



They're doing it anyway: improving academic mentoring in the residential space

Key Words

peer learning; academic literacies

Abstract

The benefits of peer education are well established (Dawson, van der Meer, Skalicky, & Cowley, 2014). Whilst many universities now offer formal peer to peer learning programs modelled on best practice, extensive informal peer mentoring is common place, particularly in residential halls. Informal mentoring can be very helpful to students (Boud, Cohen, & Sampson, 2001) , however there are some concerns. How do students distinguish between mentoring and collusion when it comes to sharing study notes and assessment pieces? Do mentoring students understand when to refer on and how not to overstep their boundaries? Is the mentoring of any value to both the mentor and mentee? To a certain extent, these informal mentors are stepping into the academic language and literacy space. This is both a challenge and an opportunity. We argue that if we as academic learning advisers are able to influence peer mentoring in residential spaces, we will have the opportunity to broaden the impact of our services. At the Australian National University, more than 20% of students live on campus in nine residential halls. There is variety in terms of semi-formal and informal mentoring occurring. In 2017, the Academic Skills and Learning Centre created new partnerships with a number of the halls to pilot academic mentoring programs. We used these pilots to investigate whether we could harness the benefits of informal mentoring and existing programs to create a more structured and supported mentoring programs, beneficial to both mentor and mentee. Unlike traditional Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) the mentoring in the residential space is not attached to a subject. We focused instead on core academic skills for new students transitioning in to university study. During this workshop we will share our experiences whilst collaborating with participants to share practice on leading the way in establishing academic peer mentoring programs in our institutions, particularly in less regulated spaces. Our first question is how do we clearly define the role of the academic mentor? We see academic mentors as both models, and facilitators of learning, but how does this work in practice? How do we encourage the learning in the mentoring space to be developmental and shared? For this to occur, mentors need to develop good listening and feedback skills which requires training and support. How do we facilitate this? The second important question is what do mentors do? How do we create new models of mentoring and adapt our curriculum? How do we ensure disciplinary relevance? What teaching and learning activities are appropriate for mentors to deliver?

References

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