Griffith University Mentoring Program

IMA conference, Orlando 2010. (TITLE SLIDE)

INTRODUCTION

It’s a real privilege for me to be here at this conference and learn from others who are passionate about mentoring.

My name is Dina Fyffe. I live in Brisbane, Australia, where the climate is sub-tropical - very much like here in Orlando. We live on the east coast of Australia, about an hour and a half away from the fabled Gold Coast, which looks like a smaller version of Miami, with all its high-rise beach-front apartments—in fact, one of the Gold Coast suburbs is called Miami.

I’m here today to share with you a little of my experience over the last 11 years of being involved in a University-based Industry Mentoring Program. Griffith University offers over 300 degrees across five campuses. My work is within Student Services as part of the careers team, where our main task is preparing students for transition to graduate employment by means of career counselling, job search seminars, Careers Fairs, and on-line resources, to mention just a few of our services.

I want to emphasise from the start that I’m not an expert in mentoring. My experience of mentoring has all been hands-on, and I hope some of what I say today may be of use to you, and I know that I will learn a great deal from the expertise in this room. I would like this to be an interactive session, so please feel free to comment or ask questions as we go through.

SUMMARY OF TALK—SLIDE 2

Today I would like to outline the background and rationale for Griffith Industry Mentoring Program, look at how we initiated and maintain University-industry connections, and then share a little of the transformative impact mentoring relationships have had on the lives of our students—but let me take you back to the early 90’s

THE SITUATION - SLIDE 3 University

At that time, Griffith University faced a number of critical challenges. It was still relatively new and experiencing culture and identity issues from recent amalgamations, as well as stringent competition from well-established rivals—one a ‘sandstone’ university and the other marketing itself as ‘Real World’. With the added disadvantage of being 15 minutes out of the CBD, Griffith needed to explore strategies that would cut through established positions and connect Griffith and its students directly with industry.
THE SITUATION - SLIDE 3 Students

At the same time, faculty staff noted that graduating students often appeared unclear about career options, lacking understanding of work roles and workplaces within their profession and unsure how to make a confident transition to graduate employment.

Students’ rationale for career choice and their perceptions of professional life often came from dubious sources, such as TV shows (“I enrolled in Criminology because CSI Miami’s really cool” or “I chose Accounting because Uncle Bob’s an accountant, and he makes heaps of money”). The majority of students worked part-time in the hospitality or retail industries so they had some understanding of work demands, however few had reliable information about what went on in a professional workplace or a clear concept of their own vocational identity.

It was apparent to the University that students needed professional role models to facilitate workplace learning and to help them make a confident transition from the culture of the classroom to that of professional life. The University required a strategy that could deliver strong industry connections and transformative learning for its students.

1. In Herr and Kramer’s epic work: Career Guidance and Counselling through the Lifespan, the authors describe Kathy Kram’s study of managers in a northeast public utilities’ firm. She discovered that, and I quote, “… mentors appear to serve two functions: a CAREER function and a PSYCHOSOCIAL function. The psychosocial function is fulfilled by role modeling of appropriate organizational behaviours, of personal and professional concern, providing ongoing support and reinforcement, and acting as a friend”

2. In his paper on student retention, Joe Cuseo also points out that: “Students need, in the words of Carl Rogers, ‘authentic professional human beings who are worthy of emulation’. Students cannot be told how to do this — authenticity cannot be transmitted through lectures.”

3. The findings of three Australian researchers, Hansford, Tennent and Eric, back up Kathy Kram’s comments: “Despite its problems or shortcomings, our research confirmed that mentoring appears to offer numerous, far-reaching benefits. More than half of the students we studied noted that mentoring facilitated some kind of career enhancement.” (Mentoring and tutoring Vol 10 No 2 2002)

4. During a study conducted by Eby, Butts, Lockwood and Simon in 2004, substantial correlations were discovered between learning and career and psychosocial mentoring — and the authors noted that “receiving support from mentors is associated with increased protégé learning.”

