60% of those admitted are the first in their family to study at university; 40% are resident in regional or remote Australia; 40% study online; 18% are international students; and nearly 5% of the students identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders.

As shown in Figure 1, the Southern Cross Model involved a bold revisioning of the University’s academic calendar (January to December) to structure the year into six terms of six weeks each. Full-time students with a typical enrolment pattern complete eight units a year, as they would have done in the traditional trimester model; however, they complete only two units at a time instead of four.

Figure 1. Teaching terms in the Southern Cross Model



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At the same time, the entire pedagogical approach required a fundamental rethink, which in turn necessitated a substantive program of transformational change. Every unit of study at the University was redesigned for delivery in the 6-week terms, to move the curriculum from its traditional 13-week trimester. Revised teaching, learning and assessment policies, procedures and systems drove an institution-wide move towards active, guided learning underpinned by principles of constructive alignment (Biggs, 1996, 1999; see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Pedagogical principles in the Southern Cross Model



Students engage with three main forms of learning in the Southern Cross Model:

- self-access online modules that are media-rich, interactive and responsive
- classes scheduled twice-weekly that are guided and interactive, involving activities such as discussion, problem-based scenarios and simulations
- assessments that are authentic, scaffolded and manageable, with no more than three per unit.

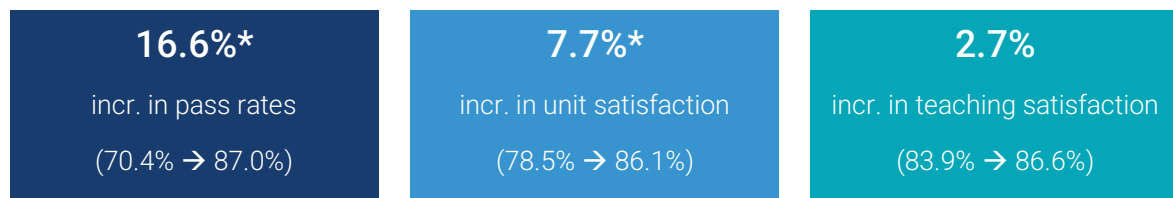
For a more detailed description of the pedagogy of the SCM and how policy, procedure and practice were transformed at the University, see Roche et al. (in press). For an example of how the SCM pedagogy was applied, see [Goode et al. \(2022a\)](#).

The impact of the Southern Cross Model on academic achievement and satisfaction

The following data summarises studies reporting on the impact of the immersive Southern Cross Model on student outcomes, and specifically their academic achievement (success or pass rates) and satisfaction.

For domestic undergraduate business students, pass rates and unit satisfaction rose to a statistically significant extent in the SCM in 2021 compared to the traditional model in 2019 (see Figure 3).

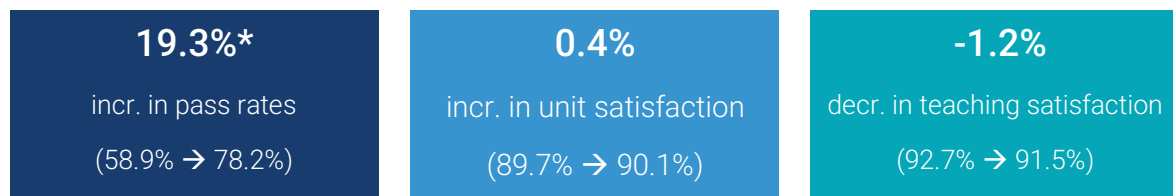
Figure 3. Outcomes for domestic undergraduate business students in the Southern Cross Model



Data source: [Goode et al., 2023b](#)

For non-award pathway (also known as enabling, foundation, or access) students, success rates also rose to a statistically significant extent in the SCM in 2021 compared to the traditional model in 2019 (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Outcomes for domestic non-award pathway students in the Southern Cross Model



Data sources: [Goode et al., 2022b](#) (success); [Goode et al., 2023a](#) (satisfaction)

Success rates increased in 2021 and 2022 compared to 2019 for a number of Australian government-recognised [equity groups](#), specifically Indigenous and low socio-economic status students, as well as students registered with a disability (see Table 1).

