Student peer mentoring in Australian higher education:
An investigation

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Abstract

This thesis is an exploration of student peer mentoring programs which are increasingly popular in Australian higher education. The thesis investigates the motivations behind student peer mentoring programs offering transition-in support for students. The thesis investigates whether programs are run to benefit the students or to serve the interests of the institution. The thesis explores the current context of higher education in Australia and moves to a case study of the University of Wollongong. Interview data is used to analyse how staff and students navigate the institutional narrative surrounding student peer mentoring and its uses.
Declaration

‘I certify that this thesis is entirely my own work except where I have given full documented references to the work of others, and that the material contained in this thesis has not been submitted for formal assessment in any formal course and the word length is 17,395.’

Nicholas M. McGhie Wednesday 24th October, 2012
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In Greek mythology, Mentor was the son of Alcimus or Anchialus. In his old age Mentor was a friend of Odysseus. Odysseus placed Mentor and his foster-brother Eumaeus in charge of his son Telemachus, and of his palace, when he left for the Trojan War. When Athena visited Telemachus she took the disguise of Mentor to hide herself from the suitors of Telemachus' mother Penelope. As Mentor, the Goddess encouraged Telemachus to stand up against the suitors and go abroad to find out what happened to his father. When Odysseus returned to Ithaca, Athena appeared briefly in the form of Mentor again at Odysseus' palace.

Because of Mentor's relationship with Telemachus and the disguised Athena's encouragement and practical plans for dealing personal dilemmas, the name Mentor has been adopted in English as a term meaning someone who imparts wisdom to and shares knowledge with a less experienced colleague.
Introduction

Framing the Investigation
This thesis focuses on student peer mentoring in Australian higher education. As a student at the University of Wollongong for the last four years, I have witnessed first-hand the diminished opportunity for university lecturers and tutors to develop one-on-one interactions with students. I have been involved in student peer mentoring programs at the University of Wollongong for three years. I understood student peer mentoring to be something that utilised students who are relatable and non-threatening to help new students find key information about university. I believed this to be a supplemental system of support and referral. As my involvement grew, so too did my exposure to the strategic goals of the institution. It occurred to me that student peer mentoring programs are subject to the strategic goals and relevant performance indicators of the institution. When I became involved in program reporting, I began to question the broader uses and motivations for running student peer mentoring programs in higher education. Is it performing a role with students’ best interests at heart or is it serving the institution?

My focus is on transition-in student peer mentoring using the University of Wollongong as a case study. Transition-in student peer mentoring is the most common model in Australian higher education today (see Appendix 2 for a summary of models currently in use in Australian higher education institutions). Interviews conducted with staff and students at the University of Wollongong shed light on the definitions and uses of student peer mentoring in higher education. The research method used is one of narrative analysis. Narrative analysis allows me to look closely at how the participants talk about student peer mentoring and how they align themselves with the institutional narrative.

I approach this thesis through an understanding of human, social and cultural capital. **Human capital** is defined as the skills, knowledge, and experience possessed by an individual or population, viewed in terms of their value or cost to an organisation or country. Coleman (1988) argues that human capital “is created by changes in persons that bring about skills and capabilities that make them able to act in new ways” (S100). Investment in human capital development is connected to education and is thus frequently used to justify government subsidies and funding for higher education (Simkovic 2012). **Social capital** is defined as the networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society, enabling that society to function effectively. Coleman (1988) argues that social capital “comes about through changes in the relations among persons that facilitate action”
Bourdieu (1986) argues that the volume of the social capital possessed by a person is dependent upon “the size of the network of connections that person can effectively mobilise and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected”. Cultural capital is defined as forms of knowledge, skills, education, and advantages that a person has, which give them a higher status in society. Parents provide their children with cultural capital by transmitting the attitudes and knowledge needed to succeed in the current educational system.

Higher education in Australia is a public investment. Government funding is distributed to institutions. The investment is based on the promise of an increase in the skills, knowledge and experience of persons, which will have a positive effect on the national economy. Higher education is thus based on a cost-benefit analysis, whereby public investment infers public return. Bourdieu (1977) stressed the education system’s role in favouring and thus legitimising the maintenance of the status and power of the controlling classes. The Government’s social inclusion policy, whereby people from backgrounds which are currently underrepresented are given equal access to higher education, is an attempt to breakdown the elitist system of education. Student peer mentoring has become a strategy to ease the transition to university for students, increasing disadvantaged students’ social and cultural capital in pursuit of the national interest of increased human capital.

It is necessary to develop an understanding of how identity and power function to legitimise and maintain the status and power of the controlling classes. In Discipline and Punish, Foucault (1995) explains Bentham’s Panopticon. Foucault (1995) compares modern society to the Panopticon design for prisons whereby a single guard can watch over many prisoners while remaining unseen. The Panopticon has the power, among other things, to “alter behaviour, to train or correct individuals” (Foucault 1995: 203). Foucault concludes by rhetorically questioning “is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?” (1995: 228).

The Panopticon… has a role of amplification… its aim is to strengthen the social forces - to increase production, to develop the economy, spread education, raise the level of public morality; to increase and multiply (Foucault 1995: 205).

Schools, factories, hospitals and prisons resemble each other because they examine pupils, workers, patients and prisoners, classify them as individuals and try to make them conform to
the "norm". I move beyond a mere critique of the corporatisation of higher education to a broader and holistic view of the competing interests evident in student peer mentoring.

The adjective "critical" does not mean simply to criticize, nor does it imply only the uncovering of the fundamental bases of knowledge and society. Rather, in the tradition of which Giroux writes, it implies an act of simultaneous negation and transcendence (Simon 1984: 379).

Henry A. Giroux’s approach, explained by Simon (1984) and Kellner (2001) retrospectively, is appropriated in this thesis. I contextualise student peer mentoring within my own background and within the political and historical context it exists within.

**Outline of Chapters**

In the opening chapter, I will provide a history of higher education in Australia and explore the evolution of student peer mentoring as a formalised practice. The opening chapter also defines mentoring and student peer mentoring whilst discovering their benefits.

In chapter two, I introduce the University of Wollongong as the site of the case study. I begin with a profile of the institution and detail the student peer mentoring programs currently in operation. I focus on the Peer-2-Peer Mentoring Program as an example of how programs measure benefits.

In chapter three, I discuss the research method of the case study. The interview data is described with commentary, identifying common themes and key preoccupations of the participants.

In chapter four, I discuss the interview data in relation to the literature and understanding of student peer mentoring and higher education in Australia developed throughout the thesis. I offer recommendations for future research and action.
Chapter One

Mentoring in Higher Education
In this chapter, I will explore the concepts of mentoring and student peer mentoring, identifying the perceived benefits. Firstly, to understand the utilisation of student peer mentoring, I look at the history of higher education. In doing so, I develop an understanding of the formalised practice of student peer mentoring and how it arose.

