PEER MENTORING PROGRAM
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HOW TO IMPLEMENT A PEER MENTORING PROGRAM
A USER’S GUIDE

Julie Grove and Gail Huon
Counselling Service School of Psychology
UNSW UNSW
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Preamble

Peer mentoring

The term, “mentoring”, refers to a supportive relationship that is characterised by constructive role-modelling, encouragement towards raised aspirations, and by positive reinforcement for the achievement of goals. Peer mentoring at university typically involves the support and guidance for beginning students from more experienced students, often within the same discipline or because of some other area of interest. Peer mentoring is an important strategy for assisting First Year students during their transition to university.

This manual

The overriding aim of this mentoring manual is to assist those who want to develop and implement a peer mentoring program for a group of students. It is not a mentoring program. Rather, it is a manual for those who want to get a mentoring program up and running. There are mentoring program manuals in various schools across UNSW. This manual is designed to complement those.

The principles behind this manual recognize the importance of sound planning for the program, careful recruitment and training of the mentors, effective dissemination of information for potential mentees, and sensitivity to mentoring group formation. Our approach also rests on the assumption that attention to various infrastructure issues will increase the likelihood of the smooth-running of a mentoring program. In addition, evaluating the extent to which the program meets its objectives should be regarded as mandatory.

The content of this manual was carefully designed, therefore, to address those areas of need. The content is generic, and we hope it is useful, therefore, for any colleagues who are wanting to set up a mentoring program, whatever their discipline or whichever group of students is their focus.

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Planning your mentoring program

Careful planning is an important component of the development of any mentoring program. Planning includes thinking about the rationale for the program, and about what it was that influenced your decision to start a program. Sometimes, for example, the impetus for starting a mentoring program is to address the identified needs of a specific group of students (for example, students from rural areas who have enrolled at a large metropolitan university) or the specific skills required to prepare students for a particular course that they must enrol in (somewhat like a bridging course). More generally, however, mentoring programs are thought to be a useful way to enhance student satisfaction and to improve student retention.

It is also advisable in the planning stage to find out about existing support services, both within the school or faculty and those that are offered centrally, and to decide how your program will complement those facilities.

Aims and objectives

Before you embark on your program, you therefore need to give careful thought to what it is that you want to achieve. In other words, you should clearly specify the aims of your program as well as its objectives.

A principal aim of many mentoring programs at the tertiary level is to assist first year students in their transition to University. The objectives of such programs are to help students

- to develop and enhance a sense of student identity,
- to become effectively integrated into the school, faculty and campus as a whole,
- to articulate a sense of purpose about being at university and about pursuing their particular program of study, and
- to acquire the necessary skills to become independent and life-long learners.

Having clearly identified your aims at the outset, you can more easily make subsequent decisions about the scope and the focus of the program. So, for example, two of the earliest decisions to be taken are whether the mentoring program is to be school- or faculty-based, and whether mentoring is to be offered to all new students or only to those in a particular degree program or other discrete group.

Being clear about the objectives of your mentoring program is an essential part of the evaluation process. In order to know how successful your mentoring program has been, you need to know how well it has met its objectives.

Design and structure

The design and structure of your mentoring program are closely tied to its aims and objectives. In deciding on the design and structure of your program, you need to give thought to the following issues.

First, is the issue of the size and the composition of mentoring groups.

- You need first to decide whether the mentoring sessions will be open group (drop-in format) or a context in which the same group of students meet together for the duration of the mentoring program (that is, closed groups).
• Having answered that first question, you then need to decide how many mentees you intend to have in each group, and whether mentors will work alone or with a co-mentoring partner.

• Bearing in mind the total number of mentees you anticipate, it then becomes clearer how many mentoring groups you will need to establish, and also, how many mentors you will need to recruit to help run your program.

The second issue concerns the **kind** or **format** of mentoring that you want to set up.

• An initial question here is whether you have (or intend to have) a structured or semi-structured program for the mentoring sessions, or you are proposing that mentoring be more akin to a social gathering.

• Questions that follow from that of course are, how long mentoring will run for, and how many sessions are planned if there is to be a structured (or semi-structured) program.

• Also related to the format is the question of the timing of the mentoring sessions. In other words, you need to decide how often the mentoring sessions will take place (for example, weekly, fortnightly).

A third issue is the **venue** for the mentoring sessions. While the decisions about the venue depend in large part on the kind of mentoring program that is to be implemented and the size and composition of the mentoring groups, there are some additional considerations.

• If your mentoring program is more akin to a social gathering, it might be feasible to leave each mentor-mentee group to decide on their own venue. Some groups might choose to meet on the library lawn, and others, in one of the places on campus that sell coffee.

• If, however, the mentoring that you intend to implement is to have a relatively formal structure, it might be necessary to arrange for specific rooms to be set aside on a regular basis as mentoring session rooms. In that case, it will be important that you arrange for timetables (whether school or centrally administered) to incorporate those as part of the normal space planning for the session.

**A time line**

In principle, a mentoring program can begin and end at any time during the year. Ideally, however, if the principal aim is to facilitate students' successful transition to university, the program should begin at the start of Session 1. Mentoring programs that focus on transition to university usually run weekly, typically continue for around 8 to 10 weeks, and cover different elements of the transition process at each meeting. Other programs require students to meet at particular points during the session, for example, in Weeks 1 to 3 when students are settling in, and again in Weeks 5 and 8 when assignments are due or a little later to assist with exam preparation. Whichever of those timelines you decide to adopt, before you can get started (and especially if you decide to begin the program from the first or second week of session), you will need to have begun planning some considerable time beforehand (during Session 2 of the previous year). In particular, decisions need to be made about the kind of program and all aspects of its design well before the time that you intend to implement your program. In addition, the selection of a coordinator, and the recruitment and training of mentors should occur in plenty of time to ensure they are ready for the arrival of the potential mentees.
Below is an example of a timeline to get a program started in Week 1 Session 1.