5. And finally, well-known mentoring guru, David Clutteruck claims that “Mentoring is a means of smoothing out graduates’ transition from an educational environment (one of the major changes in life) enabling them to settle in quickly.”
Here we have well-respected researchers claiming that mentoring can be a potent strategy for meeting the needs identified by the University, in that it can provide students with:

- professional role models
- authentic learning about professional workplaces and professional life and
- assistance in making a successful transition to graduate employment.

So what is mentoring? There are hundreds of definitions we could use but let’s go back to Clutterbuck and colleague, Megginson. They define mentoring as “offline (or informal) help by one person to another in making significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking to aid personal development, career planning or performance improvement and leadership.

So, for all the reasons we’ve mentioned, and although considered novel at the time, Griffith enlisted mentoring as the device for connecting both the University and its students directly with industry. Students would learn about their chosen field through their engagement with experienced mentors, and the University would be enriched by the re-engagement of its alumni and connections with industry generally.

MAKING THE CONNECTION - SLIDE 4 (first 2 clicks)

Hence in 1994, the Griffith University Mentoring Program was born, with the strong backing of the then Vice Chancellor, Professor Roy Webb. The Program began with a very small number of students and experienced alumni mentors. (One of those original mentors who served the program for 14 years reported that in the first year of the Program - “Mentors joked that we could have met in a phone box there were so few of us!”)

MAKING THE CONNECTION - SLIDE 4 (last click)

Initially, the Program struggled along with small numbers, but then late in ’98 it underwent substantial changes. Resources were comprehensively increased, places in the Program significantly expanded from about 49 mentees and mentors to 150 of each, and I was appointed as the first full-time mentoring coordinator (I managed the Program for 7 years but now have stepped back to part-time and Tiana Fenton manages the Program). Over the past 11 years, formal and informal feedback has provided impetus for far-reaching changes, in particular:

- Mentors are now identified and recruited for their expertise and corporate affiliations;
- Mentees and mentors receive more comprehensive training in establishing, developing and concluding mentoring relationships;
- On-line and hard copy brochures have been produced to publicise the Program;
- A web/database interface has been developed to facilitate program administration and matching of mentors and mentees;
• Resources have been written (Mentoring Handbook, Mentoring Logbook and compulsory reporting proformas);
• Mentors and mentees agree and sign off on written goals for their mentoring relationships;
• Functions were strengthened – each Program commences and concludes with high-profile networking events at inner-city hotels in Brisbane and on the Gold Coast;
• Medium and long-term mentors are now recognized with awards from the University;
• Mentors’ supervisors or managers are advised annually about the valued contributions of their staff by means of a letter from the Vice Chancellor,
• Students are awarded certificates on completion of the Program and
• Program processes are constantly re-visited in the light of annual evaluations.

In regard to these changes, a long-standing mentor from the Environmental Protection Agency commented: I have participated in the Griffith Industry Mentoring Program since 2001. I have been impressed with the program from the outset of my involvement and seen it develop in relation to the opportunities and the support services and the materials provided to students and mentors. The administration of the Program has been consistently of the finest calibre—professional, timely and engaging. (Bob Spiers, General Manager, Community Partnerships, QLD Dept of Natural Resources and Water)

Two Programs, Brisbane and Gold Coast, now run concurrently during the second semester of the university year— from July to October, with a total of 400 participants. Students and mentors now represent the full range of disciplines taught at Griffith.

The Griffith Program follows the relational model in which the learner is regarded as a valued equal who happens to have specific support needs, and where issues of respect and trust play a large part.

We use choice-based matching. Students visit the Mentoring website where they can view biosketches of mentors in their discipline and apply for the three that most closely match their career aspirations. Research confirms that allowing the learner to choose their mentor increases psychological ownership and commitment on the part of the mentee.

The Program requires mentors and mentees to have at least 6 one-hour meetings during the semester, but most partners spend a great deal more time together, with many students undertaking regular work experience or projects, half to one day a week.

Griffith mentors come from a range of organisations, including large corporations, state and local government, small to medium enterprises, not-for-profit organisations, and less commonly, single-owner businesses. To name a few of the local organisations providing mentors to Griffith students: IBM Australia, PricewaterHouseCoopers, Goldman Sachs, The Marriott, The Australian Broadcasting Commission, The (Queensland Government) Department of Premier and Cabinet, The Queensland Symphony Orchestra and the Gold Coast City Council.
MENTORING GOALS AND ACTIVITIES  SLIDE 5

Mentors assist students to:

• Gain a better understanding of relevant career paths
• Build professional networks with key people in their field
• Develop a clear knowledge of organizational structure and culture and
• Learn about the day-to-day requirements of a professional work role.