**Australian Higher Education**

The modern economy needs highly trained people in order to function smoothly and to cope with further growth. Consequently, a dynamic economy must be prepared to devote a relatively high proportion of its resources to tertiary education, and also to research and development programs which facilitate the application of new knowledge to industrial and commercial enterprises (Committee on the Future of Tertiary Education in Australia [Martin Committee] 1964 cited in; Encel 1989: 5).

Over the last 20 years, there has been an increase in the rate of students obtaining bachelor level qualifications in Australia, primarily due to the reforms during the late 1980s and early 1990s as part of the move to mass participation in higher education (Commonwealth of Australia 2009: 12). In the 1950s, the Menzies’ Liberal government introduced annual university scholarships which provided a means tested allowance and payment of fees. The move to mass participation was initiated in the 1970s under Prime Minister Gough Whitlam (1972-1975). Whitlam saw education as “a national problem and a national challenge... education is the key to national development, national prosperity and national survival” (Whitlam 1969). Whitlam viewed education as a basic human right not a privilege, a view expressed in Article 26 of the United National Universal Declaration of Human Rights drafted in 1948 (Hutchinson 2011: 15):

**Article 26**

(1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

In 1973, the Whitlam government abolished university tuition fees in the hope of making tertiary education more accessible to working and middle class Australians (National Archives of Australia). In 1974, the Commonwealth assumed full responsibility for funding higher education. This led to the establishment of the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (CTEC) which had an advisory role and responsibility for allocating government funding among universities (ARC 2009).
The Australian higher education system was a three-tier system until 1988 composed of:

- Traditional universities
- A collection of institutes of technology
- A collection of colleges of Technical and Further Education (TAFE)

In 1988, the Australian Minister for Education, Employment and Training, Mr John Dawkins, released a substantial document entitled “Higher education: a policy statement”, commonly referred to as the “White Paper” (Encel 1989: 1). The document detailed a series of structural changes to Australian higher education. Under the reforms, the Australian higher education system was made into a two-tier system, as it remains today, composed of:

- Universities (Public and Private)
- Colleges of Technical and Further Education (TAFE)

The reforms of 1988 also heralded the creation of the unified national system of institutions, educational profiles and the National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET) (ARC 2009). The structural changes resulting from the 1988 reforms did not direct universities to a specific form of academic management but it was apparent that the top down structures of the CAEs (Council for Adult Education known today as Centre for Adult Education) were “favoured to ensure ‘strong managerial modes of operation’, ‘adequate levels of consultation and accountability’, ‘streamlined decision making’, and maximum flexibility in the capacity of an ‘institution to implement new policies’” (Bessant 2002: 61-62). Although not explicit in the document “there was no suggestion anywhere that other forms of management reform might have been more suited to universities” (Bessant 2002: 62). The “White Paper”, and the resulting structural reforms, ultimately led to a corporatised model of higher education in Australia.

Bessant (2002) explains that under the corporatised model of higher education, “in satisfying the demand for efficiency in management, an enterprise may lose sight of its ideals, of its humanity and even its professional integrity” (79). Whatever the institution does in these activities must bring a financial benefit to the institution (Bessant 2002: 79). Bessant (2002) argues that in higher education:
...the corporate culture has taken over wherein the profit motive is dominant. The staff are seen to serve the interests of the corporation, to provide its finance, to support its commercial endeavours, to market its products and to charge profitable services to its clients (79-80).

The “product” in this case is education and “clients” are the students of the institution. Bessant (2002) argues that “other considerations which could involve national interest, public good, future directions, etc. are ignored” (79-80). In essence, Bessant (2002) argues that there has been a subsequent loss to the sense of the individual in the higher education system felt by staff and students alike in institutions’ pursuit of profits.

Bostock (1999), writing three years prior to Bessant (2002), argues that the corporatisation of higher education will provide:

- greater access to higher education for all and especially for disadvantaged groups,
- greater responsiveness to demands for more ‘relevant’ courses and
- greater involvement of universities with the communities that surround them - a demolishing of the ‘ivory tower’ (5)

Despite Bostock’s (1999) claims and numerous policy reforms in Australian higher education over the past 40 years there continues to be underrepresentation in higher education particularly for indigenous students and students from low socio-economic backgrounds (McLean & Holden 2004).

**Underrepresentation in Higher Education**

The corporatised, mass system of higher education has still failed to attract and retain certain students, just as it did with the abolition of university fees in the 1970s.

In order to achieve greater national productivity as well as encourage social cohesion, Australia must break down the barriers that have led to an ongoing under-representation in higher education of students from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds (DEEWR 2012).

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations’ (DEEWR’s) statement above relates to the reasons behind a transition to engage underrepresented groups in education – to achieve greater national productivity. The Whitlam Government’s commitment to a free and widely accessible higher education system marked a focus on social inclusion. The focus in recent years on social inclusion stems from the Bradley review conducted in 2008 – a comprehensive examination of Australia’s higher education sector.
The review documented a crisis in Australia’s higher education system: poor participation rates; under-represented students; and national policy and funding initiatives falling well short of counterparts such as the UK and the US (Bradley et al. 2008). The Hon Julia Gillard MP (2009), then Minister for Education, Employment, Workplace Relations, Social Inclusion and Deputy Prime Minister, stated that the Rudd Government was committed to a “very substantial new LSES (Low Socio-Economic Status) loading to encourage and reward universities who enrol students from LSES backgrounds and are funding partnership programs to ensure that universities take the action needed to bring promising students from disadvantaged backgrounds into the system”. In December 2009 the federal government announced that performance funding would be based on University specific targets set with the aim of “better quality student experience through a focus on teaching quality” (Gillard 2009). National regulation of quality would be managed through the Tertiary Education Quality & Standards Agency (TEQSA) which would operate independently from the government. Specifically the federal government was interested in “strategies to lift student experience, enhance teaching quality and improve learning outcomes”, and “measure the extent to which students involve themselves in both the academic and non-academic dimensions of university life” (Gillard 2009). The Government’s Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) introduced to the federal budget in 2009, was a direct response to the Bradley review of 2008 (Gillard 2009; National HEPPP Evaluation Think Tank 2012).

Managed by DEEWR, HEPPP makes available a pool of funds to encourage institutions to increase participation, retention and completion rates among disadvantaged students. Funding is split into two components; a ‘participation’ component and a partnerships component. The ‘partnerships’ component concerns programs and strategies targeted at primary and secondary school students (DEEWR 2012). Programs such as AIME which targets indigenous secondary school students, and the In2Uni program, which targets primary and secondary school students from low socio-economic areas, are examples at the University of Wollongong. Under the ‘participation’ component, an eligible university can apply for funding to support students from LSES backgrounds in such activities (DEEWR 2012). Support initiatives such as the University of Newcastle’s UniStart program and the University of Wollongong’s UStart@UOW Program, which both aim to offer transitional support for students identified as disadvantaged, are examples. In 2012, over $113 billion has been made
available through the HEPPP fund with this figure set to increase on a yearly basis (DEEWR 2012).

