



**Southern Cross
University**

Immersive Block Scheduling in an Australian Public University: A Case Study in Increasing Student Success

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Southern Cross University

 78 000 Graduates

 18 000+ Students

 950+ Staff



- Main Campuses
- Metro Campuses
Sydney, Melbourne, Perth
- The Hotel School
Sydney, Melbourne,
Brisbane, Hayman Island

Offshore partnerships

- China: Dalian, Changchun, Tianjin, Liuzhou
- Papua New Guinea: Port Moresby



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Our Students

69%
Women

65%
Part-Time

60%
First in family

57%
25 or older

21%
International

5%
Aboriginal or
Torres Strait
Islander

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**Southern Cross
University** commencing
student attrition (2019-
2020):

32%

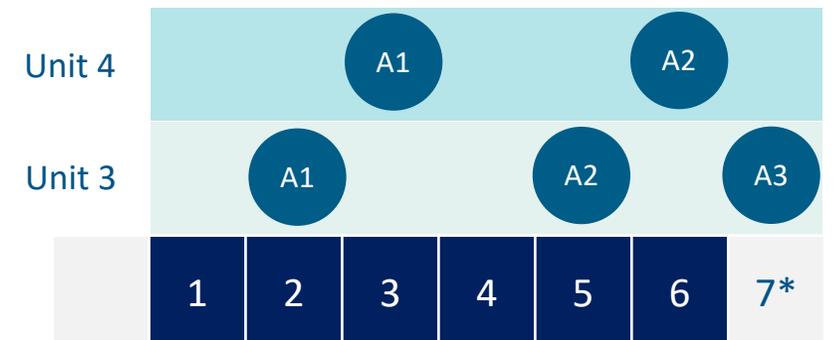
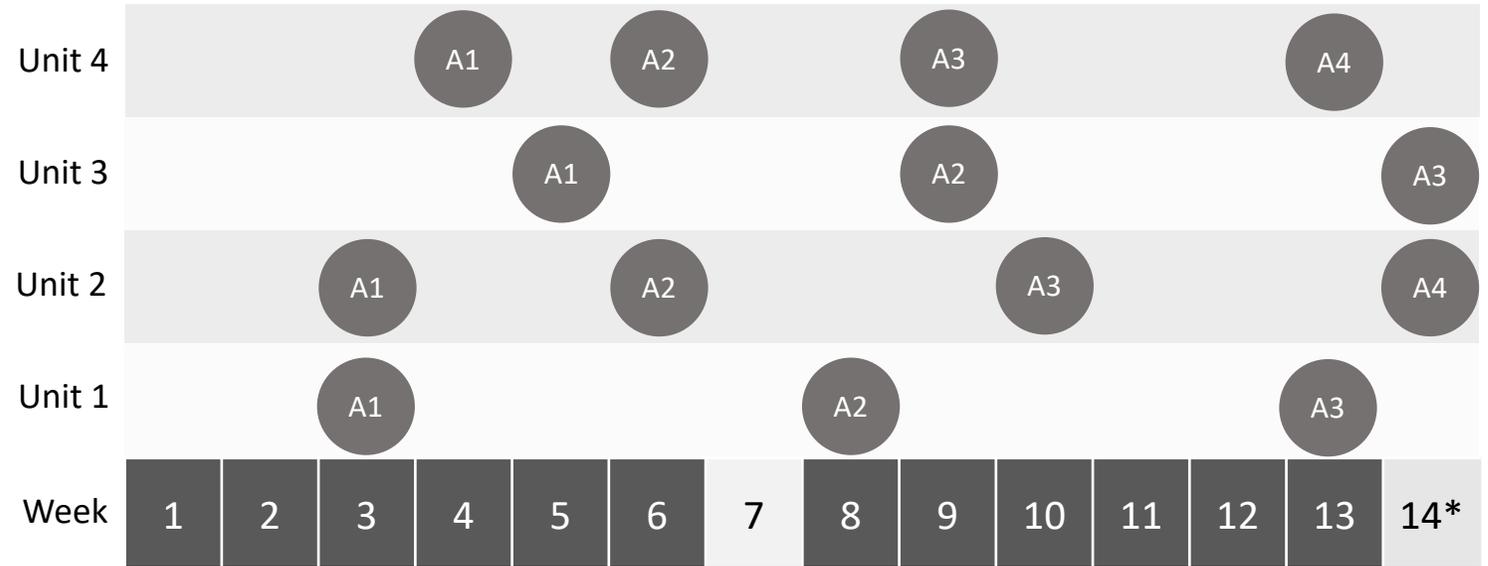
**Average Australian public
university** commencing
student attrition (2019-
2020):

