WELCOME to the fourth edition of the Peer Mentoring @ UNSW Newsletter!

In Session 2, 2014, three Peer Mentoring programs ran across UNSW. These programs were the Cultural Mentoring Program for international students, GSA FINE Mentoring Program for post-graduate students and the UNI-Wide Midyear Peer Mentoring Program for new local undergraduate students.

Mentors from these three programs supported almost three hundred students guiding newly commenced midyear enrollees through those crucial first weeks at university. From email support to individual meet-ups and social events, mentors offered advice and tips on what’s available at UNSW and provided social support as they embarked on university life midyear of the university calendar.

A big thank you to all of the mentors and mentees who participated in the programs for Semester 2, 2014!!

In this edition of the Peer Mentoring @ UNSW newsletter we feature a UPP mentor who has graduated from UNSW to become an Urban planner. Also included is a piece from the U@UNSW TAPP Peer Mentoring Coordinator Sarah Roche, and articles from previous mentors and mentees from various peer mentoring programs who share their stories about their experiences of participating in a peer mentoring program.

Also, don’t forget to read more about the upcoming ‘Peer Mentoring @ UNSW Showcase’ and how to register, featured on page 3.

Happy Reading!!

WHERE ARE THEY NOW? From UPP Peer Mentor to Urban Planner!

Nicole Lewis – Urban Planner in the State Government agency Planning and Infrastructure.

My university journey started in 2008 as an excited but very nervous student in the University Preparation Program. I remember how daunting I felt in those first couple of weeks. I had questions that were not necessarily for the teaching staff – I didn’t know how the library worked, I didn’t know where to find the place to get my student card... I was lucky to have a friend who knew how university ‘worked’.

When the opportunity to become a peer mentor for UPP students came up the following year I thought it would be a good way to overcome my innate shyness and do something that might help other students.

The skills I learnt during the time that I was a peer mentor were invaluable in my university studies (Bachelor of Planning) and in my job as an Urban Planner for the State Government at Planning and Infrastructure. Being a peer mentor means that you have to be organised, you have to learn to listen, you have to be open and friendly and you have to know how to set boundaries.

Working as a peer mentor with the University Preparation Program meant working with mature age students from their early twenties up to people in their late sixties. It involved learning to relate to a diverse group of people and encouraging them to support each other. All of the skills I learnt and acquired while a peer mentor were directly transferable to my job as an Urban Planner.

I believe having my peer mentoring experience on my CV set me apart from other candidates for my job, but knowing that you are helping other people who are changing their lives through study was the bigger reward.

PEER MENTORING TRIVIA!!

Q. When was ‘Peer Mentoring @ UNSW first established?

A) 2002?
B) 2004?
C) 2006?

12 years so far! Supporting the transition of commencing students for a million reasons.

Answer: A) 2002!

For more information about Peer Mentoring @ UNSW please go to www.peermentoring.unsw.edu.au

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THE WHO’S WHO IN PEER MENTORING @ UNSW — Welcoming Sarah Roche, Student Development – Participation & Engagement, U@UNSW Project Officer and TAPP Mentoring Co-ordinator.

Sarah Roche currently works on the U@UNSW Program and the Transition Assistant Peer Program (TAPP). The U@UNSW Program is an equity project which aims to increase access to UNSW for students from low socio economic backgrounds by utilising multiple indicators of ability, motivation and potential for success in Higher Education. An important component of the U@UNSW Program is to support successful program participants with the transition to university through TAPP.

Sarah grew up in Ireland and moved to Australia 6 years ago. She has been working as a Project Officer at UNSW for 4 years working in a number of different roles within Student Life and Learning. She has implemented and evaluated various initiatives that assist with the transition and engagement of students. She has a passion for social justice and is rewarded by seeing educational opportunities provided to all. Sarah currently volunteers with Mission Australia and states “I gain so much satisfaction from volunteering. It leaves me feeling re-energised and motivated and I like to think that this helps me to gain an insight into how our TAPP Mentors would like to feel after their own sessions.”

We are very fortunate to have Sarah co-ordinating the TAPP Mentoring Program for our 1st year U@UNSW students.

HEAR FROM A MENTOR — Law Peer Mentor, Geoffrey Zhang

My name is Geoffrey Zhang and I’m in my 5th and final year of a combined Commerce and Law degree. I’m also a mentor for the 4th year running!

The LawPLUS Peer Mentoring Program offers more than just peer support. The program also concentrates on raising mental health awareness, various social activities (such as Froyo and picnics throughout the semester) and speakers events (dealing with topics such as careers, competitions and social justice). The program also has a heavy focus on making sure the needs of transfer students and JDs (kind of like a postgraduate version of the Bachelor of Law) are met as well and that they don’t fall through the cracks of a program designed for first-year, straight from high school kinds of students only.