HEPPP reporting standards are set by DEEWR and aim to “understand how… funding is being utilised in achieving the Australian Government's ambition of achieving 20 per cent of higher education enrolments coming from a LSES background by 2020” (DEEWR 2012). Initiatives established through the use of HEPPP funding are thus required to measure impacts on retention and attrition of students from LSES backgrounds. The Government’s social inclusion policy has resulted in increased interest in the First Year Experience (FYE). The first year of higher education is identified as a critical time in terms of drop-out rates and performance. The HEPPP funding provides the impetus for institutions to create and sustain programs that encourage the participation and retention of ‘at-risk’ students in higher education. This mirrors the findings of Bradley et al. (2008) who state that “once enrolled, (students who are currently underrepresented) require higher levels of support to succeed, including financial assistance and greater academic support, mentoring and counselling services” (27). Student peer mentoring has been used as a retention strategy in that it aims to offer more support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and monitor and increase student engagement.

**Mentoring**

The concept of mentoring emerges from the figure of ‘Mentor’ in Homer’s *Odyssey*. In Homer’s *Odyssey*, Telemachus is mentored through the guise of Odysseus’ close and trusted friend Mentor by the Greek Goddess Athena. Athena, through the guise of Mentor, encourages Telemachus’ development into a brave man who ventures to find his father, return home and slay the suitors. From this story, mentoring is understood to be a relationship in which one person with more experience and knowledge aids the development of another person who is perceived to have less experience and less knowledge in a transitional stage of their life. This shapes our definition of mentoring.

Mentoring, as Bozeman & Feeney (2007) state, is a “process for the informal transmission of knowledge, social capital, and psychosocial support perceived by the recipient as relevant to work, career, or professional development; mentoring entails informal communication, usually face-to-face and during a sustained period of time, between a person who is perceived to have greater relevant knowledge, wisdom, or experience (the mentor) and a person who is
perceived to have less (the protégé/the mentee)” (732). Megginson et al. (2006) adds that mentoring is “off-line help by one person to another in making significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking” (4-5). Omatsu (2004) explains that a mentor is a knowledgeable and experienced guide, a trusted ally and advocate, and a caring role model. The personal attributes of the effective mentor are described my Omatsu (2004): they are respectful, reliable, patient, trustworthy, and a very good listener and communicator (Omatsu 2004: 2). Freire (1997) discusses that the fundamental task of the mentor is “a liberatory task - it is not to encourage the mentor’s goals and aspirations and dreams to be reproduced in the mentees, the students, but to give rise to the possibility that the students become the owners of their own history” (324). In contrast to Freire (1997), Darwin (2000) argues that mentors are often more effective if a coaching style is adopted where appropriate. Darwin (2000) thus blurs the line between mentoring and coaching implying that the term mentoring has been appropriated in organisations to achieve specific goals or objectives.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) summarises the benefits of mentoring well. ASHA (2012) states that mentees gain invaluable insight beyond their own education and experience from mentoring relationships. Some of the benefits explained by ASHA for mentees include:

- Access to a support system during critical stages of your academic and career development
- An insider's perspective on navigating your career
- Clearer understanding and enhancement of academic and career plans
- Exposure to diverse perspectives and experiences
- Direct access to powerful resources within your profession
- Identification of skill gaps
- Greater knowledge of career success factors
- The foundation of a lasting professional network (ASHA 2012)

The benefits of mentoring emphasised in the literature all relate to the enhancement of access, support, knowledge and development for mentees, protégés or participants (see Bozeman &

Peer mentoring

Peer mentoring is a non-hierarchical relationship in which peers are identified as ‘collaborators’ and ‘colleagues’. Beattie & McDaugall (1997) state peer mentoring is a process in which there is a mutual involvement in encouraging and enhancing learning and development between two peers. Peers are defined as people of similar hierarchical status or who perceive themselves as equals (Beattie & McDaugall 1997: 425). In peer mentoring environments, participants seek shared insights, experiences, ideas, guidance, problem-solving and support from their peers (Ramani et al. 2006: 406), achieved through discussion in which the participant can experiment with ideas, opinions, and alternative interpretations, receiving feedback from others engaged in a similar quest (Brookfield 1986: 135). Drew et al. (2000) argue that peer mentoring relationships are informal in nature. Holbeche (1996) and Beattie & McDaugall (1997) add and agree that a peer mentoring relationship is one of equality between members of the peer group. In some cases, this can mean peer mentoring relationships are established within an organization, sometimes even within the same department or function. Holbeche (1996) also notes that peer mentoring relationships are established across functions or divisions within an organization and sometimes go beyond the organization (Holbeche 1996: 25).

Peer mentoring is a practice discussed in business, healthcare, workplace training, special education, primary education, secondary education and higher education. As with traditional one-on-one mentoring outside of higher education, large organisations utilise peer mentoring relationships (Holbeche 1996; Bodell 2012). Holbeche (1996), in discussing the use of peer mentoring in changing organisations, notes that the “fear of making a mistake gets in the way of employees being innovative and moving their organizations forward” (24). Holbeche (1996) discusses the use of peer mentoring in organisations as a tool for easing fears of potential job loss which “causes employees to horde information and promote their own interests” (25). Peer mentoring “works on the basis that experienced individuals have many
skills and resources” which can “genuinely help achieve the mythical “empowerment” much discussed within organisations” (25). Peer mentoring is used in organisations to limit internal politics, ease the fears of the individual employee and encourage resource-sharing (Holbeche 1996).

**Student peer mentoring in higher education**

Student peer mentoring programs are increasingly common in universities in Australia and around the world (Quinn et al. 2002; Hall & Jaugietis 2011; Jacobi 1991). Heirdsfield et al. (2008) suggests that the growth of student peer mentoring programs in recent years can be accredited to increased feelings of isolation and uncertainty first year students experience in making the transition to university study (109). The Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association (ANZSSA) states that student peer mentoring programs are “widely acknowledged to be immensely valuable experiences for both mentors and mentees”, adding that student peer mentoring programs “make a positive contribution to the quality of student life and institutional effectiveness” (2009). Student peer mentoring is a form of peer mentoring utilised in higher education. No clear distinction between peer mentoring and student peer mentoring is evident in the literature. Further terms such as peer support, peer facilitation, Peer Assisted Learning (PAL), and peer tutoring are cited with little attention to definitions and their distinctions – if any.

Student peer mentoring involves a more senior student mentoring a less experienced student (ANZSSA 2009; Hall & Jaugietis 2011). In this thesis I have focused on one form of student peer mentoring – transition in. Transition in mentoring is the most common student peer mentoring model. It is believed that a students’ first year is the most critical in terms of retention and completion rates. Milne et al. (2007) argue that the pedagogies informing mentoring programs are very similar – based on collaborative learning and cooperative learning paradigms (3)¹. Student peer mentoring aims to address this period by offering transitional support to encourage student engagement and ensure important information is easily accessible. Hall & Jaugietis (2011) argue that the student peer mentoring process avoids status differences that may exist between faculty and students: student peer mentoring takes advantage of the student mentors’ ability to share their own recent experiences (41-42). By positioning themselves as peers and avoiding status differences between faculty and

¹ See *Appendix 2* for a list of student peer mentoring models currently being used in Australian higher education.
students, mentors can create a supportive and safe environment where students can speak openly.

