

UTS:

**HELPS**

HIGHER EDUCATION LANGUAGE AND PRESENTATION SUPPORT

# HELPsu:Connect Volunteer programs

## Sharing Language and Culture

MaryAnn McDonald  
**UTS HELPS Volunteer Coordinator**



"I had a chance to meet students from diverse backgrounds and **share** our cultures to find either similarity or differences."

- Conversation student



"Meeting new friends, getting to know other advisors; The experience to bond with the university and help someone on their **journey is wonderful.**"

- Peer Advisor





**International students need ‘the necessary academic, social and cultural competencies to negotiate the challenge of culture shock.’**

(CAMERON 2010, P. I)

**"I have been so more confident in many ways that use English."**

- Buddy Program student



# UTS: HELPS



"I love seeing how a student's speaking confidence is 'quietly developing' without him/her knowing. This is probably the best reward as a **Conversations Leader**."

- Conversation Leader



"One of the **best** parts about being a conversation leader is meeting with 'regulars', keeping up with their lives and developing skills."

- Conversation Leader





**"My favourite part about volunteering was definitely, the work environment. It always felt like a **big family** rather than **volunteering.**"**

- Peer Advisor







**'In order to change, speakers need to speak to other people'. You can't just 'catch' speaking skills without interaction**

(LEVIS 2015, P.42)

"The best part about being a Conversation leader is the stimulation; the intellectual gymnastics."

- Conversation Leader





**Students need to step out of their  
comfort zone and engage.**

(OLIVER, DOOEY & ROCHECOUSTE 2012)



**"My favourite part about volunteering was the great atmosphere of support and friendship."**

- Peer Advisor



**“Once I started  
talking my worry  
disappeared.”**

- Buddy Program student





***Universities need to ‘safeguard their lucrative overseas markets’.***

(YATES 2013, P.1037)





"There are few opportunities for me to make friends. The Buddy Program helps me to **build a connection**."

- Buddy Program student



**“UTS students should have the necessary knowledge and skills to successfully engage with their studies and, as graduates, successfully participate in their professional work environments.”**

## UTS ENGLISH LANGUAGE POLICY



"I enjoyed the honest and genuine **connection** where often there is a **disconnect** between local and international students."

- Buddy Program volunteer

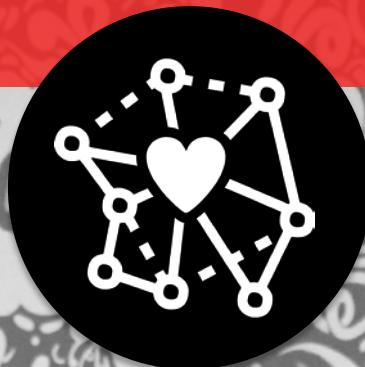


# AALL CONFERENCE THEMES

DIVERSITY



INCLUSIVITY



PEER LEARNING



**FROM 2012**

# **WHAT WE DO AT UTS HELPS**

## **Assignment writing assistance**

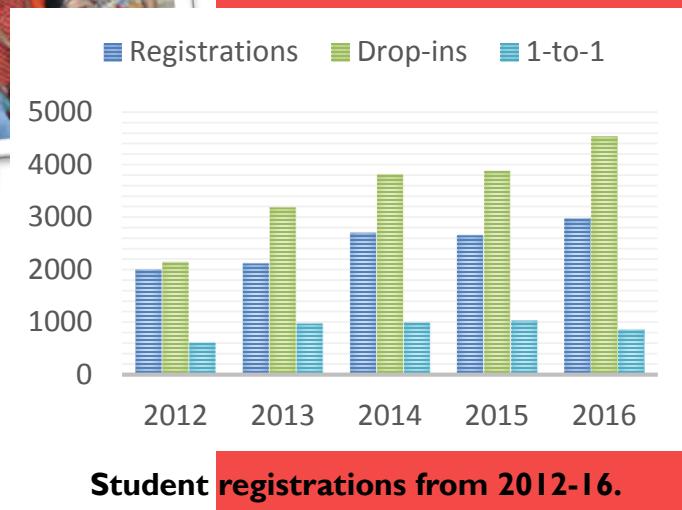
- Drop-ins
- 1-to-1 consultations
- WriteNow
- Academic workshops