* Statistically significant results at $p < .05$.

Table 1. Outcomes for students from recognised equity groups in the Southern Cross Model

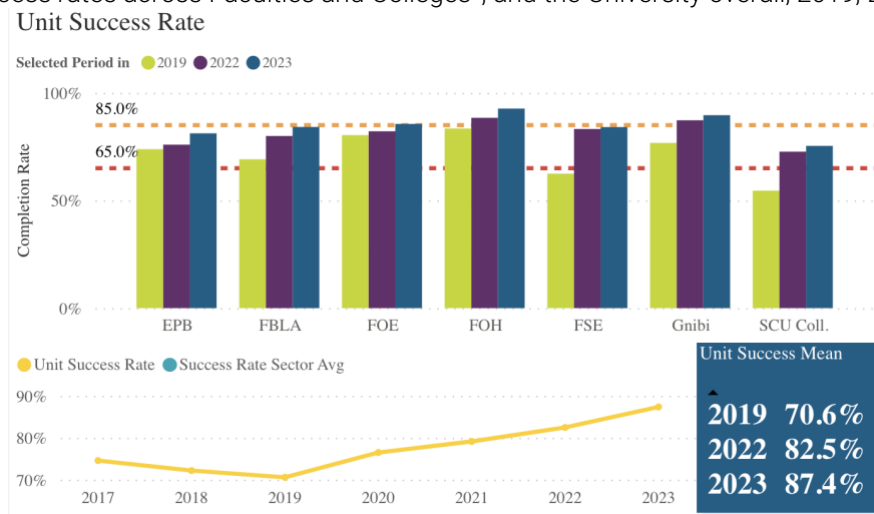
Cohort	Observations (N)	2019	2021 and 2022	Change
Success/pass rates				
Identify as Indigenous	1,521	64.4%	74.4%	10.0%*
Registered with a Disability	2,319	67.0%	75.0%	7.9%*
Low socio-economic status	5,707	72.9%	80.5%	7.6%*
English as Additional Language	740	75.1%	80.8%	5.7%
Unit satisfaction				
Identify as Indigenous	427	78.7%	83.6%	4.9%
Registered with a Disability	796	79.6%	76.7%	-2.9%
Low socio-economic status	1,815	80.5%	76.9%	-3.6%
English as Additional Language	250	75.3%	83.9%	8.6%
Teaching satisfaction				
Identify as Indigenous	427	83.1%	87.7%	4.6%
Registered with a Disability	796	83.1%	86.0%	2.9%
Low socio-economic status	1,815	85.3%	82.4%	-2.9%
English as Additional Language	250	79.2%	81.2%	2.0%

Data source: [Roche et al., 2023](#)

Student success (pass) rates have continued to increase across the University¹ (see [Wilson et al., 2023](#) for recent research data). Internal data show that the overall success rate for all students at the University (domestic, international, undergraduate, postgraduate and non-award pathway) was 16.8% higher ($p < .05$) in 2023 compared to 2019 (see Figure 5).

Student satisfaction with units and teaching has remained high overall. Looking at data aggregated across the University, the changes are not statistically significant (see Figures 6 and 7).

Figure 5. Success rates across Faculties and Colleges², and the University overall, 2019, 2022 and 2023.



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Figure 6. Unit satisfaction across Faculties and Colleges², and the University overall, 2019, 2022 and 2023.

