



TIES: Teaching Improvement and Equipment Scheme

Large Grant Application Form: Teaching Improvement Progress Report¹

Project Title

Arts Network Mentoring Program 2007

\$ Amount Awarded

\$47,500

\$ Amount Expended

\$ 47,468 has either been expended or is already allocated:

- Expenditure at 30/11/2007: \$24,468
- Funds allocated for expenditure from November 2007 - April 2008: \$23,000. Due to timing of our events, our budget generally runs from mid-year.

Brief Project Description

The Arts Network Program invites senior student volunteers to help welcome first years to the Faculty at enrolment time, to participate in organising 'Arty Starty Day', a transition workshop for initial orientation and networking, and to provide ongoing support through a peer-mentoring program, especially over the first crucial weeks of the semester.

Students are divided into mentoring groups according to their degree program and disciplinary affiliations, ensuring that groups share common academic interests but are fully inclusive and represent the diversity of the university community. Opportunities are provided for peer interaction, enjoyment and sense of involvement in the learning community through creative team activities.

Since the program started in 2002, our participant numbers have grown significantly each year. Having experienced a major increase in first year participants in 2006 we recruited twice our usual number of mentors for the 2007 program (150).

The following new initiatives were planned for the 2007 program:

- Implementation of shared program evaluation and research strategies with the Faculty of Economics and Business Peer Mentoring Program Coordinators (Ms Jill Kelton and Ms Nadia Bradley) and the Faculty of Pharmacy First Year Experience Working Group Representative (Dr Lorraine Smith);
- Establishment of a 'Mentor Taskforce', giving opportunities for program participants to take a higher level of responsibility in the participatory action research cycle used for ongoing program evaluation and improvement.
- Development of new systems for program management to cater for increasing numbers by:

¹ This form is to be sent to the Executive Officer (Learning and Teaching) by the closing date of the applications for 2007 TIES Grants.

- training ‘Mentor Taskforce’ - a small group of mentor volunteers to take on extra responsibilities in planning, leadership and events management;
- training casual staff in use of our new administrative database;
- using the database to enhance mail, email and SMS communications with mentors, first years in the network, and with all commencing first year students in the first and second semester cohorts in Arts.

Progress to date

600 first years registered for the Arts Network Mentoring Program in 2007, with 150 senior Arts students volunteering to take on the role of mentors.

- Mentors attended two training sessions – the first in October 2006, and the second in February 2007. These sessions focused on discussions of the role and responsibilities of a mentor, some practical tips about the services available to first years, and an outline of the main program activities.
- 17 Mentors volunteered for our ‘Mentor Taskforce’, and took part in three additional activities:
 - welcoming first years and assisting in promoting the program during Faculty Enrolment Week;
 - updating the activities associated with the Arty Starty Day Photographic Scavenger Hunt;
 - assembling our ‘Mentor Training Packs’.
- Our annual Arty Starty day was held on February 26 2007. This event consisted of:
 - a welcome session attended by all first years and their Mentors;
 - a Morning Tea for all participants;
 - a ‘Small Groups’ session, where first year students were grouped according to their degree program and their subject areas. Each group was allocated a mentor who helped them to get to know each other and led a discussion about any concerns the first years had about starting university.
 - a Photographic Scavenger Hunt around the campus.
- Mentors were encouraged to organize two more face-to-face meetings with their groups of first year students – one during the ‘official’ O-Week period and one during Week 1 of Semester 1. Mentors and first years also communicated by email, phone and text message during this period.
- First year students also posted queries on our WebCT site during the first weeks of Semester One. In addition, there was a separate discussion board available for Mentors to post queries to each other.
- The ‘Arty Party’ Program Round-up was held on Wednesday 21 March 2007. At this event, mentors were presented with certificates, prizes for the best photos and costumes for Arty Starty Day were awarded, and special contributions acknowledged. The event finished up with an hour of Theatre Sports facilitated by ‘Twisted Melon’, a local improvisation group.
- The 2007-2008 Program is already underway, with over 100 mentors attending their first training session in October 2007.