## **English speaking practice**

- Conversations@UTS
- Buddy Program
- Talkfest

## **UPASS**



**UTS HELPS 'has significantly strengthened direct support services to students'.**

Emeritus Professor Bruce King, Review of Progress on Aspects of English Language Support (2015)

# RECOGNITION

2015

UTS Teaching and Learning Award for  
**'Academic Support'**



2016

Australian Office of Learning and  
Teaching Citation for '**Outstanding Contribution to Student Learning 2016**'



# HELPS U:Connect Volunteer Programs

**Peer Advisor** peer to peer support at HELPS  
(writing; academic advice)

**Conversation Leaders** 2 hour conversation groups

**HELPS Buddy Program** 1 hour /week  
conversation (1:1; 1:2; 1:3)

**Talkfest Volunteers** Friday speedbefriending; games;  
group discussions

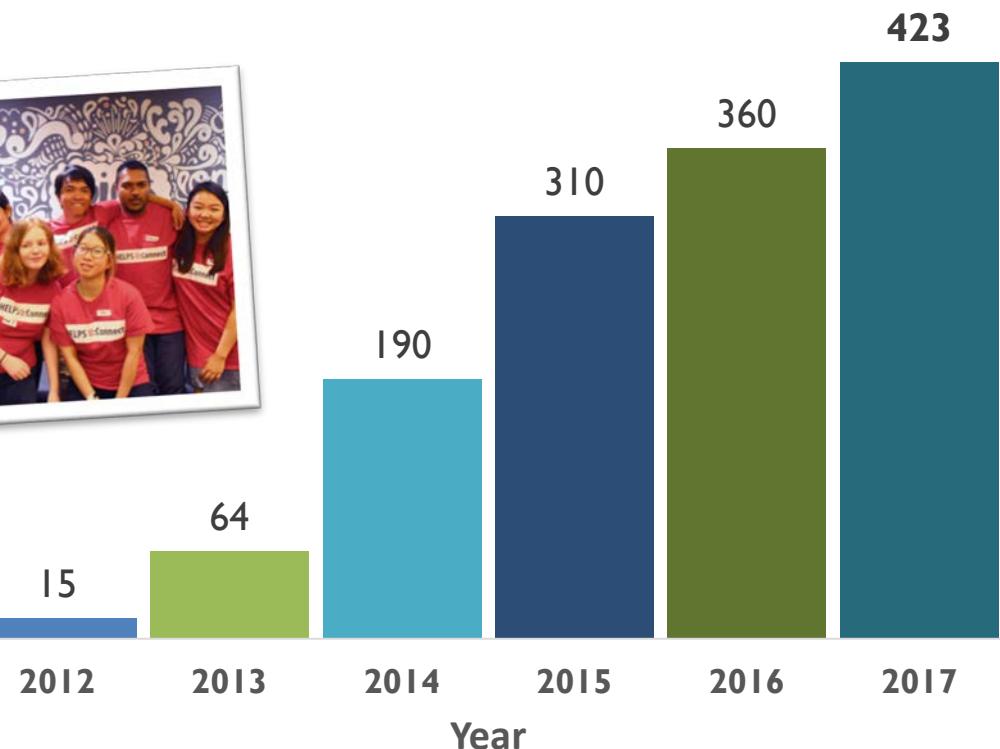


# WHO ARE OUR VOLUNTEERS?

- UTS students
- UTS staff
- UTS alumni
- ABC employees
- Community volunteers



**Number of HELPS volunteers from 2012-17**



# Being a **HELPS Volunteer** has helped me....

## Buddy Volunteer

**64%**

**Make friends**



Develop social & cultural awareness



Feel connected to the university



Develop communication skills



Want to continue working/studying at UTS

## Conversation Leader

**97%**

**Develop social & cultural awareness**



Feel connected to the university

Develop communication skills

Want to continue working/studying at UTS

## Peer Advisor

**93%**

**Develop communication skills**



Feel connected to the university



Develop problem solving skills



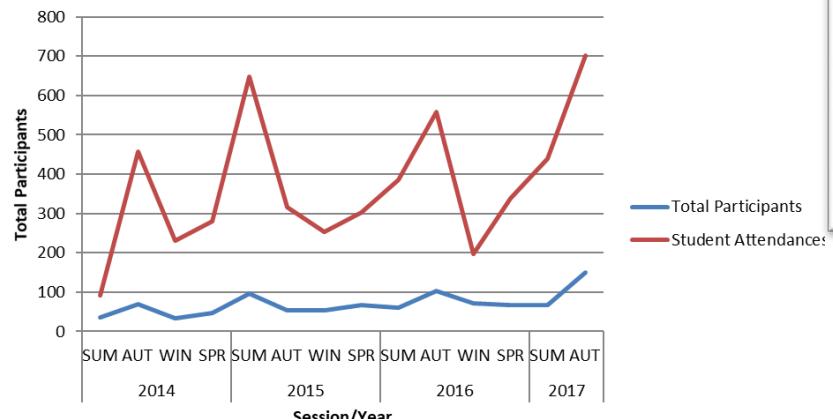
Develop social & cultural awareness

# Conversations@UTS

(25-30 Conversation Leaders per session)

**Training** Observation; Individual induction; online forum; group get together

**Resources** Guidelines; topic cards; internet access; Volunteer Lounge; data entry (attendance)



Total participants and student attendances to Conversations from 2014-2017.

International students need more '**social integration initiatives**' to improve communication skills.

**'Speaking skills will not develop by themselves.'**

(YATES 2013, P. 1037)



Bb Welcome to the Conversations@UTS

Secure | https://online.uts.edu.au/webapps/blackboard/execute/modulepage/view?course\_id=\_27741\_1&cmp\_tab\_id=\_66948\_1&mode=view

Apps Search UTS | University HELP Booking System HELP Booking System HELP Booking System @X@content.eval\_lan Topics UTS Staff Con SmartQueue Virtual Winter Semester 2011 University of Technic @X@content.eval\_lan Business Faculty - S New Tab