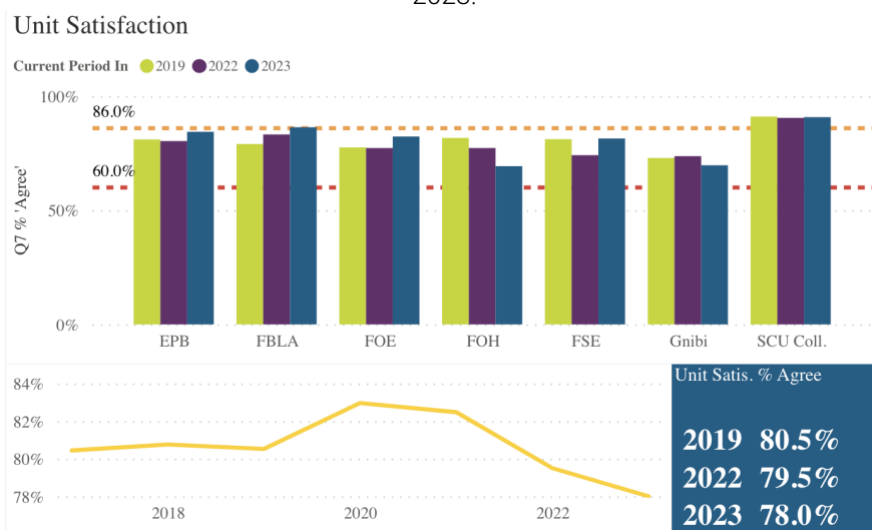
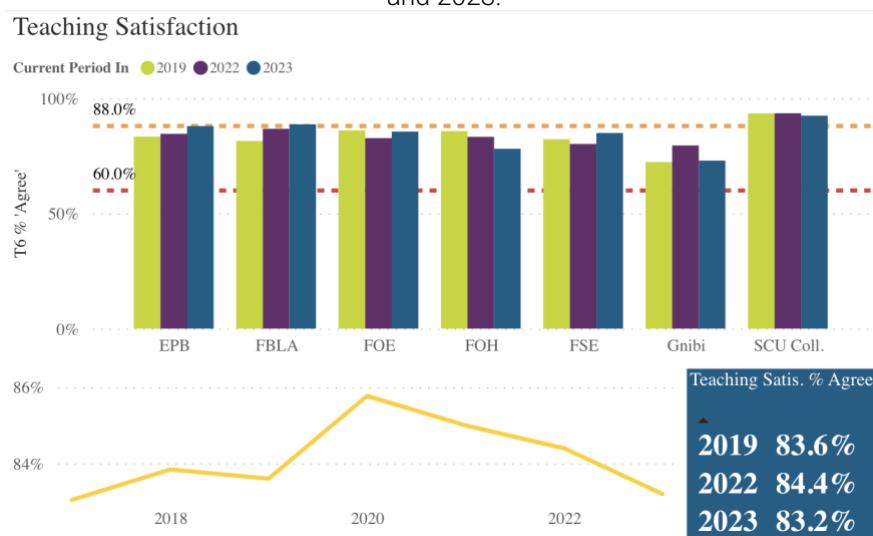


Figure 7. Teaching satisfaction across Faculties and Colleges², and the University overall, 2019, 2022 and 2023.



¹ The implementation of the SCM was staggered across 2021–2023. Law, the majority of Health, and the Hotel School did not transition to the Southern Cross Model until 2023.

² EPB = Educational Partnerships Board; FBLA = Faculty of Business, Law and Arts; FOE = Faculty of Education; FOH = Faculty of Health; Gnibi = Gnibi College of Indigenous Australian Peoples; SCU Coll. = SCU College



**Southern Cross
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These data indicate that the focused, guided and active approach to teaching and learning in the Southern Cross Model has had a significant positive impact on students' academic performance – including those from multiple recognised equity groups. Most students remain satisfied or very satisfied with units and teaching in the immersive block model.

A student-led interview with the academic leads on the SCM can be listened to in [this podcast](#) (Southern Cross University, 2023).

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The Southern Cross Model

A better way to learn

Six-week Terms

Six Terms of six weeks each across the year. Complete one or two units in a Term with a two-week break in between each one.

Increased success

Since the Southern Cross Model was implemented, our students have achieved higher grades than ever before.

Immersive learning

Focus on just one or two units each Term for an immersive study experience. Learn more, quickly, in workshops and tutorials.

Greater completion

More students complete their units successfully in the Southern Cross Model. It's a better, and more enjoyable way to learn.

You're in control

The Southern Cross Model works with you in juggling all your other commitments – family, work, sport, friends. It's university for the 21st century.



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