18%



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A revolutionary change

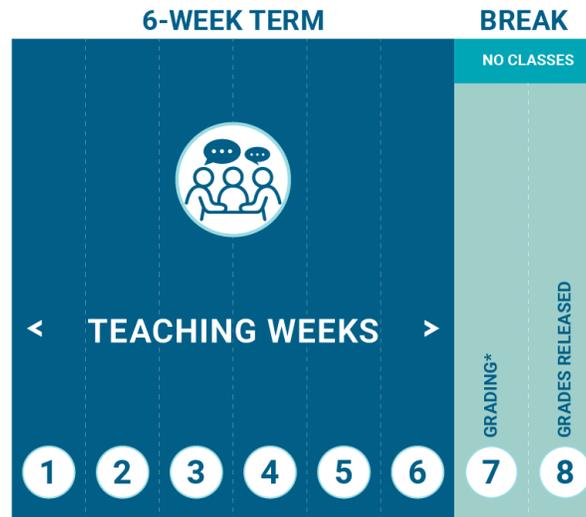


* Final assessment week for some units



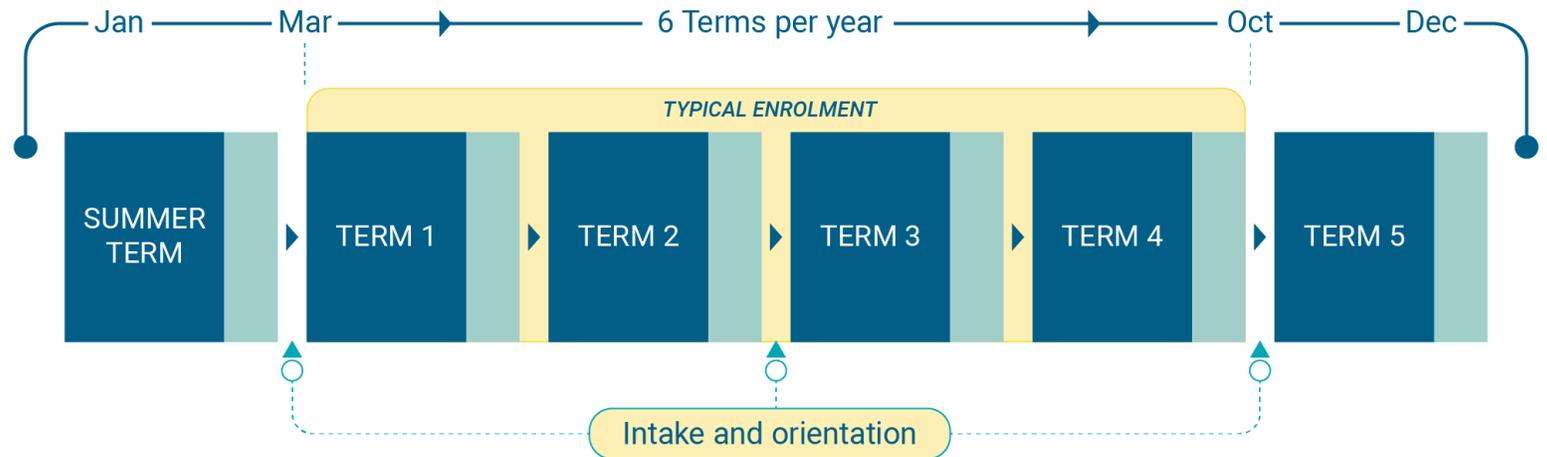
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The Southern Cross Model