1. September or October Session 2 previous year (well before final exams)
   To recruit potential mentors, prepare and distribute advertising material and invite
   interested students to attend information session
   Conduct information session; students to make decision re. participation, including
   commitment re. training in February

2. January as soon as new students receive offers for entry to UNSW
   Prepare and send out letters to potential mentees (all first year students in targeted
   program) informing them of mentoring program and inviting them to attend
   information session (preferably, 0-week)

3. Mid February (or at the very latest, 0-week)
   Conduct training for mentors
   Run information session for potential mentees; students decide re. participation

4. March Week 1 Session 1
   Program starts with lunchtime meeting as social get-together, an occasion to
   facilitate meeting of mentors and mentees

5. March Week 2 Session 1
   Mentoring sessions begin

6. March Week 3 Session 1
   Supervision sessions begin (see page 18)

A budget

Another important part of your planning is the formulation of a budget. Giving careful
thought to all aspects of the program that will require some financial assistance is an
essential step in gaining the necessary support from your school or faculty
administration. The most important items for which you will need to obtain financial
support are

- the printing of all the mentoring manuals or other materials for mentoring sessions,
- the delivery of mentor training, which includes the preparation and printing or
  copying of relevant materials, as well as the lunches and morning and afternoon
  teas,
- the postage for the mailing of letters of invitation to potential mentees,
- the costs associated with the information meeting for potential mentees to find out
  about, and sign up for, the program,
- the general administration throughout the program (notably, for photocopying,
  stationery, mail outs, telephone), and
- catering costs for any social events to bring together all the mentors and mentees
  involved in the program.

There are different views concerning the payment of mentors. On the one hand, it is
sometimes argued that payment is necessary if mentors are to be expected to be
committed and conscientious. This is often the position taken by those whose
mentoring programs are more akin to remedial tutorials.
An alternative position on this issue is that participation in a mentoring program brings rewards that outweigh the need for payment. In particular, the training for, and involvement in, mentoring provides a valuable opportunity for the acquisition and enhancement of skills that are attractive to potential employers. A certificate of participation is therefore the most appropriate form of reward.

There is clearly a need to decide whether your mentors will be paid before you embark on your recruitment phase. Students who agree to be mentors should be fully informed about this issue and the reasons for your decision before they make any commitment. Also, mentor payment will need to be included in the budget calculations.

**Gaining support from your school or faculty**

It is obviously a good idea to have gained implicit support for your mentoring program from the relevant person (the head of your school or the dean of your faculty) prior to undertaking any detailed planning. If you want the head or dean to be supportive of the proposal to implement mentoring within your school or faculty, it is wise to have done your homework before approaching the relevant person. You might need to convince him or her, for example, about the *established need* for such a program. Before making any commitment to providing financial support, you might also need to present details of the aims and objectives of the program as they address the identified need, and perhaps most importantly, an associated budget.

So, having decided on the kind of mentoring program that best meets the needs of your school or faculty, and having drawn up a budget, you can then approach the head of your school or the relevant person within your faculty to seek financial support to implement your program. It is a good idea to present details not only of the items that will require funding, but estimated costs associated with each (based on experience from others who have conducted such programs, and where relevant, quotes from the appropriate sources, such as printing).

**Selecting a coordinator**

The successful implementation and especially the daily coordination and administration of any mentoring program are dependent upon the skills and the commitment of a person who assumes responsibility for its coordination. One of the most important tasks that need to be undertaken early in the planning stages is, therefore, that of selecting the person who is to take on the coordinating role. The coordinator is often a member of the academic staff but can be a graduate student.

It is worth bearing in mind that the coordinator is often required to be a “Jack (or Jill) of all trades”. Thus, there are many traits that you might look for in selecting the best person to coordinate your mentoring program. Such a person should not only be committed to the concept of mentoring, but he or she also needs, for example, to have good organisational and project management skills, and the capacity to inspire and persuade other colleagues about the merits of the program. Above all, perhaps, the coordinator needs to have much enthusiasm and energy.
Recruiting the mentors

The success of any mentoring program depends in large part on the skills of the mentors. It is therefore important that care is taken when recruiting and selecting those who are to be involved in your mentoring program.

It is important to commence the recruitment and selection process early, well ahead of the time that your mentoring program is due to begin. That means, for programs that are to run early in the students’ first year at university, mentors need to have been recruited and trained prior to the start of the academic year (or prior to the beginning of the semester during which mentoring is to take place, for programs that begin mid-year). That generally means that the recruitment process, at least the initial contact with potential mentors, should start towards the end of the previous academic year (or towards the end of the previous semester, for a program that is to commence in the second semester).

Making contact with potential mentors

There are many strategies that can be used to make contact with the students from whom your mentors will be selected. Before deciding on your strategy, think first about who the appropriate target pool of potential mentors are, and how many mentors you would like to recruit. If the mentoring program is to be offered to students in their first year of a specific degree program, then the obvious candidates for potential mentors are the students in the later years of the same program. Also, the more mentors you require, the larger the number of students with whom you should aim to make your initial contact.

