Welcome to the second edition of the Peer Mentoring @ UNSW newsletter.

Twenty Peer Mentoring @ UNSW programs are being offered for Session 1, 2014. In today's tertiary education landscape, Peer Mentoring programs are the nexus of first year students for what to expect now and in the future of their university experience. Not only are they receiving first hand information from advanced year students, peer mentoring programs are also a great place to meet new people and to make friends. As a Mentee from CSE Student Network Mentoring Program puts it, “The social aspect was huge for me, I met most of the friends I socialise with now through the CSE Student Network. My mentor was also very good at helping me find my footing when I first started uni, however I found myself being more self-reliant as I continued. I only got there so quickly though because of an awesome mentor.”

Peer Mentors at UNSW are experienced advanced year students that provide support to new students making the transition to university life. They have a special role in helping new students settle into UNSW. Mentors use their experience and knowledge to guide new students through those first crucial weeks at university. Mentors passing on tips, insights and sharing experiences could be the important key for first year students in making that successful transition. Hundreds of advanced year students have taken on the role of a PEER MENTOR to support new first year students this Session.

In this edition of the newsletter, we feature a Mentor that has completed her undergraduate degree at UNSW and is now a PhD candidate, Mentees’ amazing stories and a Mentor who recognizes the contribution of Peer Mentoring to her uni success!

We are also pleased to feature the College of Fine Arts Peer Mentoring Coordinator Dr. Scott East.

We hope you enjoy reading issue 2!

WHERE ARE THEY NOW? - From Mentor to PhD Candidate!

By Sophie Virachit, former Peer Mentor in the Faculty of Science Peer Mentoring Program. Currently a PhD Candidate in the Faculty of Medicine.

I started off as a Peer Mentee grappling with the ropes of University life, then as an advanced year student, I became a Peer Mentor!

Being a Peer Mentee in my first year allowed me to meet other students and gave me someone to go to for handy hints and tips. The transition to becoming a Peer Mentor was nerve racking at first but the training and support network provided helps prepare you for the role. The students that I’ve had in my mentoring group were great and I did enjoy playing ice breaker games with them and doing the unofficial crash course of how to use the library, which was something my Mentors did for me!

The program allowed me to develop my leadership and communication skills and going from Mentee to Mentor allowed me to experience the two different roles, which have been helpful in understanding both sides and to remember that you were once in their shoes!

The skills gained in the Peer Mentoring Program are now being applied to help younger students coming through each year to find their feet in the research world and helping me build my network with senior scientists and other higher degree research students.

Q. How many advanced year students took on the role of Mentor in 2013?

A) 498?
B) 815?
C) 1010?

Answer: B) Approx. 815

For more information about Peer Mentoring @ UNSW please go to www.peermentoring.unsw.edu.au
Scott grew up on the South Coast and did a double degree in Fine Arts and Science at the University of Wollongong and was the first of his family to attend University. His strong involvement with community engagement and local politics included being on the SRC executive, kick-starting a local youth representative council, sitting on Faculty Boards and various other committees. This led to becoming an ambassador to schools promoting University study and later working in a University call centre helping students find the best educational pathway to fuel their careers and passions (also conveniently funding an international exchange). He then worked as an Educational Officer for a Science Faculty promoting science as a career option running summer schools for Year 9 students and other cool events before returning to finish off an honours year himself. This led on to doctoral research investigating how museums can participate in discussions around climate change.

“So, I am really interested in how educational institutions can be involved in positive social change. I am passionate about informal learning environments and peer-to-peer approaches. At the moment I am following the unSchooling movement closely and at heart am a Hackademic, which means that I believe people need to be engaged and creative when putting together their educational programs.

My new job involves teaching into our first year program as well as managing the transition plans for students both entering the college and at the other end, out into the world of work and professional experience. I am super excited about building the leadership capacity of students at COFA.”