- Students can enrol in a maximum of 2 units per Term
- The standard full-time study load is 8 units over 4 Terms per year
- Students submit a maximum of 3 assessments per unit

* Some units may have assessment in Week 7



A 3-year journey of implementation

2021 (Year 1)

Preparing for
Success Program

Civil Engineering
Management

Business and
Enterprise

62 units

2022 (Year 2)

Education

Science and
Engineering

Humanities, Arts,
Social Science

533 units

2023 (Year 3)

Health

Law

323 units

900+ units redeveloped

All Faculties, Colleges, Campuses, and Partners Onshore and Offshore





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A whole-of-institution transformation

Simplifying
student
academic
journey &
process

Teaching
calendar &
delivery

Centre for
Teaching &
Learning
uplift

Curriculum
design &
development

Academic
integrity
framework

Assessment
policy &
practice

Evaluation &
monitoring

See: Roche et al., 2024

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Immersive block models in HE

Southern Cross: Goode et al., 2023; Roche et al., 2024; Wilson et al., 2023

Victoria: Loton et al., 2022

Suffolk: Buck & Tyrrell, 2022

Plymouth: Turner et al., 2021

Manchester Metropolitan: Nerantzi & Chatzidamianos, 2020

De Montfort: Allman, 2024

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Pedagogical principles for immersive block learning

Roche et al., 2024; see also Biggs, 2014; Garrison et al., 1999; Joyner & Isbell, 2021; Kellermann, 2021; Thalluri & Penman, 2018.

Focused

Focus on what students **need to know**

Guided

Guide students through the curriculum

Active

Learning activities are **media-rich**

Signpost links in the curriculum

Learning activities are **interactive** and **responsive**

Learning activities build a **community of inquiry**



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Forms of learning in the Southern Cross Model

**Focused
Guided
Active
Learning**

Up to 20
hours of
learning
per unit
per week



Self-access modules

Interactive, media-rich,
responsive learning
content



Class learning

Three hours weekly of
case studies,
discussions, application



Authentic assessment

No exams unless
required by accrediting
body (e.g., law)



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Uplift in digital delivery and active learning pedagogy

See: Goode et al., 2022



Mark Reviewed

Module 1. Public health and
COVID-19: Responding to
uncertainty

View



Mark Reviewed

Module 2. Diversity and
representation:
Communicating with integrity

View



Mark Reviewed

Module 3. Indigenous
contexts: How to write
paragraphs using respectful
academic language

View



Mark Reviewed

Module 4. The modern
university: How to write
essays and reports

View



Mark Reviewed

Module 5. Arts in society:
How to use academic
vocabulary and style

View



Mark Reviewed

Module 6. Renewable energy:
Exploring alternative genres
of academic communication