Student Preview mode is ON

Conversations@UTS FORUMUTS20 Welcome to the Conversations@UTS team!

Conversations@UTS (FORUMUTS20)

Welcome to the Conversations@UTS team!

Induction documents

First week

Useful resources

Excursions

Conversations Timetable

Share Ideas

Links to other UTS services and events

things to do in Sydney

HELPs Buddy Program

Link to UTS Library

Email contacts for Conversation Leaders

HELPs Volunteer Coordinator

Student Feedback



**My Announcements**

No Subject or Community Announcements have been posted in the last 7 days.

[more announcements...](#)

**Dictionary**

Go

**Thesaurus**

Go

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[Accessibility information](#) • [Installation details](#)

# Going to **Conversations@UTS** has helped me...

#1

**78%**

Improve my English  
fluency



#2

**74%**

Learn about  
Australian culture



#3

**69%**

Learn new  
vocabulary



**#4 67% Develop Confidence**

**#5 63% Improve my listening skills**

...

**#10 35% Want to continue studying at UTS**

# **LEADERS**

- More promotion
- Meet other leaders more frequently
- Limit numbers
- Outside sessions;
- "if it ain't broke, don't fix it"

## **How can we improve Conversations@UTS?**

# **STUDENTS**

- Encourage students to talk more
- Limit numbers
- Vocab on board
- Involve more local students
- Grammar correction
- Events

# Peer Advisors

15-20 at drop ins; 10-20 for intensive program

Share experience; make referrals; show samples;  
intensives; read aloud approach (Vechter & Brierley 2009)

**Training** ½ day induction; observation; online forum  
end shift notes (McCormack, Pancini & Tout 2010)

**Resources** Volunteer Guidelines; Online forum;  
t-shirts; badges; Volunteer Lounge; Sign in sheet



**'turn to practice'**  
**'learningful work'**

(McCormack, Pancini & Tout 2010, p. 42)  
(Chahal 2015)

Student Rover Mentor Program, Victoria University



# Advice Peer Advisors gave to students...

Referencing or assignment question

93%



Structure or grammar

86%



Referral to other services

71%



General advice about studying at UTS

64%



Brainstorming ideas

50%



## HELPS ACADEMIC ADVISORS say...

“Having the peer advisors is a reminder that **students care about other students.**”

“The Peer Advisors are an essential element in HELP'S **community 'feel'** .”

