

Action Learning through Mentoring

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The Mentor Program at the University of Ballarat developed out of an identified need in the first year student population for additional support to assist their transition to university life. With 63% of undergraduate students at UB being the first in their family to undertake higher education, the specialised program uses an action learning approach to provide structured support and guidance at the start of the university year, when it matters most.

The Mentor Program employs students who have already experienced life as a first year undergraduate at UB to mentor new students from Orientation Week through to the end of the first teaching period, with special focus given to the first six weeks of study. This coordinated and centrally supported transition program creates awareness among first year students that the transition to university can often include social, academic and personal changes. Most importantly, the Program acts as a conduit to the student voice which assists the University to respond to identified needs. During the first phase of the program (weeks one to six), Mentors attend weekly meetings with a dedicated Transition Officer, who monitors feedback from them about week-by-week issues encountered by first year students.

With input of the University's Transition Committee, this feedback is used to guide the second phase of the program, which continues from weeks 7 to 10. In this phase, projects with a transition focus are developed by Mentors with the aim of further enhancing the first-year experience. A key part in the process is Mentor input into project parameters. In collaboration with their School, Mentors create projects that have either a School-based focus, or they may combine with Mentors from other schools to take on a Program-wide focus. Not only does this phase provide a framework for Mentors to develop leadership qualities and an opportunity for positive interaction between students and staff, it also constructs an original platform for the student voice.