Obviously, you can contact potential mentors by making an announcement in the lectures of the relevant groups of students (see, for example, Appendix A), by sending a broadcast email to all students in the relevant target pool of potential mentors, or via a letter to each student in the upper stage(s) of a specific degree program. An announcement on a noticeboard is also an option, but its effectiveness will depend on the position of the noticeboard and on the conscientiousness of students in consulting it.

The method you decide to use will depend on the extent to which the mentoring program is to be offered to a discrete group of first year students. If the program is a School-, or even Faculty-based program, your task of identifying the target students will be easier than if you are intending to coordinate a more broadly based program.

Informed consent

Before agreeing to participate, potential mentors need to be fully informed about the program and about their role in it. Ideally, the provision of the necessary information is done in writing, via an information sheet, and during an information session for all students who express an interest in participating as mentors.

So, before you set out on your recruitment drive, you need to prepare an information sheet. The information sheet should clearly identify
- the aims, objectives and structure of the program;
- what will be expected from students who participate as mentors, and especially
- how much time will be required of them.
Also, potential mentors need to be made aware of any training requirements and the dates and times of the training sessions. The information sheet should also tell potential mentors about the ongoing support they will receive, beyond the initial training; and finally, it is important that students are made aware of how their participation will be acknowledged (for example, by the awarding of a certificate, with a clear statement about what their participation involved, which is a valuable addition to any job application, or, in some cases, via payment).

The **information session** is typically a lunchtime meeting to which all students who express an interest in participating as mentors are invited. The overriding purpose of such a meeting is to ensure that any student who would like to be considered as a mentor is fully informed about what is involved. The information session can begin by welcoming and thanking all students for their interest in the mentoring program, and then proceed to underline the need for students to be fully informed about what is involved before they make a decision to participate in the mentoring program. Students generally find it helpful if they have their attention drawn to the important details that are provided on the information sheet (which has been distributed to all attendees either prior to, or as they arrive for the information session). It is also a good idea to tell students a little about the selection process, and about the importance of mentors’ confidence, though not necessarily superior performance in, their studies. Students generally appreciate the opportunity to ask questions about the program.

Students who, having heard the detailed information, continue to believe they are able to make the necessary commitment, including attendance at the training sessions, should then be asked to complete an **application form**.

The application form can ask potential mentors why they want to be a mentor. It might also ask them to identify the skills and experience that they believe will enhance their ability to be effective. Finally, it is important to also ask for contact details.

**Effective mentors**

Not everyone who volunteers to be a mentor will be suited to the role. Although it might at first seem obvious, the importance of the mentors’ appreciation of the value of mentoring for the success of any mentoring program should not be underestimated. Beyond that, although no simple personality profile can be offered to guide the recruitment and selection of your mentors, there are, nevertheless, some characteristics that are likely to enhance the mentor-mentee experience.

- First, students who are to be involved in any mentoring program should feel a **sense of commitment** to it. Effective mentors are almost always students who are **keen to make a contribution** and to assist fellow students.
- Second, if mentoring is to be effective, the mentors must be able to establish a good relationship with their mentees. Broadly, that requires mentors to be responsible and personable students. More specifically, however, mentors should have reasonably well developed **communication skills**. Ideally, mentors should be good listeners and also able to **express empathy**.
- Third, the literature tells us that the best mentors are not necessarily those who have the highest grades. However, to be effective, mentors must be **confident in their own study habits and academic progress**. If they are not, participation in the mentoring program can potentially compromise their own performance.
Methods of selection

The coordinators of any mentoring program need to feel confident in the skills and the characteristics of those who are to assume the role of mentors in their program.

As the coordinator of a specific degree program, or as student advisor for a particular cohort of students, some coordinators might be familiar with the students who indicate that they would like to be mentors. In that case, the information session will be sufficient to ensure that students are informed and can make an application to become involved. The selection process will then typically take the form of a review of all applications. Applicants can be ranked in terms of commitment and any relevant experience. Mentors can then be chosen from the ranked list, depending on the available flexibility (that is, the number of applicants in relation to the number of mentors required).

A more likely scenario might be that, as the coordinator of a mentoring program, the potential mentors are not known to you. In that case, ideally, all potential mentors should be asked to attend a brief interview. The primary purpose of the interview is to provide an opportunity for you to assess each applicant’s suitability for, and commitment to mentoring. It also allows the applicant to clarify any final issues about which they have further questions.

The following issues are the important ones to be covered in the interview.
- The mentoring role;
- Skills and characteristics required for effective mentoring; and
- Motivation for being involved in the program.

When I first started, I thought that I was the only one panicking and I felt that I wasn’t coping. I wished that I had had someone to speak to regarding these problems, so I wanted to be the one to “be there” for others. (Mentor; ATAX)

I learned a lot from discussing things, like how people organise themselves and about communication and effective teaching methods. I valued being able to help other people. (Mentor; Psychology)
Training the mentors

Having carefully selected students who are well suited to be the mentors in your program, the next important task is to ensure that they undergo appropriate training. The success of any mentoring program depends on the degree to which the students who assume the role of mentor have, and are seen to have, the appropriate expertise, that is, both the skills and the knowledge. The greater their level of skill and their own confidence in their skills and knowledge, the higher the likelihood that mentoring will be effective.