HEAR FROM A MENTOR — Faculty of Engineering Peer Mentor Zeina Tebbo

My name is Zeina and I am in my 5th year of a Chemical/Biomedical Engineering degree and a Faculty of Engineering Peer Mentor!

Settlement, whether in a new country, job or university, bears a lot of adjustment and integration. As a person whose parents are migrants I witnessed firsthand a lot the hardships people succumb to while trying to fit in, often it was a lonely journey. Becoming a peer mentor was a simple choice. It was an opportunity to be a guide and to help people enjoy the experiences of life as opposed to fearing them.

Through my time I have not only enhanced my own social skills but I have been privileged enough to meet amazing people with their own stories and experiences to share. Many of those people have become my friends and have only made my time at UNSW more enjoyable. Definitely my highest point of being a peer mentor is watching students delve into University life with confidence, independence and high self-esteem.

HEAR FROM A MENTEE — The benefits of having a mentor!

The peer mentoring program that ASOC offered me was an amazing experience. Through the use of these peer mentoring groups, we as first years were able to form strong lasting friendships quickly. The sheer size of university is a far cry from high school. The mentors put effort into showing us around campus allowing us to quickly familiarise ourselves with the large layout. Through the use of interactive games, the mentors were able to quickly involve all the group members, providing a platform for simple and effective communication. The time during peer mentoring was highly relaxing and fun. The friendships formed were long lasting and the peer mentoring program managed to smooth the transition from high school to university significantly.

By Matthew Hua — Peer Mentee 2013 (Actuarial Studies (ASOC) Peer Mentor Program)
HEAR FROM A MENTEE — The benefits of having a mentor!

Coming to UNSW med, we didn’t know what to expect! Without peer mentoring we don’t know how we would have passed our first year exams or had anyone to sit with at lunch! Apart from being a great way to make new friends in our year, we were also able to bond with our mentors and begin the integration that UNSW med is so renowned for. The older students bestowed upon us some lifesaving knowledge through their own experiences such as the best places to sit during histology and what text books not to buy.

Most importantly, mentoring gave us our first experience with Medsoc and the great sense of community it has to offer. Without mentoring we would not have been encouraged to become further involved in the society through amazing activities such as Medshow, the SB Dowton leadership conference, SIGs and pubcrawl. Before we came into med we thought it would be all study, but peer mentoring helped us to realise that finding a balance between academic and social components of medicine was the best way to succeed at university!!

By Monica Majumder and Lucy Bracken — Medicine Society (MedSoc) Peer Mentees

Student Minds at UNSW

Student Minds is a student driven initiative that is being piloted by the UNSW Counselling & Psychological Services [CAPS]. It focuses on strategies to raise awareness of mental health and wellbeing for a diverse student community and to reduce stigma associated with mental ill-health and psychological distress. When students complete the required volunteering hours, they are eligible for award under the UNSW Advantage program.

Students receive training in Mental Health First Aid and skills to support them in their volunteer role. By drawing on university resources to run on-campus events, campaigns and social activities the students promote support services to other students in need, with a focus on prevention and early intervention.

The core aims of Student Minds are to:

1. Increase understanding and knowledge of mental health amongst the student community.
2. Help spread a positive attitude about mental health and skills that sustain a sense of wellbeing.
3. Increase early help-seeking behavior amongst students experiencing psychological distress.

Student Minds @ UNSW is an opportunity for students to develop valuable real-world skills, contribute to a very important cause, meet like-minded individuals and leave a valued and important legacy on campus. Current activities have included information stalls, BBQ and social outings.

To become a Student Minds member, you will need to register via survey monkey. To obtain details, please email studentminds@unsw.edu.au or ‘like’ the Facebook page – Student Minds at UNSW. If you have further questions, please contact the Student Minds project officer, Seher Arslan at s.arslan@unsw.edu.au

QUOTE:

“If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants”.

By Isaac Newton

CONTRIBUTIONS?

Would you like to share a story about your Peer Mentoring at UNSW experience or is there something that you would like us to include in the newsletter? If so, please email peermentoring@unsw.edu.au