MENTORING GOALS AND ACTIVITIES  SLIDE 6

These goals are achieved when mentors provide students with opportunities to:

• Talk with people in various positions in the organization & discuss career /employment issues
• Network with mentors colleagues and attend workplace and professional association meetings
• Observe workplace activities and undertake work experience or projects under supervision
• Find help with resume preparation and interview skills and
• experience first-hand the social, cultural, financial and economic realities of the organization.

DISCUSSION OF MENTORING DIAGRAM

Would you please take out the sheet with a diagram.

Here you can clearly see the three stakeholders - THE UNIVERSITY, INDUSTRY (represented by mentors) and STUDENTS (mentees).

The University has two goals -

firstly to help their students to become job ready and to make a successful move to a graduate job, but also to foster beneficial connections with industry.

Industry on the other hand can see benefits in developing a relationship with a local university as well as wanting to ‘try before they buy’ in regard to graduate employment while also hoping to give something back to the professionals of tomorrow.

Students meanwhile feel quite unprepared to make the leap from university to graduate employment and are aware of their lack of understanding of professional workplaces.

Here you see the Griffith Industry Mentoring Program as the broker of services to the three stakeholders and the diagram shows how we seek to meet the needs of each stakeholder. You may like to take a few moments to study the diagram.
Mentoring staff recruit, match and train both mentors and mentees while supporting and monitoring the mentoring relationship. Our hope is that mentoring will move the student through enhanced career clarity and professional confidence to being at least job ready or actually gaining employment through the program. You’ll note for each stakeholder there is both giving and gaining.

Read the other sections and ask for comments or questions.

PROGRAM PROCESSES - SLIDE 7

Mentoring staff see our annual tasks to: RECRUIT, PROMOTE, MATCH, TRAIN, LAUNCH, MONITOR, CELEBRATE AND EVALUATE (go through slide and comment briefly on each).

I’d like to take a moment to walk you through the database and online system.

• SLIDE 8 - Here you see the Mentoring Program Home Page—from there, prospective mentors can download the brochure and listen to podcasts from mentors and students. From there they can also register. One of the key parts to the program is requiring mentors to enter their biosketch (and we have clear guidelines for this).

• SLIDE 9 - This is a small sample of mentors’ bios—you can see they are categorized according to discipline. The site is open for five weeks from March 15. Students will go to this site and apply for mentors that most closely match their career aspirations.

• SLIDE 10 - The next slide shows you the details page we have for all mentors (the same for mentees) 5 pages in all. (indicate ‘Mail in database’ sent at start of each program)

• SLIDE 11 - At the start of each year’s program, this Automated email is sent to all mentors.

• SLIDE 12 - Shows mentoring details page (note different sections).

• SLIDE 13 - scope of the mentoring database

Indicate that some of the training materials are on the table. During training these two booklets are given out (MENTORING HANDBOOK AND MENTORING LOGBOOK - HOLD UP). YOU CAN ALSO SEE SOME OF THE TRAINING MATERIALS FOR MENTORS AND MENTEES.

At the first meeting following the launch, pairs are expected to discuss and fill in the Mentoring Agreement. By the end of Week 6, both the Mentoring Agreement and the Progress Report are forwarded to Program staff. This way we are able to identify and address problem areas before they become entrenched. (Copy of the Agreement and Progress Report passed around)
I’d like to stop for discussion at this point. Could we think about these questions?
Are there any features, strategies or proformas from the Griffith Program that may be useful in your mentoring situation?

How might this type of Program work at your College?

Or alternatively, do you have any suggestions as to how the Griffith Program could be further developed or improved?

Would you please move into groups of three or four. We’ll take 10 minutes to discuss these questions and then come back together to hear from one another.