Broadly speaking, mentor training needs to address two sets of issues, namely,
- those associated with the facilitation or conduct of the mentoring sessions, which are essentially generic, interpersonal communication skills, and
- others that relate to the content of the mentoring program, typically the discipline-specific knowledge and skills involved in the mentoring program in which they are to participate.

Training for the facilitation of mentoring sessions

As we have already mentioned at the beginning of this manual, the role of a mentor is an unusual one; it is neither that of tutor, nor is it that of friend. Mentors are expected to be able to develop a relationship with each of their mentees, but it is a special kind of relationship. Mentors must assume a level of professionalism in the role, to be able to encourage and foster trust in the relationship, and to be sure to avoid any abuse of power. Some mentor-mentee relationships will form easily, and others will be a little more challenging. As is the case in everyday life, sometimes mentees will be students with whom the mentors feel an affinity, but that will not always be the case. Mentors are also required to facilitate the initial meeting and greeting, as well as the developing sense of understanding and commitment within a group of students who have typically had little previous contact with each other. With each meeting, however, mentors need to be able to step back, little by little, as the mentees gradually assume more responsibility for the mentoring sessions. Mentors must be sensitive to students with special needs, and know how to identify students who appear to be at academic or personal risk, and the steps that need to be taken in such situations. At the same time, mentors must always be mindful of their own personal boundaries, and know how to protect and ensure their own emotional health. Most importantly, mentors are as much leaders by example as by the advice they give.

So, broadly speaking, to be effective, mentors need to have training in generic interpersonal communication skills. The Counselling Service can assist you with the delivery of this training. Core training components as they are offered by Counselling, include
- identifying barriers to communication
- building rapport and empathy
- actively listening
- asking appropriate questions
- staying with someone else’s story
Training in discipline-specific knowledge

Having undergone the general skills training program, mentors should be confident in the how of mentoring, that is, in their ability to conduct the mentoring sessions. They will then need to be familiarised with the what of the mentoring sessions, in other words, with the content of the mentoring sessions.

Before you can develop an appropriate discipline-specific training program, you need to remind yourself of the aims and objectives of your mentoring program. To be sure that the mentors are appropriately prepared for their role, it is important to outline the objectives of mentoring, and how they will be expected to help achieve those objectives.

The “content” of mentoring sessions will vary from one mentoring program to another. Some mentoring programs are established with a structure and relatively formal program to follow; others are less well defined. Whatever the case for your mentoring program, it is nevertheless important that you have prepared an outline of the kinds of things that should be covered during the program of mentoring sessions, and some suggestions for the order in which they might best be addressed. Mentors will feel a greater sense of confidence in their role when they have been provided with some level of guidance about what they should aim to do across the mentoring sessions.

The discipline-specific training will then focus on the content of the mentoring program, outlining the salient issues in each mentoring session, the rationale for including the material, and identifying specific strategies and suggesting activities that might be used for each of the topics or areas of material. So, for example, for mentoring programs that seek to enhance the first year experience, core training components include:
- strategies for developing student identity and a sense of purpose
- the importance of good study habits and preparing for exams
- thinking about thinking (including discipline-specific thinking)
- effective written and oral communication skills

Training and the administrative issues

Finally, in addition to the how and the what of mentoring, it is also important to be sure that mentors are well prepared for all aspects of the getting started of mentoring. In other words, training needs to identify the strategies that mentors might use for making their initial contact with their mentees, for setting up the first meeting, and for running the first mentoring session. Some mentors are likely to find these tasks relatively easy or straightforward. Others will appreciate a little more guidance, and might be happy to be told, for example, what they might say during their first telephone or email contact with their mentees as well as for when they meet as a group for their first mentoring session.

I found the program also made me think of how I cope with my friends and family relationships and also with myself. (Mentor; FASS)

It (training) was really interesting and worthwhile, not just as a mentor but generally learning about everything available on campus and being sensitive to people’s needs and learning about the best ways to approach them. (Mentor; FASS)
Enrolling the mentees

Targeting potential participants

As we mentioned at the beginning of this manual in the section on planning, one of the first tasks you need to undertake in preparation for the setting up of your mentoring program is to decide which is the target group of students, and in particular, to determine how broad or narrow your focus will be. So, while some mentoring programs are made available to all first year students in a school (for example, all students in First Year Computer Science and Engineering, of whom there are approximately 800), others are for students within a specific degree program (for example, the Bachelor of Psychology, in which there are typically 55-60 each year).

Having done that, you then need to decide the most effective and efficient method of making contact with all of those students.

Methods of making contact

Possibly the most effective method is a special purpose letter to each student whom you want to invite to participate in the program. The letter is probably best sent within a few days of students’ having been notified of their place at UNSW. Notwithstanding the cost of postage, a letter of invitation, addressed personally to each student, increases the likelihood that it will be received and be read by all students. A copy of a sample letter is in Appendix B, from which you can see that such a letter can begin by congratulating the student on his or her achievement (that is, having achieved a place in the degree program) and can welcome them to the community of students at UNSW. The letter also draws students’ attention to the existence of the mentoring program that is designed specifically for their cohort of students. Either in the same letter, or on a separate page, students need to know about the rationale for the mentoring program and its objectives, and briefly about what participation involves. They can then be encouraged to attend a lunchtime information meeting during 0-Week or Week 1\(^1\) to learn more about the program.

The following are alternative methods of making contact, each with some merits and some drawbacks.