The program has been very successful in enabling first years to bond over shared experiences, as well as providing a safe space for them to socialise and ask questions, but I’ve also matured and gained invaluable experiences as a mentor. I find that my interpersonal communication skills have much improved, from trying to explain a variety of concepts to nervous students trying to deal with the transition to university, and that my confidence has soared from the feeling of being able to pass along the experiences I’ve gained.

It’s been a pleasure watching my groups and my mentees grow throughout these years, and I’m still close to quite a few now. Mentoring is an amazing opportunity to not only help others, but also develop fantastic skills in yourself, and I’m glad to have contributed to UNSW through my years here.

HEAR FROM A MENTEE — The benefits of joining a Peer Mentoring program!

By Thao Le, First In Family Peer Mentoring Program

Starting university straight after Year 12 was a very difficult and daunting time for me. I was absolutely terrified and can clearly remember those first nerve-racking few weeks. The sheltered walls of high school had been ripped apart and I was suddenly exposed and catapulted to a different environment.

Looking back now, it definitely wasn’t easy for me and I struggled immensely just to cope with the transition to university life. Luckily for me, I had my very own Peer Mentor who was there by my side assisting me whenever I needed help. I definitely walked away from that program feeling extremely grateful for the assistance I’d received from my Peer Mentor and what better way to say thank you than to give back? This mindset motivated me to apply as a Peer Mentor and I’m very proud to say that I was part of the First in Family Peer Mentoring Program for 2 years!
HEAR FROM A MENTEE: Joanna Zhou, LawPlus Mentee

Becoming part of the LawPLUS peer-mentoring program has been a truly valuable experience for me! As a new student, one of the biggest challenges was adjusting to the social and academic challenges of university, however with the constant, friendly support of my mentors, I have easily adjusted to the inclusive environment of the Law School and beyond.

Having a group of new students and mentors to meet weekly with provided a place for all of us to address any concerns we had as well as the opportunity to make lots of new friends. Mentors were always willing to share their knowledge and experience when it came to anything from exams and competitions to the best-known stories from law camps! Every meeting was fun and something new could be discovered. The mentors also encouraged me to participate in many activities I didn’t know existed before such as mootings and negotiations competitions, workshops, career expos and Law Society functions.

The mentors are extremely dedicated, approachable and understanding and I would highly recommend taking part in the LawPLUS peer-mentoring program to all new Law students! I’d love to become a mentor next year to pass on my knowledge and continue providing the experience that I was lucky enough to receive. From the LawPLUS peer-mentoring program, I have created lasting relationships and developed many new skills that will help me survive the rest of my degree!

Peer Mentoring @ UNSW Information Hour

On the 27 August, Peer Mentoring @ UNSW held their annual ‘Peer Mentoring @ UNSW Information Hour’.

UNSW advanced year students who have been Mentors in the past were guest speakers. They spoke about their experiences of being a Mentor and were well received by attendees.

Peer Mentoring @ UNSW would like to thank again all the Mentor guest speakers, who represented a variety of Peer Mentoring Programs being run at UNSW.

The Peer Mentoring @ UNSW Showcase – Wednesday 22 October

Peer Mentoring @ UNSW invites you to attend a two and a half hour showcase presenting innovative partnerships, programs, best practices and research in Peer Mentoring at UNSW.

The Peer Mentoring @ UNSW showcase is open to anyone within the UNSW Community with an interest in the first year experience and developing leadership opportunities for advanced year students.

Guest speakers will present on the following topics: Values at Work; Structuring a program; Improving attrition rates; Activating students’ voice; and Insights on participating in, and coordinating, a peer mentoring program.

Afternoon tea will be served on the day.

When: Wednesday 22 October 2014, 1:30pm – 4pm
Venue: Hugh Dixson Room at the AGSM, Kensington Campus, UNSW (G27 on map)
Register here: https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/pmsshowcase
Enquiries: Katie Yamaguchi, peermentoring@unsw.edu.au

Get Creative For A Cause!! – UNSW Anti-Poverty Week, October 2014

To raise awareness about the causes, consequences and hardships of poverty in Australia and around the world, the UNSW Social Justice Project interns and The Hub are seeking written, photographic and video submissions from UNSW students and staff.

All submissions will go on the UNSW Anti-Poverty Week 2014 facebook page. In addition, the best student articles will be published in the October edition of Tharunka, the best photo will be made into a limited edition UNSW APW 2014 postcard, and the best student moving picture/video will be posted on the UNSW current student website.

For full details please go to the ‘Anti-Poverty Week 2014 at UNSW’ Facebook page.