View



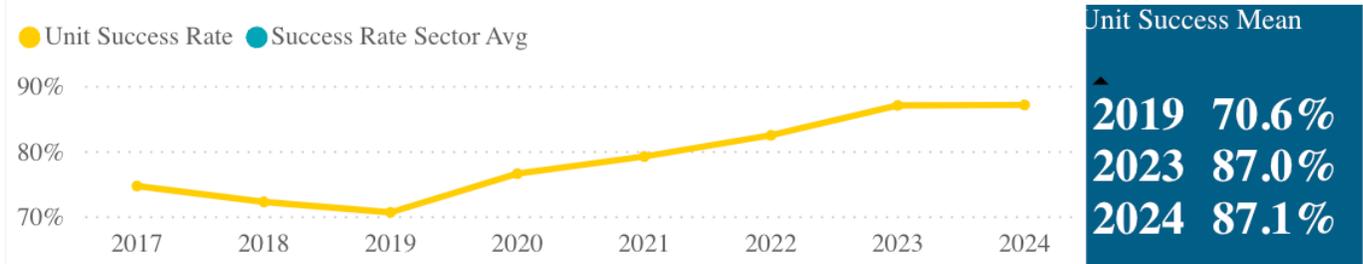
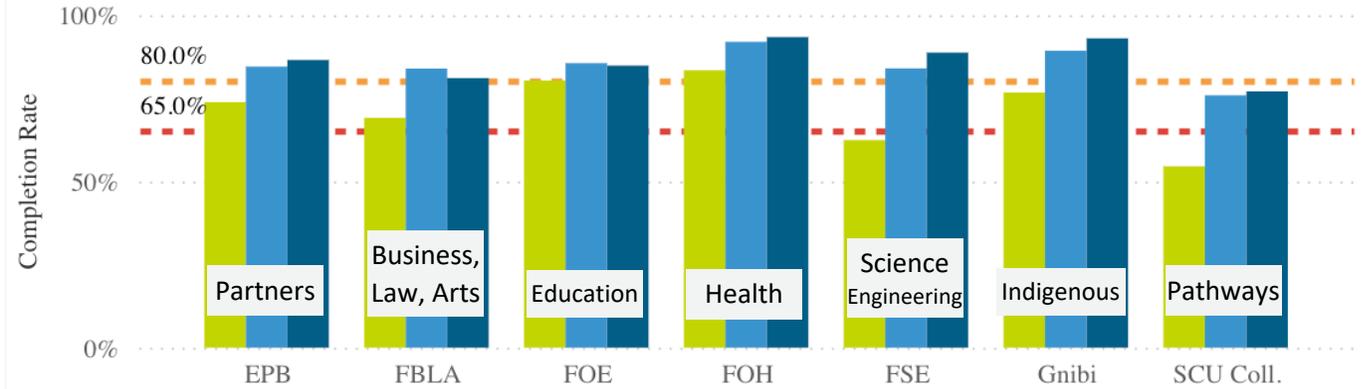
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Increased success rates and grade point averages (GPAs)

n (2019): 51,625
n (2023): 56,947
n (2024 to date): 14,097

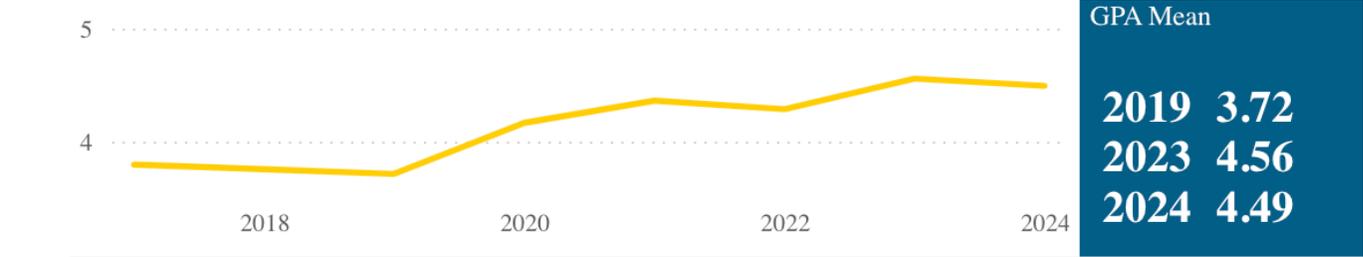
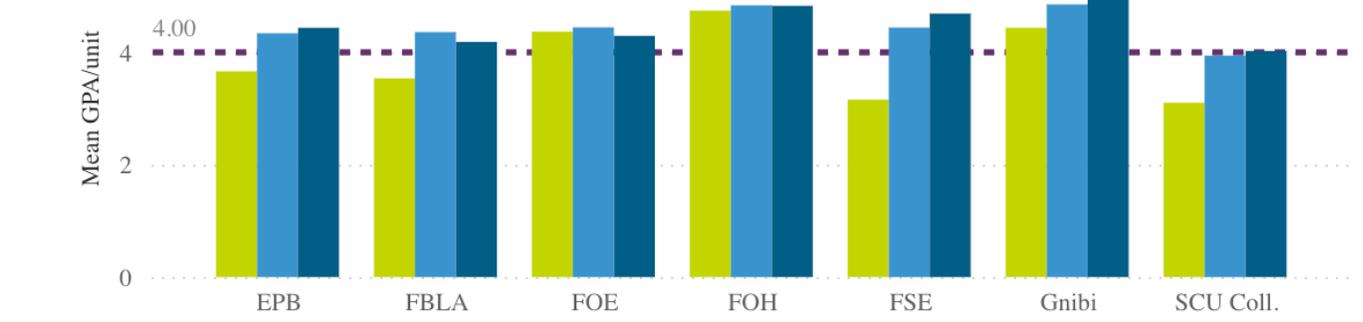
Overall changes to success (~16.5% points) and GPA (~0.8) are statistically significant ($p < .05$) in 2023 and 2024 compared to 2019