TRANSFORMATION

So what are these transformations that happen during industry mentoring? Firstly, a great deal of invaluable learning takes place. To quote Clutterbuck, “In practice, mentors provide a spectrum of learning and supporting behaviours”. Student feedback confirms this view: “Participating in the Mentoring Program with Queensland Rail has been one of the most significant and valuable learning experiences of my degree”, and “I have learned an incredible amount, grown and become so much more confident.” The mentee’s learning may be about work roles and workplace culture or structure, but may also include learning about themselves - how their own skills fit with workplace requirements, how to become more confident as a graduate job-seeker, and so on.

Some make the assumption that learning necessarily occurs through the transmission of factual knowledge or information, whether in context or not.

In regard to this, Professor Michelle Barker from Griffith believes that “The Industry Mentoring Program helps students (who are ‘professionals-in-training’) learn through observing how other professionals conduct themselves. This opportunity provides much more powerful teaching than any textbook could ever achieve!” Industry mentoring is very definitely ‘learning in context’.

Clearly every mentoring partnership is unique, and each evaluation we receive tells a different story. For many students, this experience confirms their interest and commitment to their chosen profession while for a few their experience indicates the need to move to another career. Students comment: “The Program motivated me in my career search and my career goal became clear and defined.” while another student wrote in his evaluation, “The Mentoring Program confirmed my career change choice”.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

We hear anecdotally how students are doing during the Program but students and mentors are asked to fill in a comprehensive evaluation at the conclusion.
READ - Here are a few stats from last year’s Program.

There are so many exciting stories that have come out of the program we’d be here all day if I start, so I’ll just share a few such good news story. One of the long-term mentors writes:

This is an extract of the email from Christine Soo - my first mentee. She worked with me for 2 years at the Audit Office - starting as a graduate — then left when she reached my level.

“I have just survived my first week with JP Morgan Chase as a Derivatives Securities Product Accountant in the Accounting and Control section for the entire London credit markets business line. Watching and trying to keep up with my colleagues whilst they manipulate across two monitors with multiple systems and windows open with the fastest speeds (people hardly use the mouse here) seriously made me question a few times if I was really up to the job! But fears and insecurities aside, I guess I’m really humbled and blessed that I’ve been given this once in a million opportunity to be learn how a top banking organisation operates and work with the top professionals in the field.”

The two leading radio stations on the Gold Coast have consistently employed their mentees each year since early 2000. One of these mentees is now the media officer for the local Federal government member and has returned to the Program as a mentor. Another features regularly on national TV news. One mentee was employed by his mentor’s radio station and last year won the Gold Coast’s ‘Best new media talent for 2009’.

Some mentoring continues beyond the end of the formal Program. Professor Ged Williams of Griffith, who, among other achievements, has been International Adviser to the American Nursing Credentialling Centre since 2003, is passionate about improving health in developing countries. He recounts the story of his recent mentoring:

“I have been mentoring Nyara Manzini, a Zimbabwean student since 2008. She was studying Bioscience at Griffith. She worked hard to get into Medicine, then was hit with $40,000 per year fees as an international student!! We worked together to gain sponsorship for 2009 fees from Lions International. Then we received advice she could have refugee status, so 2010-2012 she will receive HECS equivalent and can pay back her debt post qualification. It was fate that we met and were able to work through this together - full credit to Nyara though; she’s an incredibly resilient and determined young woman.”

Staff have a particular commitment to including students with disability in the Program. A few of these from past Programs come to mind. We have had several hearing-impaired and visually-impaired students, and two who used wheelchairs. We always provide whatever support is needed so that these students can take full advantage of the opportunities offered.
For hearing-impaired students we organise a sign-language interpreter to accompany them to functions and to their mentor’s workplace. One of the visually-impaired students, Lisa Hudson, was matched with a mentor for the Queensland Tourism Bureau. The organisation was so impressed with the quality of her work that they hired her part time during the Program, then full time after that. From there she went to Japan to work for the Queensland government. I’m confident she is making her mark wherever she’s now working.

SIDE 15 - audience reads slide

I won’t talk further about student feedback, but you can read what students have had to say about their experience on the sheet you received.

SLIDES 15 & 16 We’re going to have a look at some more stats from 2009. Outcomes and Activities from the Program.

