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# 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

Transforming > Tomorrow







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

32%

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

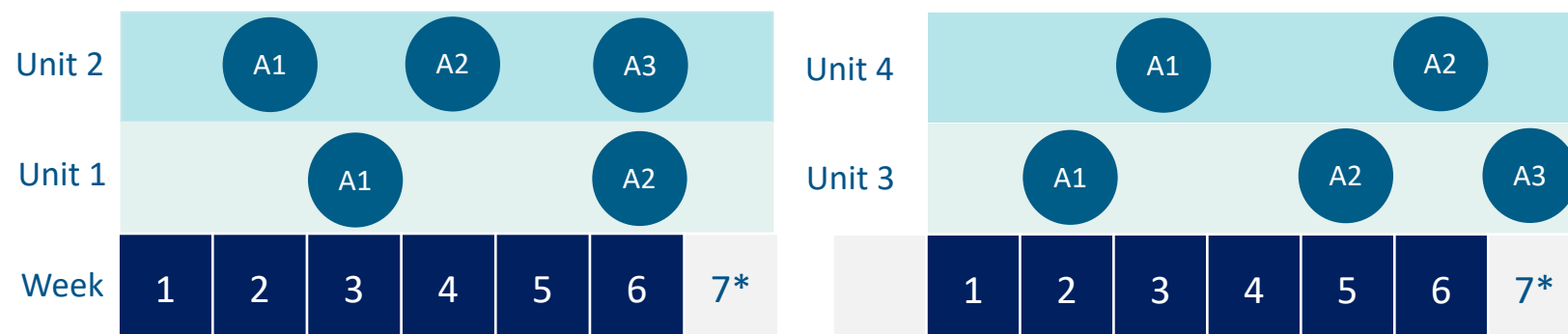
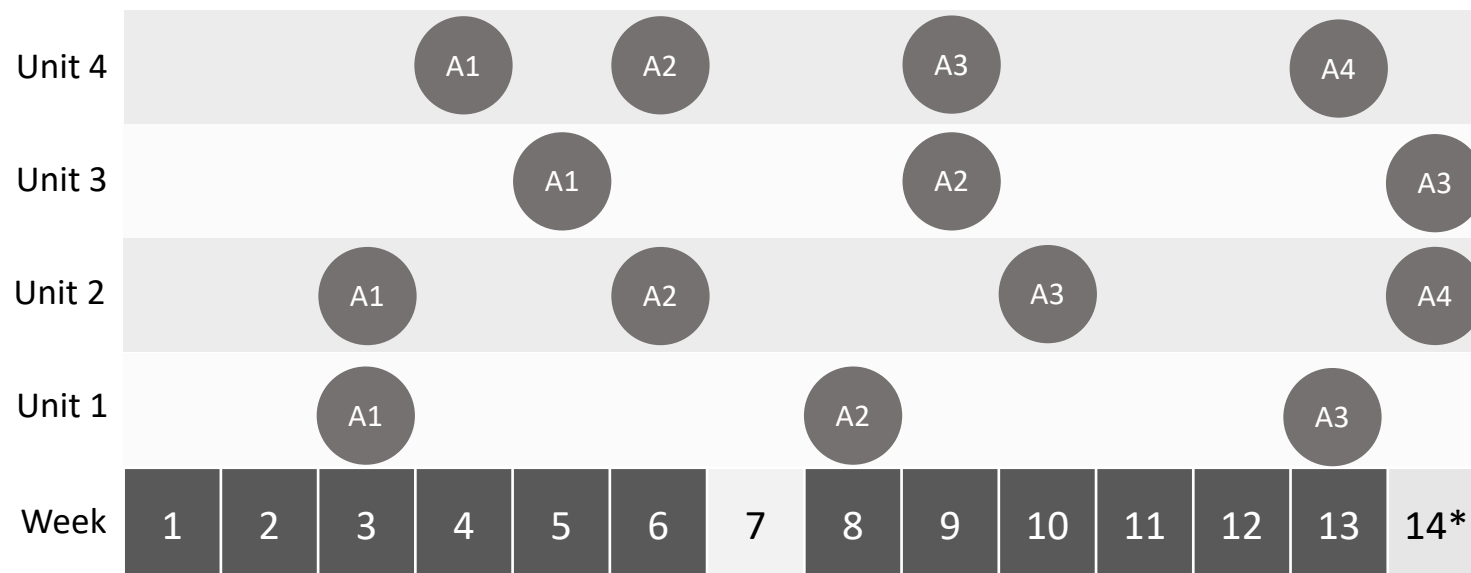
18%