- A flyer can be included with the material that is distributed to students in their “letters of offer” or in their enrolment bags. This strategy ensures that students are contacted early and in time for mentoring to get started at the beginning of session. However, while these might also appear at first to be cost effective, sadly, much of the information that is provided to students in this manner ends up in the waste paper bin, without having been read.
- An announcement in a lecture in Week 1 means that mentoring will be unlikely to begin until at least Week 2. Also, while it can be a cost-effective way to make contact with the relevant group of students, its efficiency is limited if not all students are invited to participate, because you are likely to have to deal with numerous enquiries from students who are not in your target group, which are not easily dealt with unless there is a similar program to which such students can be referred.

\(^1\) The benefit of having the information session during 0-Week is that mentoring might begin earlier in Session, possibly in Week 1. That must be weighed up against the fact that not all students attend university during 0-Week.
• Notices on general student or faculty noticeboards can also be cost effective, but they need to be strategically placed, and their effectiveness relies on students’ reading of the notices.

Informed consent

Having notified the relevant group of students, an invitation to them to attend an information session is the next important step (just as it is for mentors). Before agreeing to participate, potential mentees need to be fully informed about the mentoring program, about what would be expected of them, and what they might hope to gain from being involved in it. The information session during 0-Week or Week 1 is the time when you can ensure that this is the case.

Whatever your method of making contact, it is useful to provide potential mentees with the essential information about the mentoring program prior to their coming to the information session. Thus, an information sheet can be included in the personal letters, as we have indicated, or it can be distributed at the time of your initial contact (if you decide to use one of the other methods). The information sheet should clearly identify:

• The rationale for the mentoring program, how it came about, and the reasons for its development and implementation (for example, any evidence to highlight its effectiveness);
• Its aims, objectives, and basic structure;
• The expectations of participants in the mentoring program; and
• A little about the mentors and about the training they undergo in order to take on the role of mentor.

The information session is typically a lunchtime meeting, the purpose of which is to ensure that any student interested in being a mentee is fully informed about what is involved. The session can begin with a welcome and can then cover the following issues:

• A brief reiteration of the aims and objectives of the program;
• A comment about the efficacy of mentoring programs in general, and the possible benefits of participating in mentoring. Wherever possible, potential mentees should be provided with the results of an evaluation that has been undertaken for the program in which they are being invited to participate;
• A few remarks about being an effective mentee. Participants in mentoring programs are not generally screened in or out. However, it is important that all students who are considering taking part are made aware of what might be expected of them, especially as those expectations enhance the experience for all mentor and mentee participants. For example, it is helpful to communicate that mentees need to be comfortable about joining and being part of a group, about sharing their own stories and experiences, and about listening to the stories of others. Mentees also need to understand the distinction between open and closed groups, and to be aware of the importance of a commitment to regular attendance at mentoring sessions and to taking some responsibility for the conduct of their mentoring group.
Formalising the application

Having provided students with an opportunity to ask questions about any aspects of mentoring or of the program, those who decide to participate can then be asked to complete an application form. The form simply asks potential mentees to record their contact details and asks for their permission that the information be provided to their mentor who will then make contact with them.

An important consequence of engaging in this step-by-step process of enrolling the participants in your mentoring program is that they are fully informed about their roles and responsibilities and have made an informed decision about their participation in the program. They are, therefore, more likely to be committed and cooperative, and assume some responsibility for the effective functioning of the individual mentoring sessions and for the overall mentoring program.
Matching mentors and mentees

Now that you know how many students have indicated their interest in participating in the mentoring program, and you have your list of mentors who have undergone training, you are ready to form the mentoring groups.

One of the issues we suggested you give thought to in the section about planning concerned the size and composition of your mentoring groups, that is, how many mentees in each group and whether mentors are to work individually or in pairs. A workable model, in our experience, is approximately two to three mentees in a group with two mentors; mentors generally appreciate having a partner. However, any decision about the size and composition of your mentoring groups depends, of course, on what your numbers will allow. An ideal group size is 4-6 mentees, with an absolute upper limit being set at 10 first year students, always with two mentors for each group of mentees. In addition, while there are no simple rules to follow, there are other important issues to consider when you are forming your groups.

Issues for consideration

- First, if your mentoring program is faculty-based, students are likely to prefer to be grouped with peers from within their own school. In large faculties, where students do not choose a school-based major until their third or fourth year, it is probably a good idea to ask them if they have a preferred school from which they would like their mentor and peer mentees to come.
- Second, try to identify some areas of commonality (for example, hobbies and interests) because they are likely to facilitate the development of effective mentor-mentee relationships. The information on mentees’ application forms will be helpful here.
- Third, another issue about which it is wise to gather some information on the mentees’ application form concerns specific preferences that mentees might have for their fellow mentees. In other words, you need to ask yourself if there are specific groups of students who might be matched (for example, mature age students, or those for whom English is not the first language). Clearly, there are merits and disadvantages of disregarding such characteristics or of making assumptions about homogeneity or heterogeneity in mentoring groups. In our experience, however, it is generally a good idea to ask students if they have specific preferences or particular students with whom they would like to be in a mentoring group. Wherever those preferences have been expressed, try to accommodate them, as far as is possible.

Once you have considered these various issues, you can then form your mentoring groups, matching mentors and mentees. This task is best done as soon as possible so that mentor-mentee contact can take place early in the academic session.

