

An apple a day: Supporting 1st year learning and teaching through academic mentoring & peer-tutoring



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RMIT LEAD

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Background

- What are we trying to achieve?
 - Leadership development & student engagement;
 - Unique learning & teaching strategies;
 - Study skills & tools for success
 - Collaborative partnership
 - Improved student experience

Pick the apple - Meeting 1



1) Identify the need

- *What concerns or value add are you trying to address through mentoring?*

2) Understand the client

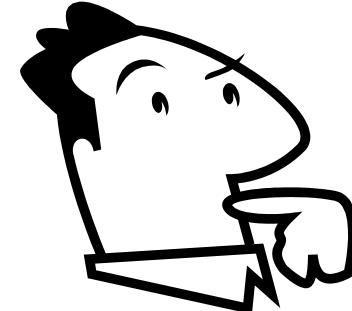
- *What is the profile and what are the particular needs of the client?*

3) Provide options

- *Which mentor model will best meet program and client needs?*

Step 1 - *Identify the need*

- Identify the unique **needs** of program
- Outline the **objectives**
- Consider the **issues** you are trying to address:
 - attrition / retention;
 - failure rates;
 - social and academic transition to university;
 - building community within their course.



Step 1 - *Identify the need*

- Example
 - Psychology Peer-Assisted Tutorial Support (PPATS)
 - **Need:** To assist students gain fundamental study skills in psychology (i.e. lab report)
 - **Objective:** To ensure students had sufficient understanding & skills to complete lab report on time
 - **Issues:**
 - High student failure rates
 - Ongoing academic skills concerns
 - Attrition rates in 1st year psychology

Step 2 - Understand the client

- Understand the **structure & context**
 - lectures, tutorials, laboratories
- Identify real and perceived **limitations**
 - timetable barriers
 - academic workload
 - strong industry regulation around course content
- Select the program **team** required to succeed
 - who should be invested in this program?

Step 2 - Understand the client

- Example
 - Psychology Peer Assisted Tutorial Support (PPATS)
 - **Structure & Context:**
 - Tutorials facilitated by postgraduate tutors
 - Currently no interaction btw 1st years and other psych students
 - **Limitations:**
 - Numbers of students in 1st year
 - Academic workload
 - Funding to resource program
 - **Project team:**
 - 1st year Coordinator
 - Senior Lecturer - Psychology
 - Postgraduate tutors, research students
 - LEAD, SET, Study & Learning Centre

Step 3 - *Provide options*

- Consider program **models**
 - focus on factors for success and sustainability
 - one-to-one mentoring
 - small group peer-tutoring
 - drop-in centre peer-tutors
- Draw out **concerns** & address key **barriers**
 - Use prior experience and best practice models
- Agree on **action** and schedule next meeting
 - ‘Homework’ is set prior to the next meeting
 - Absorb information
 - Work through resources
 - Rally support from relevant team members
 - Come up with questions

Step 3 - *Provide options*

- Example
 - Psychology Peer Assisted Tutorial Support (PPATS)
 - **Talk Program Model**
 - Small group mentoring / large no. 'mentees' & limited mentors
 - Embedded into tutorials / building into the curriculum
 - Structured activities & discussion points / maximum engagement
 - **Address Concerns**
 - Student numbers / Pilot program rolled out across one tutorial group
 - Academic workload / hire postgrad tutor to champion
 - Funding / seek grant opportunities (LTIF)
 - **Homework**
 - Speak with colleagues
 - Approach mentors
 - Go thru LEAD resources
 - Review psychology course structure
 - Set time for meeting with mentors
 - Questions

Polish the apple - Meeting 2

- 1) Structure the program
- 2) Clarify roles and responsibilities
- 3) Benefits for all



Step 4 - *Structure the program*

- **Review, consider and address issues and feedback from meeting 1**
 - Emphasising a collaborative and problem solving approach, address what is achievable and accommodate limitations.
 - Always be adjusting program design while seeking final basic plan for implementation
- **Be always seeking solutions to be tested in pilot**
 - Emphasise that the first run is a pilot and as such it is expected that there will be teething problems that are addressed in the 2nd run.
- **Keep it simple, emphasise an action research approach**
 - **Idea or question > research, analysis & reflection > conclusions & planning > recommendations for action >>**
 - Many projects never get started due to attempting to plan for every contingency. As a pilot your program should be the 'basic model' with fine tuning made in the reflection and planning for the 2nd and subsequent iteration.
 - Naming the program as action research assists to validate the program as an accepted academic endeavour with ongoing trial, error, reflection and improvement.

