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## Pathways theory of progression through higher education

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### Abstract

This paper is concerned with the pathways students take through their studies at university. A critique of current research demands a fresh approach to explaining student progression, in particular within Australian higher education. To date, theories of student progression commonly consider the fit of the person to the university environment within one rather homogeneous socio-cultural milieu. Socio-ecological approaches provide a new, more appropriate framework for investigating the progression of undergraduate students. Student pathways are conceptualised as a diverse series of choices within the discrete learning contexts of courses. In principle, student pathways and related behavioural outcomes are a function of student characteristics and the supports and constraints within each course. Understanding the differential impact of personal and social characteristics of students and their specific learning contexts contributes to an understanding of the choice behaviour of students as they negotiate common and distinct pathways through courses within the broader context of higher education. This paper presents an appropriate, useful and meaningful theoretical framework for understanding how students navigate the Australian higher education system.

[Link to full text paper pdf \(89KB\)](#)

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