Smith (2009) argues that mentoring should normalise the experience of higher education and assist underrepresented students with acquiring academic cultural capital. Smith (2009) argues that student peer mentoring programs provide students with critical support to enhance the network available. Mentoring enhances the family network’s ability to support students to aspire to and achieve a goal (McLean & Holden 2004: 5). Student peer mentoring programs should enhance academic social networks as they play a significant role in students’ academic achievement (Smith 2009: 5). The unspoken norm, values and rules of education which govern behaviours and interactions between faculty, professionals and students should be intentionally revealed to students in student peer mentoring programs:

An example of revealing the hidden curriculum is learning appropriate ways on how to disagree with a professor on “controversial issues” in a respectful manner that does not challenge authority… These types of “codes of behaviour” may not be self-evident to all students (Smith: 2009: 3).

Social contacts become conduits with which students acquire academic cultural capital: “students are able to increase their academic cultural capital when they increase their social capital and vice versa” (Smith 2009: 5).

**Measurable benefits of student peer mentoring**

Measurable benefits are important in a performance based funding system initiated by the Rudd Government – “if universities achieve their targets, they will receive performance funding” (Gillard 2009). The Rudd Government established sector wide targets and key performance indicators (KPIs) to assess institutions. In response to the Bradley Review, in March 2009, the Government announced the establishment of the Tertiary Education Quality and Assurance Agency (TEQSA) as a single national regulatory and quality assurance agency for higher education².

**SI/PASS**

The Supplemental Instruction or the Peer Assisted Study Sessions Program (SI/PASS) is discussed in the closely related field of peer learning, which distinguishes itself from student

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² TEQSA has subsumed the responsibilities and functions of the former Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA).
peer mentoring. SI/PASS\(^3\), although originally developed to address attrition problems, is associated with an increase in academic grades for regular participants (see Martin & Arendale 1992). Martin & Arendale’s (1992) study was informed by data from 49 institutions in the US, selected because “they represent a cross-section of different institutional types, have rigorous data collection procedures, and transmit their data in a timely fashion” (23). SI/PASS has become increasingly popular in Australia – where it is known simply as PASS. SI/PASS is also assumed to serve similar purposes to other student peer mentoring programs particularly in relation to attrition/retention and transitional support (see Martin & Arendale 1992). At the University of Wollongong, PASS is marketed to students and staff as a program that has consistently shown to improve individual subject grades\(^4\). A criticism of PASS, and student peer mentoring programs more generally, is the issue of self-selection bias – that already able students, who would succeed regardless, attend thus overstating the impacts of student peer mentoring programs (Johnson et al. 2010: 55). Research has addressed the issue of self-selection bias. Lewis et al. (2005), for example, found that PASS has a positive impact on the academic performance of students after correcting for selection bias. Muschallik & Pull (2012) found that participants in formal mentoring programs for researchers in higher education are more productive than their non-participating counterparts even when taking into account self-selection bias. PASS, and other student peer mentoring programs, have thus been shown to increase academic performance – a measurable outcome.

**Student Satisfaction and Student Engagement**

The Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) suggests that learning is influenced by how an individual participates in educationally purposeful activities. Tinto (1993) found that students involved in community and collaborative learning programs, where students learn with and from their peers, were involved in a wider range of learning activities, learned more, and persisted at a higher rate than did similar students in more traditional learning settings.

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\(^3\) Supplemental Instruction/Peer Assisted Study Sessions (SI/PASS) is an academic support program attached to subjects with historically high failure rates and/or are perceived to be difficult. SI is how the Program is referred to in the United States. PASS is the name of the Program in Australia. SI/PASS is how the Program is referred to internationally.

\(^4\) Publically available statistics for selected subjects supported by PASS at the University of Wollongong

If a student is more engaged in university academically, socially and culturally and more satisfied with the institution and their overall educational experience, they are more likely to have a commitment to the university and are more likely to complete their course (Tinto 1975). Adams et al. (2010) found that “the use of peer mentoring was generally regarded as an effective mechanism for tracking and enhancing student engagement” (27 – emphasis added). Student peer mentoring offers a way for students to be integrated into the systems of the university whilst meeting with peers and being exposed to engagement opportunities. The ultimate measure of student satisfaction and engagement is attrition and completion rates – the assumption that a more engaged and more satisfied student will persist in higher education.

**Attrition and Retention**

There is a common assumption in academic literature and in practice that student peer mentoring reduces attrition rates (e.g. Treston 1999; Blanc et al. 1983; Quinn et al. 2002). Despite the assumption, Whitaker et al. (2002) argues that “little research has addressed what constitutes effective mentoring or if mentoring actually has any effect on attrition”. Blanc et al. (1983) was the only study found which presents empirical evidence that SI/PASS reduces attrition. Blanc et al. (1983) found that participation in SI/PASS, for students identified as ‘high-risk’, appeared to improve both performance in the subject the program was attached to and retention at the institution. Blanc et al. (1983) state that “it is much more difficult to assess which factors contributed to the observed effects”, admitting that “a combination of factors undoubtedly operates to influence higher levels of student academic performance” (87). Whether student peer mentoring can be proven to reduce attrition rates should be the focus of another study. What is important for this thesis is the fact that student peer mentoring programs in Australian educational institutions report on attrition and position it as a key goal.

The Bradley Review (2008), from a Government perspective, reiterated the worth and purpose of higher education for the national economy (27). At an institutional level, in the corporatised system of higher education that exists, it is the responsibility of, and in the best interests financially of, the institution to retain students once enrolled. Retention rates are being closely monitored by institutions because they are facing problems of inadequately prepared students, increasing attrition rates, performance-based government funding and the
consequent pressure to attract and maintain students (Garner 1997), particularly those from low socio-economic backgrounds.

The provision of funding, in the corporatised model, is therefore based on the goals and visions of the Government and the demonstrated ability the institution has to meet these goals and visions. Sole accountability has been placed on institutions, involving the monitoring and reporting of attrition, retention and participation rates by institutions. Institutional reports are collated and presented nationally by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) who state, in relation to the importance of measuring attrition rates, that:

…it is important for policy and program development to know if particular groups or categories of students are more inclined to drop out of higher education than others, and whether attrition is greater at particular institutions, in particular fields of education or in particular course types than in others (2012).

DEEWR refer to the Government’s vision of an inclusive education, initiated by Whitlam in the 1970s.