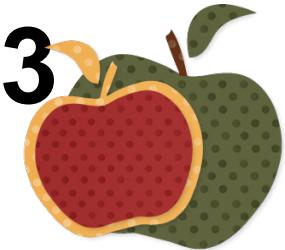
Step 5 - *Clarify roles and responsibilities*

- **Determine and clarify roles and responsibilities**
 - It is important for all stakeholders expectations accurately reflect reality, especially in regards to role, workload and responsibilities.
- **Local level ownership equals commitment and sustainability**
 - By this stage local level understanding of objectives, design, implementation plan and roles should be clear so that fine tuning is informed by local knowledge.
 - Buy-in equals commitment and with ongoing support the local level stakeholders now start to own the program and have an investment in its ongoing success.
- **Allocation of work, commence recruitment of mentors, space acquisition, etc.**
 - Implementation commences with design of the mentor recruitment strategy (see LEAD volunteer recruitment) that also acts to concretize the program boundaries such as start/ finish dates, key objectives, training, etc.

Step 6 - *Benefits for all*

- **Reiterate and reinforce benefits and expected outcomes by linking to examples, policy and research.**
 - "...interactive and participatory learning.. greater student ownership of the learning process.. immediate feedback.. enhances cognitive processing in the peer tutor/ mentor.." (Topping, 1998)
 - "...positive impacts on student /teacher ratios, motivation and attitudes, social interactions and engagements.." (Chester, 2007)
 - "...projects that bring together students to facilitate development of social and learning communities and foster a shared consensus regarding institutional goals promote persistence.." (Mangold, Bean, Adams, Schwab, & Lynch, 2003)
- **Finalisation of program design and allocation of actions, and plan next meeting**
 - fine tuning of mentor/ mentee interaction e.g. ice breaker, social transition, etc
 - amendments to course guide, i.e. embedding the program
 - mentor recruitment plan e.g. brochure and initial engagement activities
 - communication planning, e.g. use of Blackboard, F2F meetings, etc.
 - commence design of training that supports required skill sets

Perfect the apple - Meeting 3



1) Identify the skill set

- *What do the mentors need to be able to do?*

2) Establish learning objectives

- *What specific outcomes will guide training?*

3) Devise and deliver training

- *How will we deliver the outcomes?*

Step 7- *Identify the skill set*

- **What will the mentors be doing?**
- **What skills do they already have?**
- **What skills do they need to develop?**

Example: First year Psychology (2nd year mentors)

What they'll be doing:

☒ assisting in transition of 1st year students to program & RMIT	☒ guiding and supporting report writing
☒ facilitating small groups	☒ contextualising the course
☒ acting as a resource base	

Already studied as part of program:

☒ communication theory	☒ learning styles
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What skills they need to develop:

☒ understand the role of a mentor	☒ group facilitation skills
☒ awareness of resources	☒ strategies for assisting report-writing
☒ intercultural awareness	

Step 8 - *Establish learning objectives*

- Training is usually 5 hours
 - 4 delivered by Study and Learning Centre
 - 1 delivered by the program or course Champion
- Concrete achievable outcomes for the training, stated in objectives
- For example: 2nd year Psychology mentors
 - Define the concept of mentoring
 - Articulate roles and boundaries
 - Use active listening skills
 - Identify strategies for assisting report writing
 - Identify own and RMIT resources

Step 9 - *Design and deliver training*

Training resources are selected from a growing range of mini-modules which can be interlocked together. These include:

- ☒ What is a mentor? Identifying roles and boundaries.
- ☒ Working with a team
- ☒ Building rapport
- ☒ Active listening skills
- ☒ Cultural diversity and academic expectations
- ☒ Learning styles
- ☒ Reflective practice
- ☒ Knowing RMIT

Some specific activities may need to be devised for the individual cohort. In some programs the mentoring is also tied to an assessment task.

Sample training activity

- **Learning objective:** Articulate roles and boundaries of a mentor
- **The envelope activity**
 - Students discuss a set of questions or statements they draw from an envelope and identify what are appropriate attitudes or expectations from each perspective

For example:

- **Mentee:** Can you correct the English in my report?
- **Mentor:** This student is hopeless at statistics
- Students then brainstorm a set of “rules” for mentors around the headings:

Always:

Avoid:

Be clear about:



Thank you!



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