Source: Department of Education, 2023



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# A revolutionary change



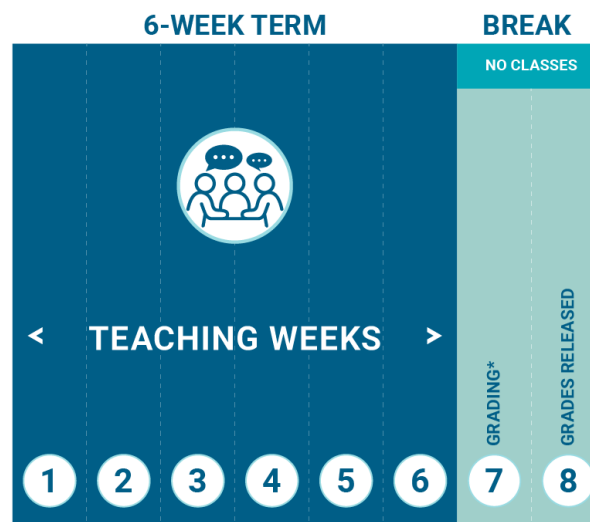
\* Final assessment week for some units





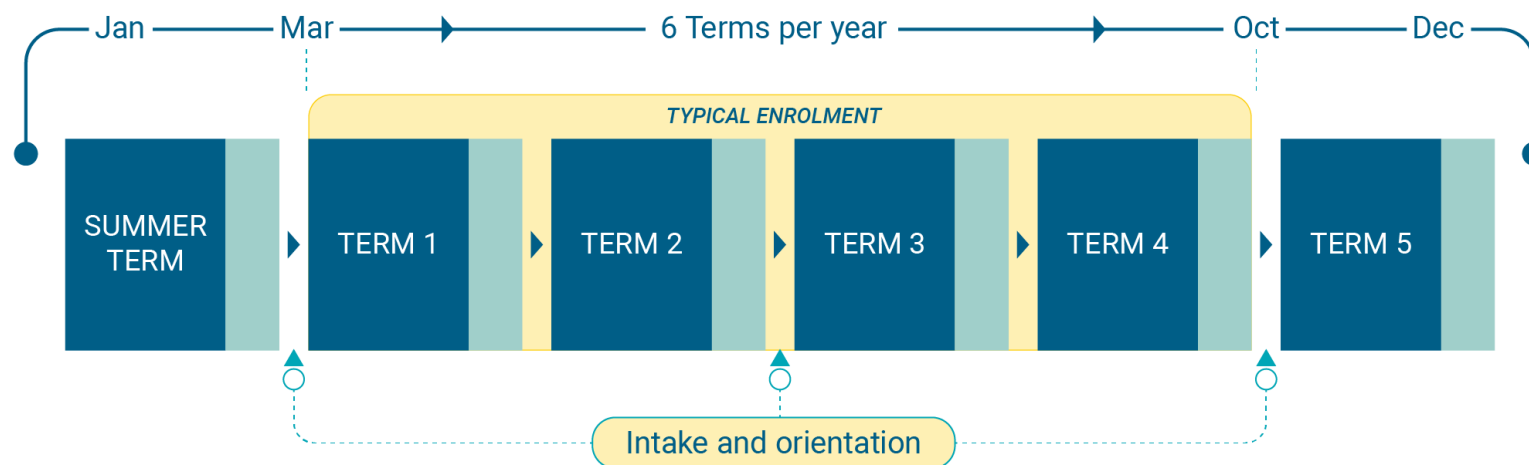
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# The Southern Cross Model



- 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)