I found being able to meet with someone in the initial weeks was reassuring.. it’s a completely new environment and most other students are younger. (Mentee; Mature age group)

My mentor has been very friendly. Knowing this I feel comfortable that when I don’t know something I can ask her for the information. (Mentee; FASS)
Establishing an infrastructure for your program

We outline here the tasks that ensure the smooth running of your mentoring program.

Having selected and trained your mentors, recruited the mentees, and decided on your mentoring groups (matching mentors and mentees), there are things you can do to get the program off to a good start, to enhance the efficiency of administering it once it is underway, to ensure “quality control” throughout, and to end with appropriate acknowledgements and reflections. These tasks are

- Facilitating initial contact
- Setting up a database
- Supervising and monitoring your program, and
- Appreciating and celebrating

Together, these things might be thought of as providing a kind of infrastructure for your mentoring program. Let’s consider what these involve and why they are important.

Facilitating initial contact

It is very important that the start of any mentoring program is marked off in some way, for the participants in the program, for those who are involved in its administration, and for those who support its existence. As we have already indicated in the section concerning mentor training, most mentors need some guidance to get their mentoring sessions started. We therefore outlined some specific issues to help mentors plan for their first contact and initial mentoring session. Just prior to the start of any mentoring sessions, however, it is a good idea to facilitate the initial contact between mentors and their mentees.

An effective way to support the mentors when they are making their initial contact with their mentees is to host a social get-together, for example, a lunchtime meeting. Such an event, held immediately before the start of the mentoring sessions, provides the mentors and their mentees with the opportunity to get to know each other in an informal setting. It also allows mentors and mentees to meet all the other participants as well as the graduate students and staff who will be involved in the running and supervision of the program. In addition, it can send a clear message to all participants that the school or faculty supports the program, especially if lunch is provided and the head of school or relevant faculty attends the luncheon to welcome the mentees, to thank the mentors, and to “launch” the program for the year (or session).

Setting up a database

Once the mentoring program is underway (or as soon as your mentor-mentee groups are formed), it is also a good idea to establish a database that lists all the mentors and their mentees with their contact details, and indicates the mentoring group to which they belong. It is particularly efficient if an email list is set up so that there can be regular contact between the program coordinators (staff and graduate students) and all the mentors and mentees who are involved in the program. The email list can be used for important announcements, as well as for friendly messages throughout the program. Clearly, if the email contact list is to be effective, all those who are listed need to be encouraged to access their email regularly, to ensure that the email address listed is current, and to notify the coordinators if their email address changes. These issues are particularly important for the first year students (that is, the mentees) as email contact is an official and formal method of contacting students throughout the University.
Monitoring and supervising

An essential component of the administration of any mentoring program is some form of monitoring. There are different options for monitoring, but the overriding objectives are to provide supervision for the mentors and to arrange to be accessible to all participants, including the mentees.

Providing ongoing supervision for the mentors is important because
- it provides an opportunity for them to debrief about their groups,
- it enables them to hear about the experiences of other mentors,
- it ensures that the coordinators are able to identify any potential problems or difficulties and to put strategies in place for dealing with those, and
- it gives a clear message to the mentors that they have your support.

Arrangements for supervision should be scheduled at the outset and the mentors made aware of the importance of attending supervision sessions before they make a commitment to participate in the program. Generally mentors appreciate having weekly supervision for the first two or three weeks. After that, however, supervision meetings need occur only about once a month. Graduate students can facilitate supervision sessions, but it is important that the academic coordinator either attend the sessions, or at least be easily accessible to the graduate students to answer any questions or to deal with any problems or concerns that might arise.

It is also important that the academic coordinator of any mentoring program be available for contact by any of the participants (mentors and mentees), should they have any issues or concerns that they want to discuss. In our experience, participants rarely need to make contact, but program coordinators have a responsibility to ensure that they are available in case a need does arise.

Appreciating and celebrating

The facilitation of the initial mentor-mentee contact and the setting up of the database contribute to the success of the newly established mentoring program. In a similar way, an acknowledgement of the mentors’ contribution, and a final social get-together increase the likelihood that both mentors and mentees will remember the experience favourably and recommend it to other students.

It is important that students who participate as mentors in the program are formally acknowledged in some way. As we have already indicated, the issue of payment of mentors is a matter of choice for individual schools or faculties who offer mentoring. In our experience, mentors do not expect to be paid. The mentors who have participated in the programs that we have conducted have, however, been presented with a certificate at the end of the program. There are various forms that such a certificate can take, and we have included an example as Appendix C.

In general, these certificates are most useful when they indicate not only that the student has been a mentor, but also, the skills that the mentor has acquired as a result of their training and participation. By highlighting those skills the certificate becomes a very useful inclusion for any job application.
The presentation of these certificates is an important component of the program. It demonstrates the school or faculty’s appreciation of the students who agree to be mentors in your program. A good time to make these presentations is at an end-of-program celebration.

Some mentoring program coordinators choose to hold social events during the session while the mentoring program is being conducted (for example, a DVD night, beach BBQ or sausage sizzle). Other programs do not have such events.

Whatever you decide in relation to the hosting of during-program social events, an initial get-together and an end-of-program celebration are essential. The final social get-together is an important way to mark the end of the program.

All mentors and mentees as well as all those who have been involved in the coordination and administration of the program should be invited to an end-of-program social event of some kind (for example, a luncheon). It is an ideal time for the mentors to be thanked. They can be thanked informally and also formally, with the presentation of their certificates. Such an event is also an ideal time for all the participants to reflect on the experience and to decide if they would like their mentoring experience to continue and if so, in what form (for example, some groups decide to meet informally every month). Mentors and mentees can also be asked to complete an evaluation of the program. In our experience, they appreciate the opportunity to give feedback.

