Lessons learned from 4 years of Peer Mentoring in a Tiered Group Program

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Overview

- Rationale for Peer Mentoring within university settings
- Description of the Program
  - Implementation
  - Ongoing Evaluation
- Lessons learned over 4 years
  - Recruitment, Matching, Feedback
Within the University setting

Peer Mentoring programs have demonstrated potential to facilitate
- transition to university
- a sense of belonging
- improved retention & student persistence
- enhanced skill development.

Benefits for both Mentors and Mentees

- Low/no cost
- Complement existing transition/retention strategies
Description of the Program

- Peer Mentoring Program for First Year Students in Education (2006-2009)
- Offered primarily at one campus – Mt Gravatt campus
- 6 week Group program - Weeks 1-6 – an hour per week
- Follows compulsory one-off Peer Mentor session offered in Orientation
- First Year Students are matched with a Mentor (2nd, 3rd or 4th year Edn student)
- Matched by Program (B. Education Primary, Secondary, Special Education, Applied Theatre, Technology Education)
- Where possible, matched to similar age and gender of mentors
- Tiered Mentoring Model
  - First Year Advisors (FYA), Counselling staff and the Program Coordinator provide ongoing support to Mentors
Implementation: Recruitment

- Recruitment of Mentors via academic staff/email/previous Mentees

- Recruitment of Mentees via
  - Letter and Application form sent out prior to Orientation
  - Application form from one-off Orientation Peer Mentor session
  - University web site – Mentoring@ Griffith
Implementation: Training

Training of Mentors
- 2 hour Training program in Orientation
- Conducted by Counsellors and Coordinator
- Handbook on the Program with all documentation

Training included
- Role and responsibilities of Mentors
- Limits and Boundaries
- Conducting Mentoring sessions
- Referring students for additional assistance within University
- Checklist for First Year Students
- Support for Mentors

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Ongoing Evaluation

- Pre and Post questionnaires (in 2009 electronic format)
  - adapted from the Institutional Integration Scales
    (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980)
  - 10 items on 5 point Likert scale comparing First Year Students’ expectations of university with actual experience after first 6 weeks
  - Post questionnaire included additional items rating their satisfaction with the Program / Mentor and qualitative feedback

- Weekly electronic reports from Mentors to linked First Year Advisors/Counsellors/Program Coordinator
  - Attendance
  - Issues covered in Mentor session
  - Concerns about individual Students or managing the Group

- Review meetings/Focus Groups in Weeks 3 & 7
  - Mentors reported on progress of Groups
  - Attended by Counsellors, Program Coordinator and in some years First Year Advisors
  - Minutes circulated to those who could not attend
  - Sharing of strategies for conducting Peer Mentor sessions

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Lessons learned over 4 years

Recruitment

- Multiple avenues
  - Letters, emails to enrolled First Year Students
  - Orientation Peer Mentor sessions
  - Announcements in initial lectures
  - Endorsement by key academic staff – First Year Advisors, Course Convenors
  - University website Mentoring@Griffith

- Application process
  - One page information sheet and application form
  - Collects contact details (preferred email address, landline, mobile), degree program, student number, equity target groups
  - Reply paid envelopes for mailed application forms
  - Applications collected by Mentors at Orientation Mentor session
  - Online forms from University website with return email address

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Lessons learned over 4 years cont.

Matching Mentors and First Year Students

- By degree program (Primary, Secondary Education, Applied Theatre etc)
- Time ie availability to attend
  (Tip: use student numbers to find common time in University timetable for FYS and Mentors)
- Generally by age and gender
- Encourage Mentors to be sensitive to the differences between mature age vs school leavers and foster collaboration rather than competition

Group size and composition

- Larger groups (8-10) allow for some attrition
- Paired Mentors provide greater diversity for FYS in terms of age, experience, personality

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Lessons learned over 4 years cont.