Table 1: The Cost of Attrition at Australian Universities 2008 (Adams et al. 2010: 17)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Enrolments Include Offshore</th>
<th>Numbers Dropped Out</th>
<th>Total Tuition Fees Loss</th>
<th>Costs of Marketing &amp; Recruitment</th>
<th>Total Cost of Attrition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>International Students</strong></td>
<td>274,186</td>
<td>35,946</td>
<td>$386 million</td>
<td>$100 million</td>
<td>$486 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Domestic Students</strong></td>
<td>727,817</td>
<td>101,530</td>
<td>$812 million</td>
<td>$51 million</td>
<td>$863 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1,002,003</td>
<td>137,476</td>
<td>$1,198 million</td>
<td>$151 million</td>
<td>$1,367 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average per Australian University</strong></td>
<td>263,685</td>
<td>3618</td>
<td>$32 million</td>
<td>$4 million</td>
<td>$36 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adams et al. (2010) present a cost analysis of attrition in Australian universities in 2008. They report that the total cost of attrition was $1.4 billion in 2008 (Adams et al. 2010). Figure 2 shows the findings, factoring in lost tuition fees, marketing and recruitment costs (all significantly higher for international students). Every 1% drop in the attrition rate
represents a saving in Australia’s public universities of almost one billion dollars (Adams et al. 2010: 18). It is within this climate that the prominence of student peer mentoring programs in Australian higher education has grown. Although not yet thoroughly evaluated student peer mentoring is commonly believed to be and used as a retention strategy. Student peer mentoring in Australian higher education is not simply providing the highest possible level of support to students.

The Utilisation of Formalised Mentoring

The movement from an exclusive to a more inclusive higher education system has had an undesirable effect. Reflected in the findings of Bradley et al. (2008), Adams et al. (2010), AUSSE and broader research into the First Year Experience is the fact students do not receive the same level of face-to-face, human interaction that was once available. Krause et al (2005) notes that students are spending fewer hours on campus than they ever have, narrowing the opportunities for social and network connections (Godfrey 2008: 2). Mentoring, and other such initiatives, have been formalised in an attempt to engage students more in university life in their first year. The danger with increased isolation and a decline in human interaction and support is reduced student satisfaction, higher attrition rates and reduced academic marks.

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\[5\] Although some research suggests student peer mentoring reduces attrition, research is lacking in the specific elements and features that ensure programs produce the increase in retention
Mentoring programs have thus been utilised in Australian higher education to bring back an element of human interaction and support in a mass system. Under the corporatised model of higher education, mentoring has been formalised in an effort to produce measurable benefits which secures continued institutional support and funding (as shown in Figure 1).

The corporatisation of higher education in Australia has meant that the concept of human capital has been applied to educational policy in Australia. The assumption of the human capital model is that education is an investment that produces benefits in the future – education provides students with information and skills that will be valuable in later life. Quiggin (1999) argues that the human capital model’s implication for education policy is that “public and private expenditure on education should be expanded to the point where the present value of the stream of returns to marginal investments is equal to the cost” – the means should justify the ends. Cuts in educational funding will thus have adverse effects on long-term economic growth and on the lifetime welfare of students affected by the cuts (Quiggin 1999). At the institutional level, the human capital model is applied to student peer mentoring programs. Thus the investment the institution makes in student peer mentoring programs should produce a stream of returns equal to the cost. In other words, programs funded by the institution should produce outcomes which will benefit the institution’s position and in turn can be fed back to the Government to justify the original investment (as shown in Figure 2). To draw on an earlier example, institutions are provided funding through the HEPP to reach the Government’s 2020 target of 20% LSES student enrolment in higher education. Student peer mentoring programs are seen as a way to achieve this goal.

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6 The Australian higher education funding model is simplified to present the basic process of investment. The Australian Government offers a variety of grants with various strategic goals and KPIs.
The investment offered by institutions to student peer mentoring programs then must produce a reduction in attrition which will ultimately benefit the institution financially in the future – through securing more Government funding, and/or through tuition fees. It will also benefit society as a whole – economic prosperity from public investment in higher education.

In this chapter I have explored mentoring and student peer mentoring, explaining its benefits and uses in Australian higher education. I concluded this chapter linking strategic goals of the Government and the benefits attributed to student peer mentoring in the pursuit of these goals. I simplified the investment process, based on the concept of human capital, to clearly present the context in which student peer mentoring operate and the purpose they have come to serve. In chapter two, I look specifically at student peer mentoring programs at the University of Wollongong to investigate how institutions use programs. It is first necessary to introduce key points about the University of Wollongong and the student peer mentoring programs currently in operation to understand the interview data collected by staff and students at the University in chapter three’s case study. The case study investigates the perceptions of student peer mentoring at the University of Wollongong. I will look closely at how the institution talks about student peer mentoring publically and how participants align

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7 As with Figure 1, the process of investment return is simplified. An obvious benefactor of Government investment in higher education in Australia is society as a whole – as per the concept of human capital.
themselves with this narrative. Is student peer mentoring there to serve the students in Australian higher education or the institutions?
Chapter Two

Student peer mentoring at the University of Wollongong
In chapter one, I looked at the current state of higher education in Australia in order to understand the broader uses and motivations behind student peer mentoring programs. I looked at a brief history of higher education policy in Australia and the rise of corporatisation in higher education in Australia. A history of policy shifts has led to a ‘crisis’ in higher education involving underrepresented groups. I have grounded student peer mentoring initiatives in an understanding of the current context of higher education, looking at definitions and founding assumptions of student peer mentoring – how mentoring is believed to help and why it is being utilised. In chapter two, I introduce the case study institution, the University of Wollongong in New South Wales’ Illawarra region, to investigate first-hand how student peer mentoring is being used to address the strategic goals of the Australian Government.

**The University of Wollongong**

The University of Wollongong is a New South Wales education institution established in 1951 in the Illawarra region south of Sydney. It has a total student enrolment of 28,904, as of 2011. Professor Paul Wellings is the University’s fourth Vice-Chancellor (UOW 2012). Total international student enrolment in 2011 was 7446 – roughly 25% of total enrolment (UOW 2012). The University has campuses on the NSW South Coast (Shoalhaven, Batemans Bay, Bega) as well as a campus in Southern Sydney and the Southern Highlands. The University also has another campus in Wollongong, the Innovation Campus (iC), and the Sydney Business School – located in Sydney’s City Centre and also at the iC. The University of Wollongong was recently awarded a perfect score for educational experience in the 2013 Australian Good Universities Guide, receiving five stars in: teaching quality; generic skills; graduate satisfaction; getting a job; positive graduate outcomes; and graduate starting salary. In 2009, the University of Wollongong was rated first for overall satisfaction among Australian university students in the independent Sweeney Research Group’s “Uni Student Report”. From 2001 to 2010, the University had an average attrition rate of 10.21% which is roughly 6% below the NSW average of 16.88% and roughly 7% below the national average of 17.06% over the same time period (DEEWR 2012). According to the 2011 Annual Report, the University of Wollongong has a strong emphasis on student access and

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8 Attrition rate for year (x) is the proportion of students who commenced a bachelor course in year (x) who neither complete nor return in year (x + 1).
transitional support for students. There is a particular focus on LSES student participation and retention, stating a commitment to several initiatives to provide more opportunities for LSES students to study at UOW: “the In2Uni program to support LSES students in secondary school, new equity scholarships, new mentoring and ambassador programs and Social Inclusion Projects Scheme funding for transition and support of LSES students in a range of settings” (UOW 2012: 13-14).