If Project completed, list project outcomes

The Arts Network Program is an ongoing initiative that is continually evolving. Each year new initiatives are adopted in order to ensure that the program remains fresh and dynamic, and continues to meet our aims to build an encouraging and supportive learning community and foster a sense of engagement with the Faculty and the University for all Arts students, especially for commencing first year students, thereby positively impacting student retention and the overall

student experience.

- In the 2007 project we developed further our benchmarking relationship with the Faculty of Economics and Business peer-mentoring program. This included the following initiatives:
 - A shared program evaluation questionnaire for first years and mentors;
 - A shared lunch with mentors from both programs, followed by focus groups examining the sense of belonging fostered by both programs. We also invited feedback on specific events. This led to an extensive review of the training content of our program;
 - Observation of a training session for Economics and Business mentors;
 - Regular meetings to share tips and advice on practical aspects of the program co-ordination.
- It is our usual practice to involve program participants in our action research cycle for program evaluation and improvement. Following the decision to review the content of our Mentor Training sessions, we took this practice a step further, and invited a member of the 2007 Mentor Taskforce to meet with us regularly to assist in conducting this review and developing new content. The revised training program was piloted in October, and received very positive feedback.
- The 2007 Arts Network Mentoring Program saw the successful implementation of new web communication technologies and database tools, which were necessary to cater for the increase in participant numbers, specifically:
 - Regular use of sms to communicate with Mentors;
 - Introduction of an additional website for Arts Network photos;
 - Introduction of an online tool for online RSVP system and evaluations;
 - Development of an Arts Network Mentoring Program report within the FlexSIS reporting portal;
 - Implementation of a new database for program participants, with functionality to improve efficiency in communication and the mentor/first year matching process.

Evaluation of our program consistently shows that the overall student experience of first year students and mentors is enhanced by their participation in our program:

- First year students were invited to give feedback on the 2007 Program. Analysis of this feedback revealed the following:
 - 41.4% of our first years said that they felt isolated during their transition into university life. Of these, 82.4% said that participating in the Arts Network Mentoring Program helped them feel less isolated;
 - 96% of first years said that they would recommend the program to new students;
 - 83% of first years agreed or strongly agreed the program helped students settle in to the University;
 - 76% of first years said that the program helped them feel like they belonged to the University community.
- Mentors were also invited to give feedback on the 2007 Program:
 - 92% of Mentors agreed or strongly agreed that the program helped them feel like they belonged to the University community;
 - 84% of Mentors agreed or strongly agreed that the program helped them feel part of a group of students and staff committed to learning;
 - 83% of Mentors agreed or strongly agreed that the program helps to develop a learning community in the Faculty of Arts.

List any publications or seminar/conferences reporting on this project

Jarkey, N. (2007). Participatory action research in an Arts transition program. In Angela Brew & Judyth Sachs (Eds), *Transforming a university: The scholarship of teaching and learning in practice* (pp. 141-149). Sydney: Sydney University Press.

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What is the next step? How may project be replicated and best practice spread across the University?

- The ongoing benchmarking project with the Faculty and Economics & Business continues to provide opportunities for extensive peer evaluation, sharing and improvement of the strategies employed in both Faculties.
- This year has seen some initial discussion around the development of an additional benchmarking arrangement with the co-ordinators of peer-mentoring programs run by the University of South Australia - the "Business Mates" and "10:1 peer mentoring program" in the Divisions of Business and Arts respectively.
- The program co-ordinators have recently met with and advised a number of colleagues interested in implementing peer-mentoring programs in their area. These include the Faculty of Arts Honours Review Committee, the Post-Graduate Coursework Co-ordinators in the Department of Media and Communications, and the Koori Centre.
- Following a presentation given by Dr Lorraine Smith from the Faculty of Pharmacy at the 2006 Research Forum on the First Year Experience ('First Year Pharmacy Students – who am I, where do I come from, what are my hopes and dreams?'), we included in our first year sign-up form a similar set of questions to those asked by the Faculty of Pharmacy. This initiative will be extended in 2008 as part of a research project conducted by members of the First Year Experience Working Group.
- In 2008 the extensive qualitative research we have conducted since the program commenced will be complemented by the development of quantitative research designed to ascertain the value of the program in relation to participants' retention at the University and success in their programs of study.

Project Representative

Name	Dr Nerida Jarkey
Signature	