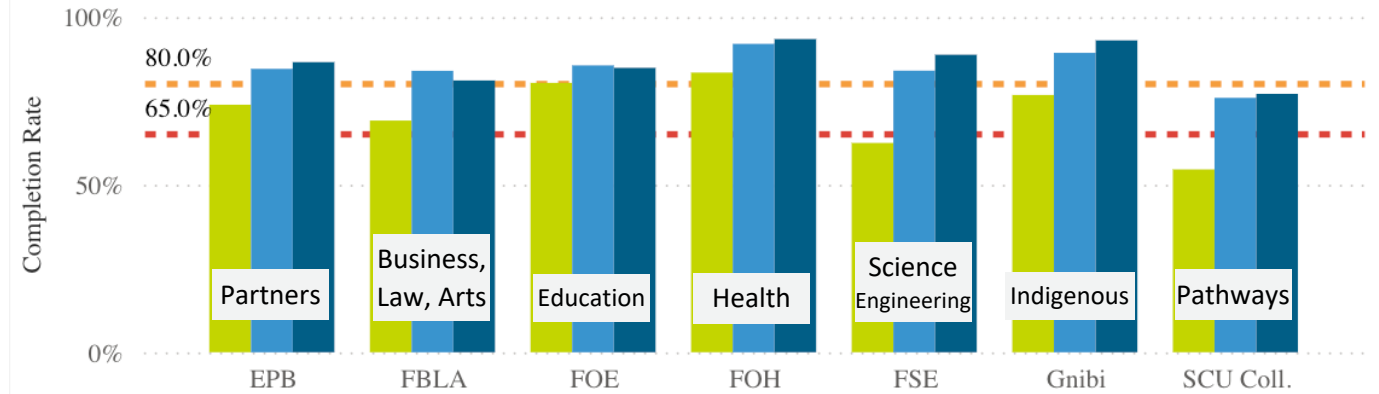
*n* (2019): 51,625

*n* (2023): 56,947

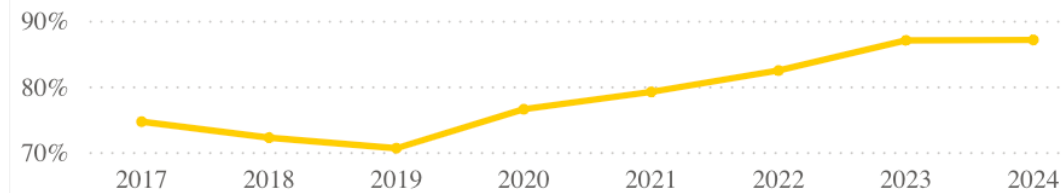
*n* (2024 to date): 14,097

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

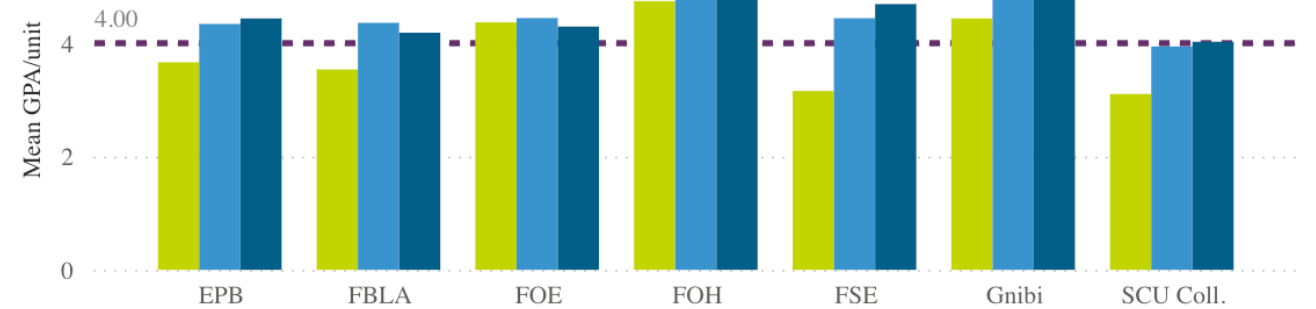


● Unit Success Rate ● Success Rate Sector Avg



Unit Success Mean

2019 70.6%  
2023 87.0%  
2024 87.1%



GPA Mean

2019 3.72  
2023 4.56  
2024 4.49

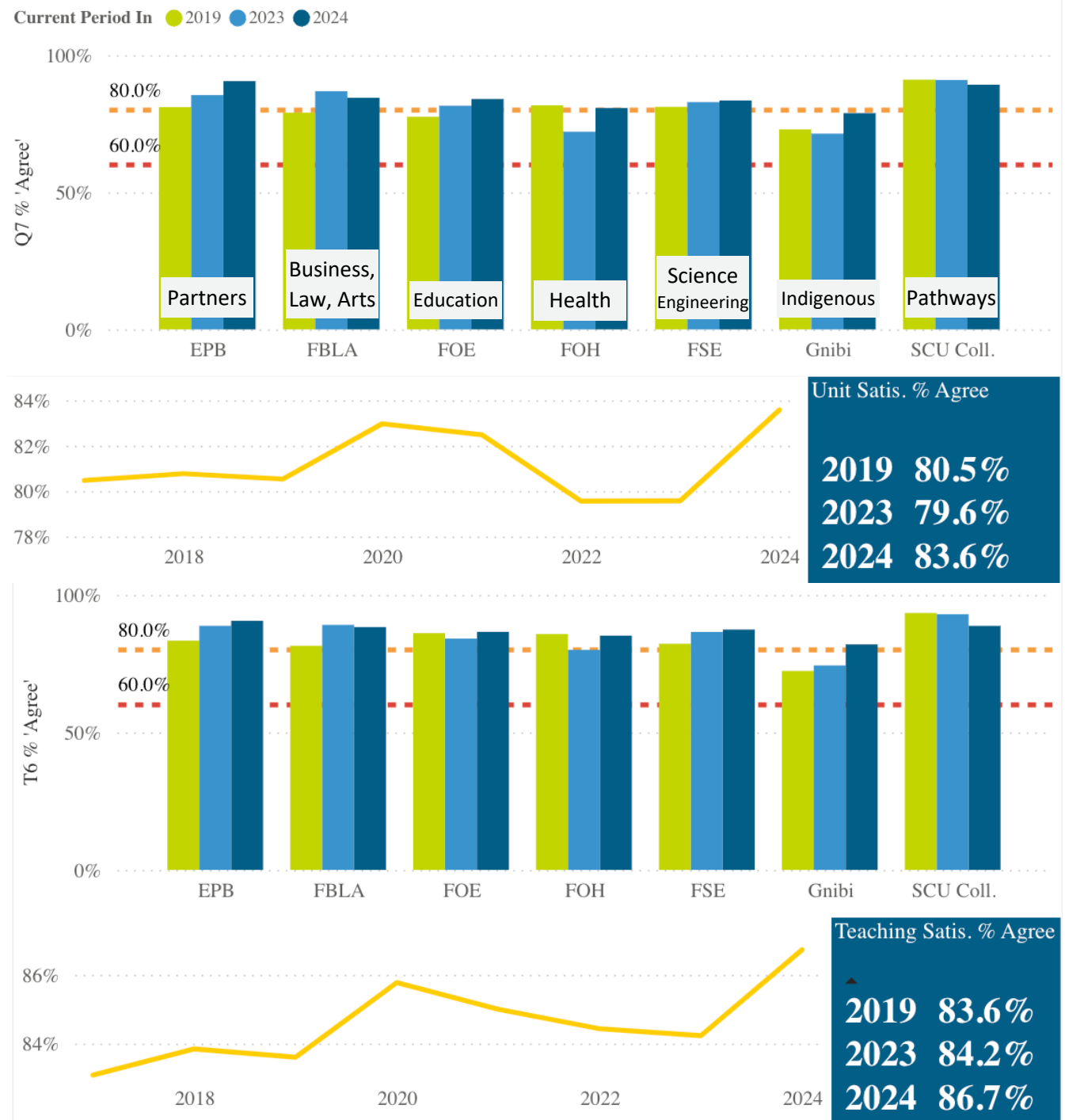


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# Sustained and strong unit and teaching satisfaction

*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







**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\*%

Source: Department of Education, 2023





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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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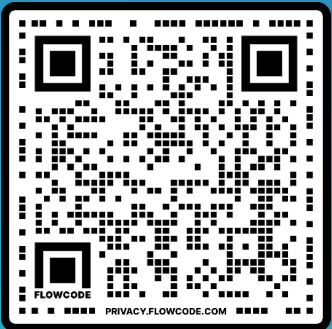




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# Thank you

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SSRN Working Paper  
(Pre-Print) Series

## The Southern Cross Model – Publications

Goode, E., Nieuwoudt, J. E., & Roche, T. (2022). Does online engagement matter? The impact of interactive learning modules and synchronous class attendance on student achievement in an immersive delivery model. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 38(4), 76–94. <https://doi.org/10.14742/ajet.7929>

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