**Student peer mentoring programs at the University of Wollongong**

The University’s 2011 Annual Report, mentions various student peer mentoring initiatives at the University of Wollongong⁹. The University of Wollongong has introduced student mentoring programs to encourage the participation and retention of students identified as at-risk. As discussed in chapter one, provision of funding is reliant on the commitment of the institution to commit to the strategic goals of the Government through the successful attainment of relevant KPIs; performance funding. For example, the funding agreement between the Commonwealth of Australia and the University of Wollongong states that a key objective of the Commonwealth “in providing funding for non-designated courses of study¹⁰ is to achieve the attainment target of 40 percent of the Australian population aged 25 to 34 years old having a bachelor level qualification or above by 2025” (Commonwealth of Australia 2012: 4).

**Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS)**

The longest running student peer mentoring program is the PASS Program. PASS began at the University in 2002 in the faculty of Informatics. PASS is an academic mentoring program for students with the aim of helping students master subject content whilst gaining learning skills for their discipline. PASS is attached to difficult subjects and/or used to promote development of learning communities. It aims to avoid remedial stigma by targeting subjects rather than students and is open to anyone enrolled in the subject. In 2005, PASS received purpose-built permanent facilities at the main Wollongong campus. PASS currently houses

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⁹ Although the focus in the University of Wollongong’s 2012 Annual Report is on student peer mentoring initiatives which directly address and actively encourage LSES student participation and retention.

¹⁰ From 2011, under the Higher Education Support Amendment (Demand Driven Funding System and Other Measures) Bill 2011, the Government no longer sets targets for student places in undergraduate courses of study other than medicine. The courses of study, other than medicine, are referred to as non-designated courses of study in the new legislation. Each university is paid for all of the undergraduate student places it provides (including places in enabling courses). Under this funding model, the impetus is on the institution to attract and enrol as many students as possible.
two dedicated teaching rooms, a training room, a kitchen and 6 offices. In 2012, PASS supports 87 subjects across the University of Wollongong’s main and regional campuses across all nine faculties. Subject-specific reports are prepared for subject coordinators detailing student attendance and average grades. The reports also include qualitative feedback collected from in-session and online surveys. Other reports, offered upon requested, include data concerning LSES participation rates, international student participation rates and gender analyses.

**In2Uni Program**

The In2Uni Program was launched in 2011 at the University of Wollongong. It aims to “build aspirations for tertiary education and beyond by allowing students to explore possibilities and opportunities at University” (In2Uni 2012). In2Uni offers a range of activities, including Academic Mentoring, Leadership & Transition Workshops, on-site experiences, road shows and online activities for students, parents and teachers in the program. The In2Uni Program is a partnership between the University of Wollongong and Department of Education and Communities (DEC NSW), Illawarra and South East Region to enhance aspirations of selected primary and secondary schools considered ‘at-risk’ within the community (In2Uni 2012). The success of the Program is measured by the participation rates of students from the targeted disadvantaged schools in the Illawarra and South East Region.

**UStart@UOW, iStart@UOW and UStart@UOW 2**

The UStart@UOW Program was trialled in 2011 and connects ‘at-risk’ students with student facilitators who are more advanced in their degrees. Individual faculty programs are developed by the student facilitators and aim to provide students with key information and tips for the beginning of their university education. The Program began in the faculties of Law, Education and Arts. In 2012, every undergraduate faculty ran a program for commencing students. The concurrent UStart@UOW2 Program is run by program staff to provide key information to parents and partners. Also trialled in 2011, iStart@UOW is a similar Program run by and developed for students at the University of Wollongong to address indigenous participation and persistence rates in higher education.

**Global Communicators Program (GCP)**

The Global Communicators Program was launched in 2012 with the aim of providing a social environment for international students and domestic students. The Program encourages
international students to develop their English language skills and share their culture. Domestic and International students are encouraged to attend to build international friendships and networks. The Global Communicators Program is funded by the Student Services and Amenities Fee brought in by the Government in 2012.

**UOW Student Life**

A new transition support program called UOW Student Life was introduced in 2012. With a dedicated website and social media page\(^{11}\), the program runs initiatives to aid social transition to university. Initiatives include: “Play Free Sport” – offering free lunch time sport for all students; “Fun on the Lawn” – activities and games such as hula hoops, Twister, Frisbee, bocce and three legged races; “The Good Life Series” – a series of hour-long talks from students campus-wide on topics such as eating cheap, renting, academic support, visas and immigration and staying active; and “Networking after 5” – formal and informal networking events designed to prepare students for a career whilst meeting relevant industry contacts.

**Recruitment**

Student mentors are recruited by Program staff and/or relevant university staff. A selective criterion applies to mentoring roles at the University of Wollongong. In the PASS Program, for example, applicants must have a high credit average\(^{12}\) and must have achieved at least a distinction\(^{13}\) in the subject for which they are applying to be a PASS Leader (PASS 2012). The emphasis on academic grades in the PASS recruitment process is stronger in 2012 for positions beginning 2013. Depending on the number of applicants for each subject, candidates with distinction averages are favoured. Further to academic performance, if PASS has run on the subject before, applicants must have attended regularly as a student in the subject\(^{14}\). They must also possess “above average communication and interpersonal skills, maturity and good organisational skills” (PASS 2012). The assumption underpinning PASS’ recruitment process is that high achieving students are the most appropriate for the role. The In2Uni Program places a similar emphasis on academic results, specifying that it is desirable that applicants have a credit average in their undergraduate or postgraduate degree with strong skills in the areas of Mathematics, English or Science (In2Uni 2012). “Applicants

\(^{11}\) UOW Student Life Facebook page: http://www.facebook.com/uowstudentlife

\(^{12}\) At the University of Wollongong, a Credit grade is defined as being 65% to 74%

\(^{13}\) At the University of Wollongong, a Distinction grade is defined as being 75% to 84%

\(^{14}\) Regular attendance is defined as 5 or more times
should have a strong desire to help raise the educational capacity of students with whom they are working” (In2Uni 2012). It is also desirable, but not essential, that applicants have attended one the high schools included in the Program (In2Uni 2012).

The Peer-2-Peer Mentoring Program, which is explored in more detail later in this chapter, has a less specific recruitment criterion specifying broader skills such as good understanding of academic principles and practices (Peer-2-Peer Mentoring Program 2012). Even so, as with the PASS and In2Uni Programs, there is an emphasis on recruiting student mentors with the necessary cultural capital: “a strong desire to build the capacity of first year students to meet the challenges of the transition to tertiary studies” (Peer-2-Peer Mentoring Program 2012). Generally, mentors in student peer mentoring programs at the University of Wollongong are students with cultural capital; generally students with strong academic ability and who have the time to commit to extracurricular activities.