It was very helpful. It made me feel like our mentors went through the same experience and knew what problems we may be having. Our mentors were very willing to discuss any problems in general and give us advice, which we really appreciated. (Mentee; Psychology)

I thought the program was a great idea. I would have liked to be a part of a program like that in first year as a means of becoming more involved with the university. (Mentor; FASS)

I found this extremely useful. It was great fun too! (Mentor; Rural student)
Evaluating your program

The overriding objective of any evaluation of your mentoring program is to determine the extent to which it has been effective. So, the focus and the scope of your evaluation will depend on your initial program objectives. It is worth noting that the planning of your evaluation should be carried out at the same time as you are planning the development and implementation of your program.

Your starting point for planning your evaluation is to remind yourself of what you want your mentoring program to achieve. The specific measures you use and their timing should be carefully linked to the program objectives. It is advisable to include quantitative measures (for example, specific scales that have been developed for the purpose of assessing particular attributes and skills, or simple ratings of particular program components) as well as qualitative assessments (open-ended questions, or interview or focus group discussions). The kind of comparisons you might undertake is also determined by the information you want your evaluation to provide. Program evaluations can focus on the mentees, on the mentors, or ideally, on both.

- Focusing on the mentees
  If the objective of your mentoring program is to assist a group of first years to make a successful transition to University, your principal measures will assess aspects of the first year mentees' transition. In terms of timing, the main assessment is best conducted towards the end of Session, after students have participated in the mentoring program. However, you might decide also to assess how well the mentees are adjusting to university life during the session while they are involved in mentoring. In order to establish whether the students have benefited from their participation in mentoring, one comparison would be between participating mentees and a group of matched non-participating peers from the same cohort (although it is important to recognise that when participation is voluntary, participants and non-participants are likely to differ on other relevant dimensions, such as motivation, assertiveness, or even perceived level of existing support). A comparison of transition success and academic achievement between those who do and do not participate from within the same cohort of students nevertheless provides one important source of information that can be used to evaluate your program. Such information can also be used in subsequent years to inform students who may be considering participating in the mentoring program.

- Focusing on the mentors
  Another objective of your evaluation should be to assess the mentors' skills. In this instance, you might be more interested in change in those skills and you should therefore obtain an assessment of their level of skill before training. There are two possible aspects to skill change for the mentors.

Assuming you are interested in the effectiveness of your training, you should undertake pre- and post-training assessment of the specific skills covered in training, as well as the extent to which mentors understand the role of mentor, and their impression of the usefulness of training modules.

Perhaps you are also interested in the degree to which participation as a mentor itself enhances the mentors' skills. In that case, you would assess their skills again at the conclusion of the mentoring program. Your evaluation will then take the form of one or two comparisons, the first being from pre-training to post-training, and the
second, from pre-training to conclusion (if you are interested in overall change from before to after participation) or from post-training to conclusion (if you are interested in any further skill enhancement that occurs following training, as a result of applying the skills as mentors).

- Focusing on non-participants
Another important component of any evaluation, at least in mentoring programs where participation is voluntary, is to establish the reasons for non-participation. Such information can help to improve advertising and recruitment procedures in subsequent years. As we have already indicated, first year students might decide not to participate for any one of several reasons. Self selecting in or out of mentoring might, for example, reflect a perception that mentoring is not needed (for students who believe they have adequate support) or shyness. Among the group of non-participants there are almost always students who would benefit from mentoring. Thus, a third source of information that can be used to improve your program is from students who, for whatever reason, decided not to take part in the program. It is important to ask those students what their reasons were.

A last word

Finally, to reiterate our preamble, this manual is intended as a step-by-step guide to the implementation of mentoring. It is not a mentoring program itself. We hope you find it useful and would be pleased to have your feedback.

Gail Huon and Julie Grove
18 November 2002
## Appendices

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ARE YOU FROM OUT OF TOWN?
BE A PEER MENTOR!

We’re running a peer mentoring program in 2002, to support first year students who are from out of town.

What would I have to do?
- Receive FREE training in Feb 2002 to provide academic and social support to your mentees
- Contact your mentees every week for the first 3 weeks of session 1, and then again in weeks 5 and 8
- Receive support from experienced staff, with lots of opportunities to debrief

What’s in it for me?
- Make more friends and have loads of fun
- Enhance your personal and professional development
- Become a leader in the University
- Add to and share your knowledge of Uni life
- Acquire skills to include on your resume and enhance your employability

Receive a certificate of involvement and a personal reference!

How do I apply?
Fill out the form on the back & drop it in to the Counselling Service, Lvl 2 East Wing Quad Building by **Nov 9th 2001**. Or you can call Julie Grove on 9385 5418 or email: j.grove@unsw.edu.au We’ll call you for an interview.
7 January 2000

Dear First Year student,

Congratulations. Entry to the B Psychology degree program is highly competitive. Your offer of a place in the program is therefore an important achievement.

Beginning your first year at university can be challenging. The transition to university requires some reorganisation in the way you think about yourself. You need to identify the features that distinguish your new role from your experiences at school, and to be clear about the new expectations, both academically and socially.