“I have been particularly impressed with **their depth of skill** this semester.”

“Peer Advisors are such a **valued link** to all UTS students.”

**“Thank you everyone for helping me on my first day!”**

## **General Comments**

**“It felt like we were correcting her assessment together rather than myself...”**

**“...I really enjoyed helping students and volunteering with HELPS!”**

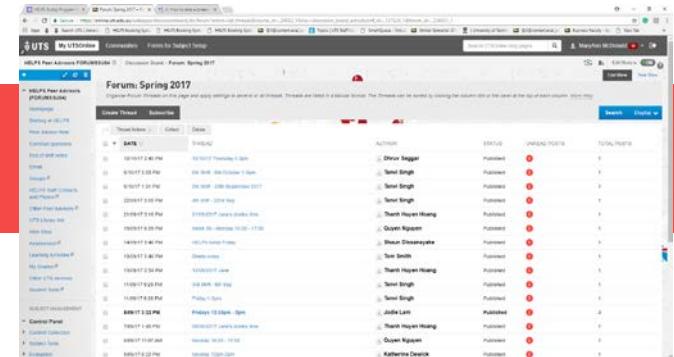
**“Hopefully, I will see **everyone** next semester - 2018!”**

# **Peer Advisors ‘end shift notes’**

**“Having been a new student myself four months ago...I shared advice on Harvard UTS referencing guide.”**

# Advice to other Peer Advisors

**“Students respond enthusiastically to the sample written assignments. Students who are unfamiliar with critical reflection, formal-style writing and referencing benefit from these documents.”**



“.. I told them to **check the criteria** before they start their assignments.”

**“...you can also refer them to the student's association to seek more info....”**

**“I asked the students to **read some of the sentences out loud...**”**

# **How can we improve Peer Advising?**

- Meet with whole HELPS team
- Monthly catch up with other PAs
- More referencing resources
- More HELPS promotion
- Volunteer more than 1 day per week

# HELPS U:Connect Volunteer Programs

## Volunteer Agreement

- Cross cultural differences
- Giving Advice
- Activity outside UTS
- Your time and personal details
- Reward and Recognition
- Link to UTS Code of Conduct

UTS:HELPS

### Volunteering at UTSHELPs

Thank you for volunteering with UTS HELPS. The following outlines a number of areas we think are important to consider when taking on a volunteer role.

#### HELPS Volunteers and Benefits

Our Volunteers are recruited from UTS student, staff and alumni communities as well as people being developed with industry and people from the general community.

Program feedback over the last 4 years has shown that volunteers benefit in a number of ways including feeling more connected to the university; improvement of workplace and communication skills; volunteer hours to contribute to award schemes and the opportunity for rich social and professional interaction with the international student community. Current research agrees that volunteer benefits range across career, social and health dimensions. We hope you will also feel that your volunteer experience is fulfilling.

#### Volunteer Role

All HELPS staff, volunteers and students are expected to demonstrate tolerance, respect and patience. While not employed by UTS, volunteers are officially representing the University and so are expected to present and behave in ways which accord with the UTS [Code of Conduct](#).

As a volunteer at times you need to be aware of the dual relationship that develops when you mix with students in a professional role but at an informal, conversational level. There is a professional boundary that is sometimes difficult to define but should be monitored in the following ways to ensure your comfort and the comfort of the students you support.

#### Cross cultural differences:

People from a variety of backgrounds may be comfortable with different levels of interaction - sharing personal information; physical contact or discussion topics eg politics or religion. Sharing personal stories may not suit everyone and some people need more time to build trust.

Learning to understand different perspectives and values without judgement is an important part of building cross cultural communication skills. You don't need to agree with someone else's values, but it's important that you recognise the importance of their values to them. It is not our job at HELPS to promote a particular political or religious view.

It's also important to try to avoid assumptions - get to know people based on what you learn about them rather than cultural stereotypes and expected behaviours. (UTS policy states stereotyping people and mocking customs or cultures is a type of harassment).