**Peer-2-Peer Mentoring Program**

The second largest student peer mentoring program at the University of Wollongong is the Faculty of Arts’ Peer-2-Peer Mentoring Program. In 2011, the Faculty of Arts trialled the Program to encourage student engagement by marketing opportunities available including:

- Internships
- Volunteering and work experience
- Student conferences
- Professional development programs
- Extra-curricular programs
- Careers advice including finding work on-campus
- Library services
- Student support services
- Getting to know Wollongong
- Social events
- Live music
- Sporting events

By increasing awareness of extracurricular and social activities, the Program aims to increase student engagement, increase student satisfaction and reduce attrition rates. The Program also encourages the establishment of social networks with the aim of increasing student engagement and increasing student satisfaction. This is achieved through weekly meetings between mentees and mentors who come from different backgrounds and who have different
experiences: “The program actively encourages you to get to know your fellow mentees, share your knowledge, and develop into active members of the university community together” (Peer-2-Peer Mentoring Program 2012).

**Background**

In 2009, the Faculty of Arts had an attrition rate of 12.3%, above the university average of 9.6%\(^{15}\). In a report prepared by the Faculty\(^{16}\), it was acknowledged that: “the University and the federal government see attrition as a KPI (Key Performance Indicator) and the Faculty is required to report back on its attrition rates - the Bradley Report has identified a national attrition rate of 28% as an issue the sector needs to address”. The Faculty identified factors that sought to explain the above average attrition rates in Arts. One contributing factor found was the difficulty students have in engaging with peers and the university community. The Faculty suggested that this is due to the size of the cohort and the nature of the Faculty – the flexibility and the diverse range of disciplines, degrees and specialisations available. The Faculty intervened with a targeted engagement program for students during the initial transition to university. The Program was trialled in 2011 as a compulsory degree component for Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Arts (Dean’s Scholars) students. In 2012, the Program was introduced as a compulsory degree component for all degrees in the Faculty of Arts. As is the case institution-wide, Faculties are delegated responsibility for ensuring KPIs, such as retention, are met.

**Data**

At the beginning of Autumn session in 2011, the Peer-2-Peer Program had an overall enrolment of 304 students. Thirty mentors participated in the program in Autumn 2011. In Spring session in 2011, the Peer-2-Peer Program had an enrolment of 51 students. Six mentors continued in the Program for Spring 2011. In Autumn session in 2012, the Peer-2-Peer Program became compulsory for all undergraduate degrees in the Faculty of Arts – Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Arts (Dean’s Scholars), Bachelor of Communication and Media Studies, Bachelor of Communication and Media Studies (Dean’s Scholars), Bachelor

\(^{15}\) These statistics were included in a report prepared for the Faculty of Arts. According to DEEWR’s figures, attrition from the University of Wollongong in 2009 was 12.12% (2012). Although not specified, the attrition rates stated appear to be first-year attrition rates in Autumn semester 2009.

\(^{16}\) Anonymity of this source protects the author as a current member of staff at the University of Wollongong. The report was prepared for the Faculty of Arts in 2008 relating to performance funding, a response to the Bradley Review into higher education in Australia.
of International Studies and Bachelor of International Studies (Dean’s Scholars). At the beginning of Autumn session in 2012, the Peer-2-Peer Program had an enrolment of 607. In Spring session 2012, the Program had an enrolment of 78 students. Eight mentors continued in the Program in Spring 2012.

**Measures**

Evaluations of the Program are conducted via paper surveys distributed in the final week to student mentees. The questions and answers are generally consistent as, *Table 3* indicates. In Autumn 2011 and Autumn 2012, the majority of respondents agreed that they felt more connected to the Faculty and the institution. Most agreed that the Program helped them get to know other students in the Faculty.

*Table 2: Peer-2-Peer Mentoring Program Mentee Feedback*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentee Feedback (Autumn 2011)</th>
<th>Responses: 189</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>U</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helped me get to know other students in the Faculty of Arts</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presented information that was relevant to my concerns as a first year student</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped me understand my degree and how to complete my studies</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made me think about where my studies will lead</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped me feel connected to the Faculty of Arts</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped me feel connected to the University of Wollongong</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more likely to make use of the other student support services on campus</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentee Feedback (Autumn 2012)</th>
<th>Responses: 374</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>U</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helped me get to know other students in the Faculty of Arts</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presented information that was relevant to my concerns as a first year student</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped me understand my degree and where my studies can lead</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taught me valuable skills that have helped me to carry out my studies</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped me feel connected to the Faculty of Arts community</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped me feel connected to the UOW community</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped me understand academic culture</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made me more aware of how to access UOW student support services</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Autumn 2011, 189 mentees responded and in Autumn 2012, 374 mentees responded. The majority of participants in both surveys agreed with the statement. The surveys distributed in the Program are an attempt at gauging student satisfaction and measuring student engagement in academia, the Faculty and in the broader university community. The main measure of the effectiveness of the Program is attrition.
**Outcomes**

Attrition of commencing students from the Faculty of Arts in Autumn 2009 was about 16% and in Autumn 2010 was about 18%. Attrition of commencing students from the Bachelor of Arts in Autumn session 2010 was higher than the Faculty average at 23%. Preliminary data indicates that the Peer-2-Peer Program may have a positive effect on student retention. 14% of the commencing Bachelor of Arts students who enrolled in the Program in Autumn session 2011 did not enrol in the following Spring session – a reduction of 4% from the year before.

In this chapter, I have investigated student peer mentoring programs at the University of Wollongong. The information contained in this chapter is vital in understanding the case study. In chapter three, I will present data collected from five semi-structured interviews with staff and students from the University of Wollongong. The case study analyses how staff and students align themselves with the institutional narrative of student peer mentoring.
Chapter Three

The case study
One way to understand student peer mentoring in higher education, is to consider the perceptions and practical experiences stakeholders have had in programs and the extent to which these align with the institutional narrative. The interview questions encouraged participants to provide a personal narrative about their experiences of student peer mentoring. This chapter will identify the institutional narrative and explain the research method employed. The main focus of this chapter is to outline the interview data. Participant profiles are provided as all interviewees were de-identified post-transcription.