SLIDE 16 - Last year, 53% of our mentors were alumni with 47% having no previous contact with Griffith. Importantly, 22% of non-alumni mentors had additional contact with Griffith on the basis of their involvement in the Program. This year, we are working towards gaining library access for our mentors.

MENTOR FEEDBACK

Mentoring literature shows clearly that learning is not confined to mentees. Kathy Kram argues that mentoring could be of as much benefit to the mentor as to the protégé.

Clutterbuck concurs: “These same benefits seem to apply broadly to mentors as well. The principal benefit described by mentors ... is the learning they acquire from the experience.”

Mentors describe the rewards of their involvement.

- “I have gained great personal satisfaction in helping to establish an emerging professional in her career.”
- “The Program facilitated my exposure to graduates as potential future employees.”
- “I have honed my mentoring and coaching skills and have enjoyed articulating my work environment to others.”

From last year’s evaluations, mentors reported:

79% - My participation was valuable for me
89% - Resources very helpful or helpful
86% - Student match Excellent or VG
One mentor gained tangible benefits from his mentee. He reports, "My mentee Judith had all the up-to-date information on marketing and international business. She highlighted the importance of the internet in promoting our products and strengthening our brand image. The corporate website she assisted me with recently secured an $80,000 export order to Changi Airport in Singapore.

Griffith highly values the contribution of our mentors. 9 current mentors have served for over 11 years while 139 current mentors have passed the 3 year mark.

Research and experience confirm that those who have been successfully mentored themselves are likely to want to mentor others. Mentees, now established in their careers are increasingly becoming mentors for current students. There are now over 20 returned mentees. We actually now have the first second-generation mentor!

SLIDE 19 - A MENTOR COMMENTS (audience can read slide)

MONITORING CHALLENGES - SLIDE 20

Many mentoring matches turn out brilliantly but some are problematic and others fail for a variety of reasons: mismatch of personality, lack of commitment of either party, unrealistic expectations of mentees, change of circumstances for one or other, to mention just a few.

With about 23% of mentees being international students (mainly from Asia and the sub-continent, though there are significant numbers from Africa and the Middle East), we sometimes find that a lack of experience in Australian work environment impacts on the mentoring relationship.

Could we spend a few minutes now discussing these questions:

What problematic issues have arisen in your mentoring program?
How did they impact on the mentoring relationship? and

What steps did you take to address/resolve these issues?

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL RECOGNITION

And finally: because of the longevity and success of the industry mentoring program, Griffith has now holistically embraced mentoring by promoting the development of “University-wide and element-specific mentoring programs” as a commitment in its Academic Plan. We now have a mentoring@griffith website with more peer mentoring programs springing up each year.

There are numerous examples of recognition from universities, business and community groups. For example, at least five universities have adapted segments of the Program to meet
their mentoring needs. In a national sweep of mentoring programs, Deakin University mentioned the Griffith Program as one of four consistently recognised by other Australian universities, and in 2008, Griffith industry Mentoring Program was awarded a National Citation by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council.

CONCLUSION - SLIDE 21

I believe that the success of the Griffith Industry Mentoring Program has demonstrated that mentoring relationships can provide transformative workplace learning for students on the threshold of their careers, and facilitate valuable connections between educational institutions and the workplace.

*The rigour of tracking the scope and content of the mentoring relationship has evolved to a point of simple effective good practice, reflecting the level of sophistication generally that delivers excellent, predictable and time-efficient benefits to both students and mentors.*

Other topics for discussion if time permits.

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* Isn't it the case that new inventions, new programs, and other initiatives nearly always arise out of an identified deficit, shortfall or need. Could we hear from one person who has been involved in initiating a mentoring program. Would you be willing to share two things with us - firstly, what was the major need of your target group and secondly, as you looked around for solutions, why did you select mentoring as a strategy for meeting those needs? Would you please keep your comments to 2-3 minutes.

______________________________________________________________________________

* The Griffith Program is continually evolving, with revisions made every year—some minor, others more far-reaching. Is there someone in the audience who would be willing to share with us one way in which you have utilised participant feedback to fine-tune your program and so obtain a better outcome.