Selected Period in 2019 2023 2024



Unit Success Mean

2019	70.6%
2023	87.0%
2024	87.1%



GPA Mean

2019	3.72
2023	4.56
2024	4.49



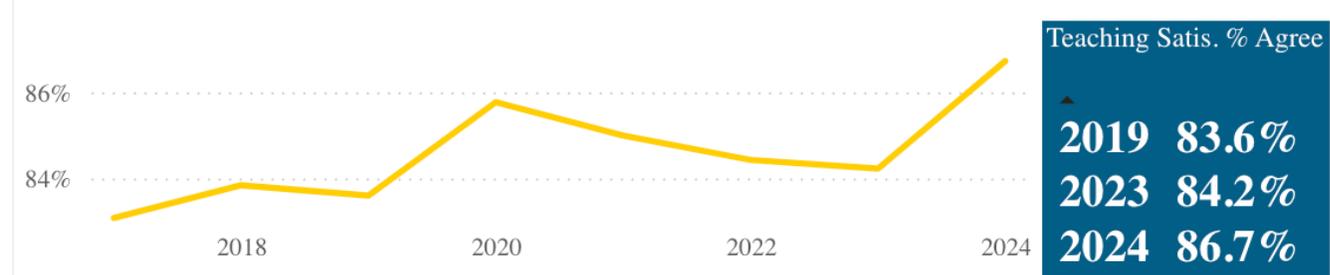
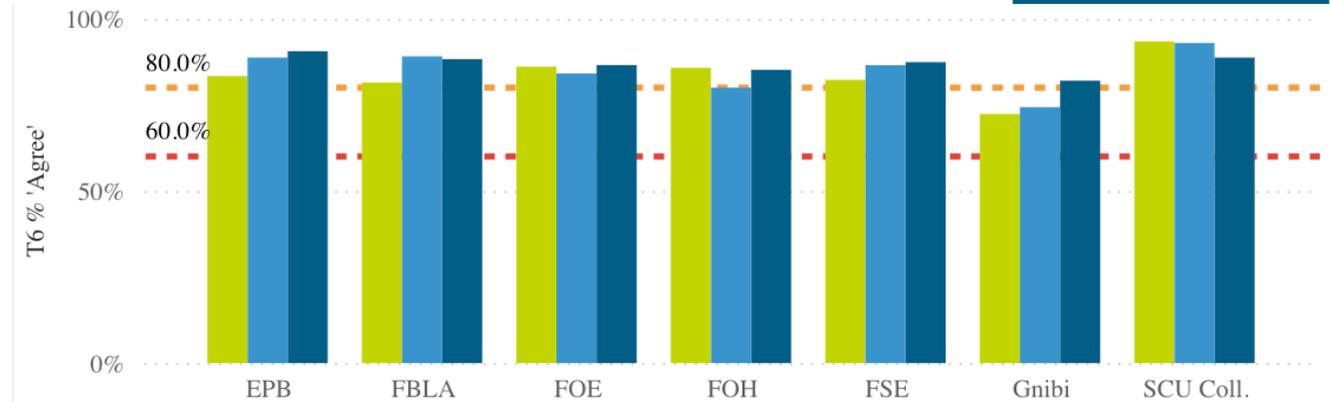
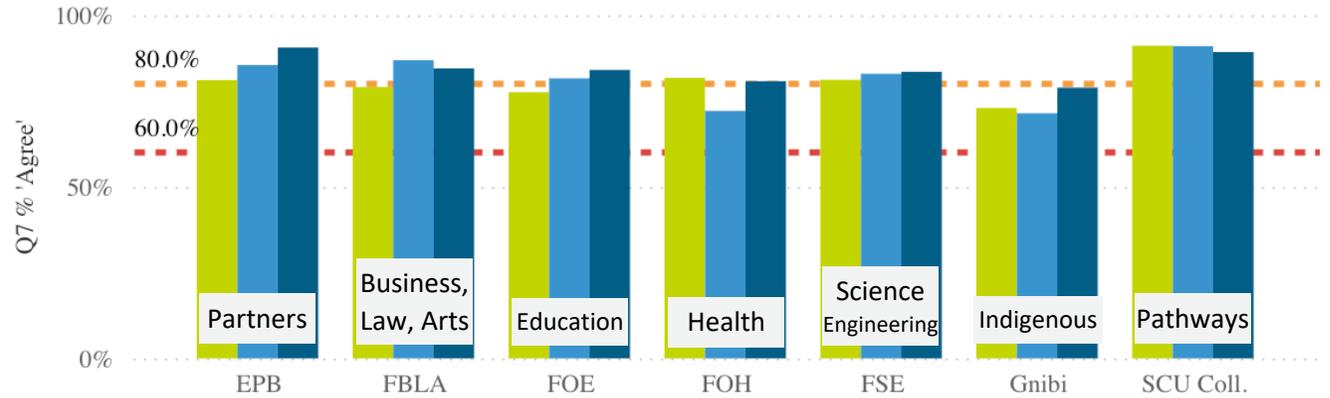
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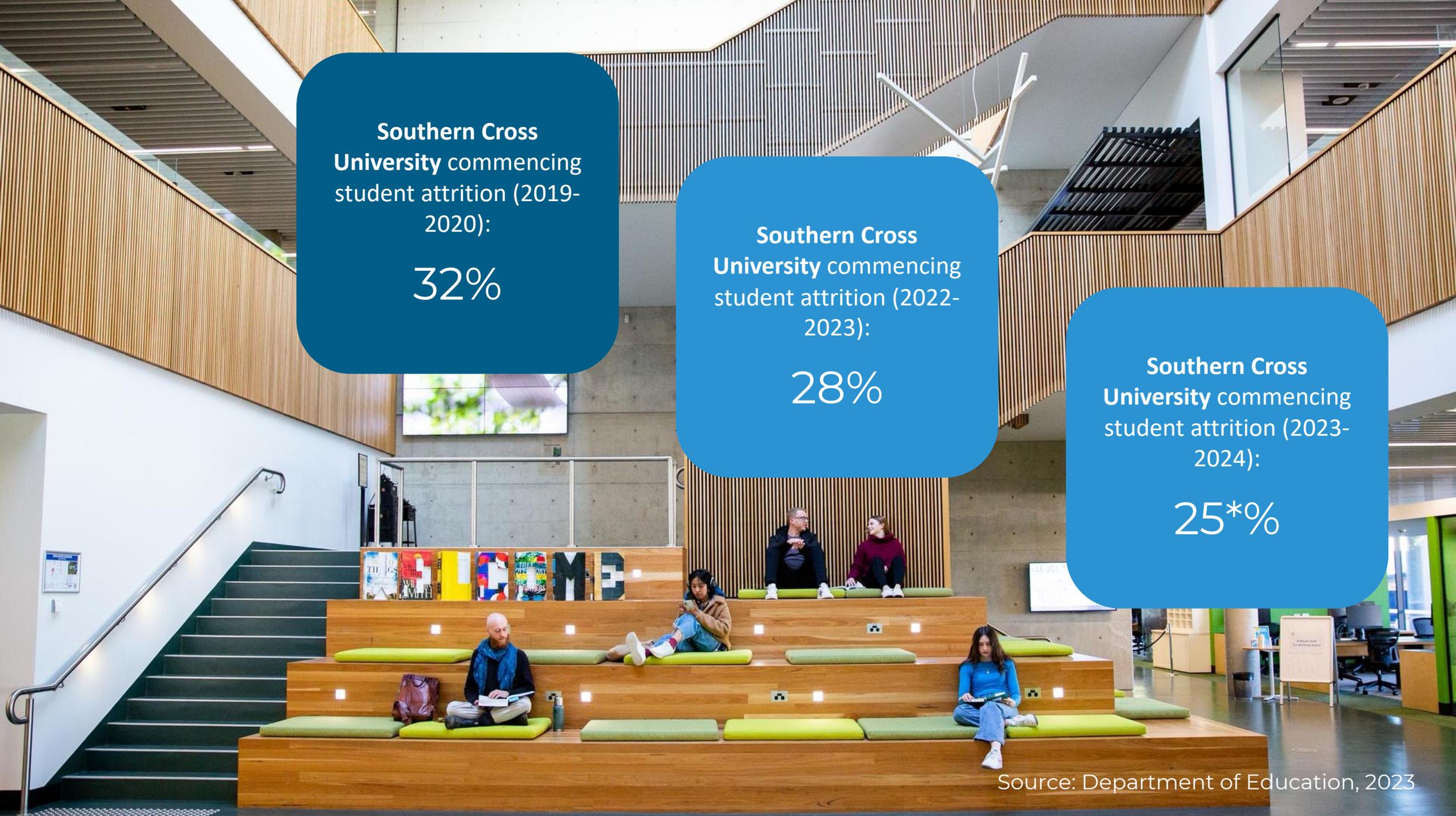
Sustained and strong unit and teaching satisfaction

n (2019): 13,712
n (2023): 19,735
n (2024 to date): 4,506

Overall changes are not statistically significant in 2023 and 2024 compared to 2019

Current Period In ● 2019 ● 2023 ● 2024





**Southern Cross
University** commencing
student attrition (2019-
2020):

32%

**Southern Cross
University** commencing
student attrition (2022-
2023):

28%

**Southern Cross
University** commencing
student attrition (2023-
2024):

25*%



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Key takeaways

- Curriculum innovation is making a significant positive difference to student academic achievement at a whole-of-institution level
- A pedagogy of focused, active, guided learning (Roche et al., 2024) can improve student outcomes
- Student satisfaction remains high, but continuous improvement is an important element of major curriculum reform

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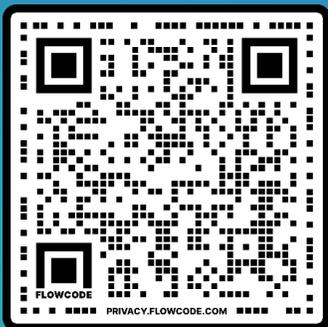
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Thank you

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SSRN Working Paper
(Pre-Print) Series

The Southern Cross Model – Publications

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