

Stars on campus: Designing student mentoring programs to build mentors' sense of community, connections and engagement with other students and the university

Sophie Relf (Division of Education, Arts and Social Sciences) and Tristana Sidoryn (Division of Business) University of South Australia

This session will present two case studies of student peer-mentoring programs (Business Mates and Div EAS Mentors) from the University of South Australia. Although universities have traditionally established student mentoring programs with a focus on the transition of commencing students into university, there is evidence of the considerable benefits for continuing students involved as mentors. There will be discussion on the program designs with a focus on the strategies for valuing the student mentors and enhancing their sense of community.

It is argued that it is vitally important to the success of a student mentoring program to focus on strategies designed to develop the student mentors' sense of community, connections and engagement with other students and the university. It is through having a student mentoring program where the student mentors feel engaged that the benefits to new students (mentees) are increased. A recent Australasian Survey of Student Engagement has found students who work on campus have increased learning outcomes. The authors take this proposal a step further and argue that involvement in university volunteer programs also increases students' sense of engagement with their university.

While the Business Mates and Div EAS Mentor programs have different student cohorts, evidence suggests that student mentors have been satisfied with the programs and have noticeable benefits for their own sense of engagement with university life. Both the Business Mates and the Div EAS Mentors identified their interest in increasing their own social networks and the desire to give something back, as they had been assisted by student mentors when they were a first year student.

The evaluation results will be discussed for the two mentoring programs. Both quantitative and qualitative results from 2008-9 will be provided. A focus of the student mentoring programs has been on implementing strategies aimed at making the mentors feel more valued by the university. Strategies have included peer support structures (such as Mentor Leader roles) and acknowledgement events for the university to recognise the contributions of the mentors. An important part of this session will be the audience sharing experiences on how other universities have built effective student mentoring programs and the strategies implemented to value the student mentors' role.

Session Plan:

1. Outline of the student peer-mentoring programs (Business Mates and Div EAS Mentors) from the University of South Australia.
2. The evaluation results from 2008-9 will be provided.
3. The strategies aimed at making the student mentors feel more valued will be discussed.
4. Discussion with the audience:
 - how other universities have built effective student mentoring programs
 - the strategies implemented to value the student mentors' role