It's good to recognize every culture, including your own, has its strengths and weaknesses. For example, in a conversation group discussion can often turn to news items that may reflect badly on a particular

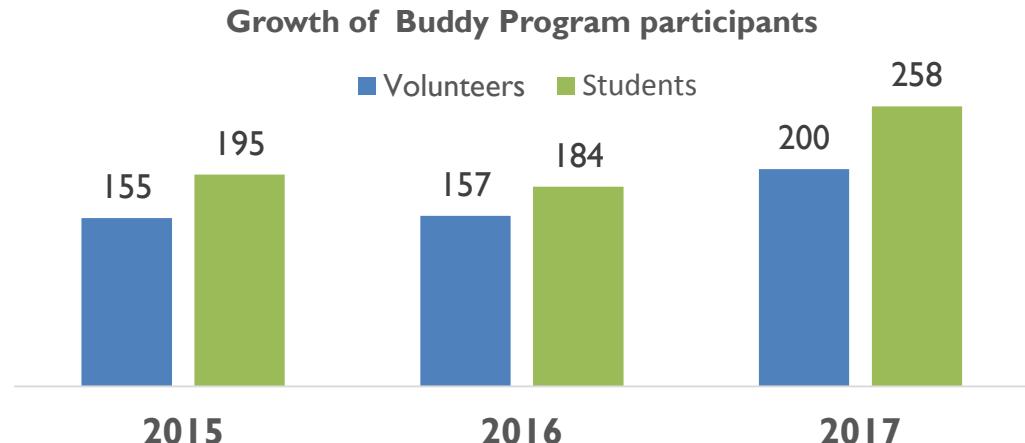


# Buddy Program

*Up to 200 volunteers; 250 students*

**Training** Online guidance; regular emails/Facebook;  
Information sessions (ABC/Alumni)

**Resources** Matching system\*\* (+ Record meetings); admin  
staff; Volunteer Guidelines; Certificates



Tandem, University of Zurich

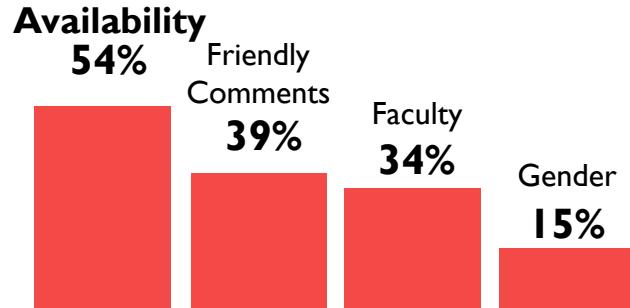
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International students:  
increased linguistic and cultural  
competence

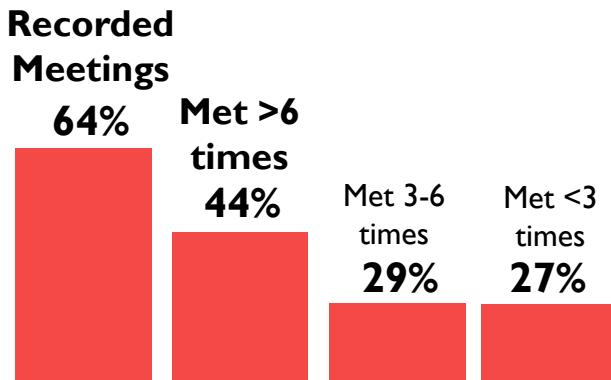
**Volunteers:** cultural exchange  
(LEE 2016)



## Factors considered when choosing a buddy



## How many times buddies met in Autumn 2017



UTS:HELPS

## VOLUNTEER GUIDE

This is a guide for volunteers in UTS HELPS Buddy Program.



UTS HELPS Buddy Program - Record Your Meetings

This is a form for UTS Volunteers involved in the Buddy Program. Record the times you have met your buddy on UTS Campus.

\*Required

Password \*

Your answer

NEXT

Never submit passwords through Google Forms

# Buddy Volunteer Guide

UTS:HELPs

## VOLUNTEER GUIDE

This is a guide for volunteers in UTS:HELPs Buddy Program.

### HELPING WITH CONVERSATION SKILLS



#### Fluency

International students need opportunities to talk at length without too many pauses or hesitations. Talking with a buddy can help them develop the right speed and give them practice linking their ideas together well.