UNSW is committed to ensuring that all students are provided with appropriate assistance during their transition to university. As the coordinator of the Bachelor of Psychology program, I am writing to you to invite you to participate in a peer-assisted mentoring program. The overriding purpose of the program is to ensure that all students in the Bachelor of Psychology program are helped to make their transition to university a successful one. The mentoring program will be provided by senior students in the Bachelor of Psychology program, under my supervision. These mentors are ideally equipped to help students who are starting in the program. The program will run across six weeks, for 1 ½ hours each week. It is designed to orient you in the overall psychology program, and to inform you about psychology as a profession. The program also seeks to enhance your academic performance in psychology, through effective research and writing skills, and to give you an opportunity to get to know the other Bachelor of Psychology students.

In order that you might make a decision about whether or not you would like to participate, we invite you to attend the following meeting. If you are interested to be involved, it is very important that you come to this meeting.

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<tr>
<th>Day</th>
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<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>1.00 – 2.00</td>
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<td>Place</td>
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I look forward to meeting you.
Yours sincerely,

Gail Huon, PhD.,
Associate Professor
School of Psychology
Coordinator of BPsychology Peer Mentoring Program
CERTIFICATE OF PARTICIPATION

This is to certify that

Jillian Student

participated as a mentor to a group of first year students in the Bachelor of Psychology Peer-Assisted Mentoring Program at the University of New South Wales, in Session 1, 2002

During this 12 week program, mentors were trained in the following skills:

- **Listening**
  Barriers to, and strategies for effective listening

- **Facilitating the discussion of others**
  Open and closed questioning, elaboration and specification techniques

- **Motivating others**
  Role modeling and mobilizing positive influence

- **Maintaining the motivation of others**
  Goal setting and study techniques

- **Effective writing**
  Structuring and justifying a written argument

- **Skilled interpersonal interaction**
  Acceptance of individual differences and empathic responding

The program was designed to facilitate the successful transition of First Year students to University. Working in pairs, mentors were assigned to small groups of First Year Bachelor of Psychology students. Mentors helped to integrate these students within the University, and covered issues such as critical thinking, researching, structuring written arguments, oral presentation and study skills. During each of the 12 weekly sessions, mentors facilitated discussion, led activities and provided guidance for the students being mentored.

_____________________________________________

Gail Huon, PhD.
Associate Professor, School of Psychology
Coordinator, Peer-Assisted Mentoring Program
Mentee Survey

1. How well do you feel you have made the transition to Uni?
   _____________________________________________________
   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
   | Not at all well | Somewhat | Very well |

2. At any stage this year did you consider discontinuing or deferring?  Yes ( ) No ( )

3. If you did, are you still considering discontinuing or deferring?  Yes ( ) No ( )

4. If you answered yes to either of the two previous questions, what is the main reason?
   _____________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________

5. To what extent do you feel a sense of belonging with UNSW?
   _____________________________________________________
   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
   | No sense at all | Somewhat | Strong sense |

6. How useful has the mentoring program been in helping you adjust to Uni?
   _____________________________________________________
   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
   | No help at all | Somewhat | Most helpful |

7. How often did you use the mentoring program?
   _____________________________________________________
   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
   | Never | Occasionally | Often |

8. How helpful did you find your mentor?
   _____________________________________________________
   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
   | Not helpful | Somewhat | Very helpful |

9. In what ways has the mentoring program been helpful/unhelpful?
   _____________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________

10. What problems have you experienced with the mentoring program?
    _____________________________________________________
    _____________________________________________________

11. What suggestions do you have for improving the program?
    _____________________________________________________
    _____________________________________________________

Thank you for completing this survey. We appreciate the time and care you have taken in answering these questions.
Mentor Survey

1. How useful do you think you have been to your mentees:
   a) in helping them find their way around the UNSW University system?

   ______________________________________________________
   1 2 3 4 5
   no help at all Somewhat very helpful

   b) in helping them adjust to the Uni teaching style?

   ______________________________________________________
   no help at all Somewhat very helpful

   c) in helping them make useful contacts?

   ______________________________________________________
   1 2 3 4 5
   no help at all Somewhat very helpful

   d) in helping them access University facilities and resources?

   ______________________________________________________
   1 2 3 4 5
   no help at all Somewhat very helpful

2. Can you identify any ways in which you might have been more helpful to your mentees? If so, why?

   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________

4. What problems have you encountered in providing support to your mentees?

   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________

5. How has being a mentor assisted you with:
   a) improving your communication skills

   ______________________________________________________
   1 2 3 4 5
   not at all Somewhat very much

   b) helping you identify with the School/Faculty?

   ______________________________________________________
   1 2 3 4 5
   not at all Somewhat very much
c) improving your social skills?

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d) improving your employment skills?

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e) improving your self-confidence?

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6. In what ways do you think the mentoring scheme could be improved?

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

Thank you for your time in completing this survey. The findings will be available later in the year. You can contact the Counselling Service if you are interested in the findings.
The program helped me adjust to uni life and the different teaching methods. (Mentee; FASS)

I enjoyed meeting up with other mentees and seeing that they were in the same position. (Mentee; Materials Science and Engineering)

The program was helpful in giving me a sense of belonging and showing me people I can turn to. (Mentee; Materials Science and Engineering)

For me, the program has been a great way to get settled into Uni and to make initial contacts, especially since I am not in a college. (Mentee; Rural student)

I like the fact that there is someone other than a teacher who is willing to help me out. (Mentee; Rural student)

The generosity of the mentors was wonderful. It was good to have someone who knew what was happening. The program really provided support in beginning the course and uni. (Mentee; Psychology)