Maintenance of Groups

- Having paired Mentors means tasks can be divided/shared to suit Mentors’ needs e.g. emailing vs phoning FYS
- Offer incentives for FYS to attend e.g. breakfast to share if Peer Mentor session has to be scheduled early i.e. 8.00am
- Send texts/telephone call the night before each group to remind students of Peer Mentor session
- Send encouraging texts/telephone calls at the end of Week 1 to congratulate First Year Students on having survived the first week
- Set goals/tasks for the group in response to identified concerns
Demographics of cohort:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics of program participants 2006-2009 (Total N=211)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age category of participant</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School leaver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-21yo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-25yo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mature-aged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Campus attended</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mt Gravatt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Degree program</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.Ed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.Ed.Sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.Tech.Ed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.App.Theatre</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comprised approx 25% of enrolments

Overall the cohort was mainly comprised of:
- female
- school leavers & young adults
- enrolled in Primary & Secondary education programs

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Lessons learned – qualitative feedback

What did you like about participating in the Peer Mentoring Program?

5 Key themes over 4 years:

- Ask/Discuss/Talk: 25%
- Meet others/Make Friends: 24%
- Advice/Help/Guidance: 24%
- Value of Mentors: 15%
- How to survive at Uni: 11%

Key Themes over 4 years (2006-2009)
Ask/Talk/Discuss: examples

- Having someone to ask all the stupid questions
- You could ask your Mentor and there was no such thing as a ‘stupid question’
- Having someone who had done the assignment or similar one to it
- A chance to talk to people who had already gone through their first year
- You could ask heaps of questions, get other points of view and just be told it is going to be OK
- A good place to vent, pick up ideas and generally engage in discussion about how we are going

Meet others/make friends: examples

- I loved meeting some like minded mature age students
- Chance to meet other students – they are now my friends and system of support
- Just knowing everyone is experiencing similar problems is a relief
- It was great for easing the transition from high school. I’ve met new people …
- It was good to get to know other students…that I was not alone

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Advice/help/guidance: examples

- It's good to know what things are going to be like later on
- Good support and positive advice
- Feedback on what I am doing
- Made it a lot easier for me to understand what is expected of me
- Getting help with interpreting assessment
- They give you valuable information and reassure you that you are doing the right thing

Value of Mentors: examples

- Someone who’s ‘been there, done that’
- Tips on how to cope with workload, time management
- Knowing where to go to for help
- Support and encouragement to keep going

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How to survive University: examples

- *It helped me to settle in and it was good to have someone to talk to about things I didn’t understand*
- *Having someone to help me settle into uni and give me tips on how to approach situations*
- *Made me feel more confident about uni life*
- *Made you feel more confident about the whole uni experience*
Was there anything you disliked or thought could be improved?

Majority of responses were overwhelmingly positive

Only a handful of suggestions for improvement:
- More meetings and more fun
- More chocolate
- Maybe it could be longer than 6 weeks

Would you recommend the PMP to first year students?

Majority of responses were overwhelmingly positive

96% (N=99) said they would recommend the program to other FYS

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What do you think you gained from participating in the PMP?

- Confidence/motivation
- More understanding about Uni life
- Friends/networks/ongoing relationships
- Not alone/support/help
- Mentoring very helpful
- Helped with study/academic program
- Helped with handling stress/coping with Uni

**Question 15  2006-2009 (incl)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reduced anxiety/handling</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped with study/academic program</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring very helpful</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not alone/support/help is available</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends/networks/ongoing relationships</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More insight/understanding about Uni life</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gained confidence/motivation</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What was gained from participation in PMP?

Examples:

- A couple of people I knew dropped out as they found it overwhelming whereas I had the confidence (knowledge) to stick to it
- Exposure to mentors’ enthusiasm and commitment
- I adapted to Uni life quicker and better than I would have without it
- Comfort that the road ahead is achievable
- Uni life is so different from anything I have ever seen and the program helped me realise how easy things really were despite how they appeared and this was due to the one on one help I got from the Mentor
- Sense of perspective, reassured of journey ahead etc.
- Confidence, friendship
- Knowing that others have been down this path, there are hurdles, but to stick it out and get there in the end
- Knowledge of where I can find help and friendships
- Help
- I have gained an understanding of where my course is headed and it provided me with an opportunity to get to know older students as well as those in my course
- Confidence and a sense that I belong here – it’s not so scary
Lessons learned – quantitative feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expected versus actual</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>p-value</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satisfying friends</td>
<td>.462**</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>&lt; 0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfying academic experience</td>
<td>.400**</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>&lt; 0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with other students positively influence intellectual growth and interest in ideas</td>
<td>.354**</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>&lt; 0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturers and tutors genuinely interested in teaching</td>
<td>.264*</td>
<td>.020</td>
<td>&lt; 0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intend to stay and complete program</td>
<td>.052</td>
<td>.654</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to do things as well as others</td>
<td>.266*</td>
<td>.019</td>
<td>&lt; 0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied with program of study</td>
<td>.227*</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>&lt; 0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel stressed about uni life</td>
<td>.263*</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td>&lt; 0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worry about not belonging</td>
<td>.436**</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>&lt; 0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studies will prepare me well for work</td>
<td>.124</td>
<td>.281</td>
<td>NS</td>
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</table>

NS = Not significant

Generally speaking, university experiences of FYS 6 weeks into semester tended to match their expectations at the start of semester (e.g. those expecting to find satisfying friendships were more likely to experience satisfying friendships).
Did matching Mentors and First Year Students pay off?

At the end of the 6-week Peer Mentor Program, Mentees who reported a higher similarity with their Mentors were also more likely to report:

» feeling good about the Peer Mentoring experience \( (N=102, r=0.63, p<0.01) \)

» being more satisfied with friendships at university \( (N=102, r=0.3, p<0.01) \)

» being more positively influenced in their intellectual growth and interest in ideas by these relationships \( (N=101, r=0.45, p<0.01) \)

» feeling that their lecturers and tutors were more genuinely interested in teaching, and \( (N=102, r=0.28, p<0.01) \)

Interestingly they also were more likely to report:

» that their studies were preparing them well for work \( (N=102, r=0.4, p<0.01) \)
Did the PMP have an influence on the social and academic experiences of First Year Students?

Following participation in the PMP, FYS expectations and actual experiences of university changed for the better in regards to:

- Feeling stressed
- Worry about not belonging
- Having a satisfying academic experience
- Seeing academics as genuinely interested in teaching
- Gaining work preparedness

### Comparison of expected versus actual social and academic experiences of university

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Pre Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Post Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Amount Changed</th>
<th>p</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feel stressed about uni life</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>4.2 (0.9)</td>
<td>3.6 (1.0)</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worry about not belonging</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>2.8 (1.1)</td>
<td>2.4 (1.0)</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
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<tr>
<td>Satisfying academic experience</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>4.3 (0.6)</td>
<td>4.0 (0.7)</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>&lt; 0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturers and tutors genuinely interested in teaching</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>4.4 (0.7)</td>
<td>4.1 (0.7)</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>&lt; 0.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>Studies will prepare me well for work</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>4.5 (0.7)</td>
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<td>77</td>
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<td>0.0</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to do things as well as others</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>3.9 (0.8)</td>
<td>4.1 (0.7)</td>
<td>-0.2</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.0</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary of lessons learned/outcomes

Recruitment:
» Use multiple avenues
» Make application process simple & user friendly
» Gaining endorsement & support from key academics is critical

Mentors/Group size:
» Using paired mentors not only enhances the Peer Mentoring experience for the First Year students but also provides an avenue of added support amongst the mentors
» Matching Mentors/FYSs is critical to a more positive Mentoring experience, feeling more socially & academically connected and supported, and experiencing studies as worthwhile
» Larger groups are better in terms of facilitating social connectedness and reducing the impact of attrition

The Peer Mentoring experience:
» Students found the Peer Mentoring overwhelmingly positive
» Mostly liked the social opportunities rather than the information & and academic help
» Gained confidence and a greater sense of belonging through the friendships and ongoing relationships that were developed
» Was associated with feeling less stressed and worrying less about belonging cf their initial expectations of university.
» Also associated with a more satisfying, genuine and worthwhile sense of the academic experience cf their initial expectations.

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