Ask questions to keep your student talking. You will naturally model how to start sentences and link them together without thinking about it.

e.g. 'apparently'; 'because of that'; 'what I mean is ...'



#### Vocabulary

International students are trying to increase the range and accuracy of their vocabulary.

- For study (academic vocabulary)
- Within their particular field (nursing, business, law etc)
- Within the Australian context (slang, informal language, casual conversation)

Let them know if you notice them using incorrect word forms e.g. 'economy'/economic'. Help them find the words they are looking for and different ways of saying the same thing.



#### Grammar

International students are trying to reduce the number of errors and increase their range of grammatical structures. Help them identify regular errors without over-correcting them. For example:

Verb tense	<i>I go (went) to the beach</i>
Subject/verb agreement	<i>I go/she goes</i>
Articles	<i>the/a/an</i>

You will model different grammatical structures without even trying.

#### Pronunciation

International students are looking for pronunciation errors that cause confusion.

It's not about having an accent – everyone has an accent! – it's about being understood.

Tell your buddy when you don't understand a word or phrase.

Write down what you hear and show them so they can see what you hear. You can model the word or phrase and ask them to repeat it and compare.

# Being a **Buddy Student** has helped me...

#1

**67%**

Make friends



#2

**64%**

Improve listening  
skills



#3

**61%**

Improve my  
confidence



**#4 53%** Improve my pronunciation

**#5 48%** Learn about Australian Culture

...

**#7 38%** Want to continue studying at UTS

# **LEADERS**

- Resources
- 1:2 groups
- Quiet place
- Events

## **How can we improve the Buddy Program?**

# **STUDENTS**

- Availability/commitment of volunteers;
- Events;
- Meet more people;
- Age range?

# Talkfest

Weekly 6-10 volunteers; 30-50 students

Participate in games; encourage group discussion  
share experience;

**Training** regular attendees become volunteers;  
brief induction

**Resources** t-shirts; Volunteer Lounge; Facebook  
registration



## Certificates & Thank You cards



## Volunteer recognition



End of year  
'Thank You' party

# Lessons learned

**Conversations** relief; guidelines;  
students as assistants; use of technology  
vs face to face availability

**Peer Advisors** skillset; commitment;  
role clarification; quiet times

**Buddy Program** risk assessment;  
matching system; balance  
volunteers/students; clear guidelines;  
'local'; staff support (interns)

## Overall

- Support
- Volunteers not employees (+ diversity)
- Start small
- Sustainability
- Online vs personal
- Challenges

# CHALLENGES

- I can't find a buddy ..... I need a new buddy ... I want more volunteers ... I like talking to my buddy but I need to talk to more people ... I want to be a volunteer but maybe not yet, or maybe later ...
- Is My English OK? ... am I good enough with grammar? ... I think my English can be in good use ... Having considerable experience in this area I MAY be able to assist ...
- I didn't get a reply to my email ... I didn't email, should I email? ... he didn't reply to my email so please stop him in my group please ... are we supposed to keep meeting? Are we supposed to stop meeting? ...
- I'm late ... I'm nearly there ... I'm sick ... I'm going on holiday... I'm stressed ... I have to do my assignment ... my train stopped that's not my fault ... I think I am available to meet you tomorrow ... sorry I missed it ...
- Ta ... Awesome ... Nope ... Ah true, sweet, I will be there ... actually I think I can't make it ... I double booked in error, my bad ...
- Will I get a reference? ... Can I have another certificate? Mine got rained on ... Can I have another t-shirt? ... I wouldn't be able to be part of this program if I don't get certain reference from you ...



# AALL CONFERENCE THEMES

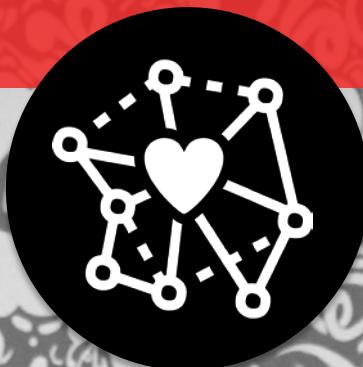
## DIVERSITY

Buddy Program



## INCLUSIVITY

Conversations@UTS



## PEER LEARNING

Peer Advisors