**Research Method**

Five participants from the University of Wollongong offered their interpretations on what student peer mentoring is and the perceived benefits programs have at the institution. The interviews were “aimed at finding out ‘what things exist rather than determining how many such things there are’” (Crouch & McKenzie 2006: 488-489). The research was aimed at discovering the dimensions and aspects of student peer mentoring within the sample rather than using the sample to state claims about the population. As Crouch & McKenzie (2006) argue, “qualitative research scrutinizes the dynamic qualities of a situation rather than its constituents and the proportionate relationships among them” (488-489). Thus the concerns of small sample-sizes in qualitative research used to make inferences about the population (documented by Sandalowski 1995) do not apply. The method employed is rather one of narrative research. Narrative analysis takes the story itself as the object of study, focusing on how individuals or groups make sense of events and actions in their lives through examining the story, and the linguistic and structural properties (Riessman 1993). Narrative method of research is the most appropriate when considering the nature of mentoring. Mentoring is an inherently personal experience and interviewees were encouraged to define and recall certain aspects of their own experiences to produce a personal narrative. The narrative is a way of seeing how they have made sense of student peer mentoring in their lives with particular attention to how they navigate the institutional narrative of student peer mentoring, its benefits and its uses.

To discover dimensions and aspects of student peer mentoring, it was vital to ensure each participant was able to provide, or at least encouraged to provide, narrative responses. A set of open-ended questions were arranged for the project in an attempt to minimise variation in the questions posed to interviewees (Patton 1987: 112). Open-ended questions also ensure
that responses can be compared and contrasted. The questions were aimed at prompting interviewees to share their story of student peer mentoring and are listed below:

- What is student peer mentoring?
- How and when did you first hear about student peer mentoring?
- What is/has been your level of involvement with student peer mentoring at the University of Wollongong?
- Do you believe student peer mentoring to be effective?
- In regards to the previous question, why or why not (i.e. what is effective and/or ineffective)?
- Why is student peer mentoring used at the University of Wollongong?

The questions were designed to gauge what participants knew about student peer mentoring more generally to allow opportunities to explain how this understanding has been established. The study also provided participants the opportunity to assess the effectiveness of student peer mentoring. The research project thus promoted structured interviews whilst allowing some level of conversation and probing based on responses. All respondents were de-identified post transcription to protect their positions within the institution.

Over the past three years I have worked with relevant contacts at the University of Wollongong. I therefore chose to interview people who I knew had an appropriate background and/or exposure to student peer mentoring at the institution. The background and/or exposure to student peer mentoring I deemed to be appropriate included: people who established programs; people who have implemented programs; people who have been through programs within the last two years. My criterion led me to five candidates who subsequently agreed to participate in the research project and provide feedback on their experiences and understanding of student peer mentoring at the University of Wollongong.

**Institutional Narrative**

Institutions have developed a particular way of talking about student peer mentoring. The ‘institutional narrative’ explains what student peer mentoring is and why it is being utilised at the institution. A small cross-section of Australian universities - the University of Wollongong, Victoria University and Edith Cowan University – were analysed and examples are shown below:

The transfer from High School to University is an exciting time for students but it can also be daunting. In a new environment it can take some time to make new friends, work out how the university operates
or even find a good spot for lunch. With this in mind, the Faculty of Arts has designed the Peer-2-Peer Mentoring Program to take the confusion and anxiety out of getting started at the University of Wollongong (University of Wollongong, NSW).

This Student Mentoring Program focuses on easing the transition to university in the first semester. Student mentors, who are second or third year students, facilitate group mentoring sessions during the semester: two at the beginning, two in the middle and two before the exam period (Victoria University, VIC).

Starting out at university can be a daunting and challenging time. Having an experienced student as your mentor gives you access to a great source of information on things that happen in the university and they act as a sounding board for any of your questions or concerns. The … Peer Mentor Program is designed to assist new students make the transition into university life as smooth as possible, by providing a support network and opportunity to meet new people during your first semester (Edith Cowan University, WA).

Across the three institutions, student peer mentoring is presented in the same way. All feature the idea that “the transition to university is hard”. The worth and aim of the respective programs is also identical – “don’t worry; we are here to help with this transition by offering student peer mentoring programs”. This institutional storytelling has been formed by an increased interest in the first year experience through increased participation in conferences and also a common belief in the worth of student peer mentoring. Since 1995, the First Year Experience (FYE) Conference has featured an increasing number of papers on peer mentoring and peer-based programs more generally. At a 2012 FYE Conference in Brisbane, it was acknowledged that “peer mentoring and other forms of mentoring had developed in an ad hoc manner and without intellectual rigour” (Townsend et al. 2012: 7).

Missing from the institutional depiction of student peer mentoring is the political motivations of their usage. Indeed, this may be done out of necessity so as not to explicitly label students as belonging to a certain group – the result may stigmatise the support service leading to underutilisation by students who would benefit from it. What is worth analysing then, from the interviews, is how students and staff navigate the institutional narrative which explains the practical functions of student peer mentoring and their own experiences of it.
Participant profiles

The following participant profiles have been compiled from information gathered throughout the interview process and in my own knowledge of their positions within the University of Wollongong

Participant 1: Male, current student, domestic student, currently involved in the PASS Program as a Leader and Mentor (2 years), AIME (1 year), preoccupied with PASS.

Participant 2: Female, Academic, lecturer in the Faculty of Education, involved in design and implementation of UStart@UOW (2 years), preoccupied with social benefits of mentoring especially for LSES students.

Participant 3: Male, HDR Commerce student, involved in the establishment of a mentoring program for PhD students in 2012/2013, member of academic senate, international student, mentee in a mentoring program at UOW Dubai, preoccupied with a new mentoring program for HDR students in the Faculty of Commerce.

Participant 4: Male, Faculty Executive, Senior Lecturer, established the Peer-2-Peer Mentoring Program (2011), preoccupied with an analysis of Peer-2-Peer Mentoring.

Participant 5: Male, senior lecturer, PASS run on two of his subjects for 3 semesters, preoccupied with an analysis of PASS.

Defining student peer mentoring

Participants were asked to define student peer mentoring. All participants recognised that student peer mentoring involves a student who is further along in their degree helping new students. Participant 1 defined the help offered by mentors as ranging from “academic work to even just university life… it’s also really encouraging independent learning”. Programs “utilise existing students (as mentors) who are already involved in whatever educational system you’re working in” to assist new students (Participant 2).

Participant 2, involved in the design and implementation of a first-year transitional support program run before the formal semester begins, said that “…my definition of peer mentoring wouldn’t necessarily have a content component to it in that it wouldn’t be very formalised or
very structured but more about facilitating social networks amongst youth and students that are more advanced in their studies” (Participant 2). Participant 2’s comments speak to Smith’s (2009) belief that student peer mentoring should aim to develop academic social networks as they play a significant role in students’ academic achievement (5). Social contacts become conduits with which students acquire academic cultural capital: “students are able to increase their academic cultural capital when they increase their social capital and vice versa” (Smith 2009: 5).

Participant 3 differed slightly from the consensus adding that student peer mentoring involves “teaching or training students that are less effective or not as good as they are - essentially what it would be is basically more experienced people helping less experienced people get through the same process” (Participant 3). Participant 3 added a different dimension to the definition of student peer mentoring, implied by other participants, explicitly stating that the process had a core goal of reproducing desirable behaviours in the student mentee possessed by the student mentor.

Participant 4, who has a background in large-scale mentoring programs through previous work at a university in England and experience establishing a large-scale mentoring program at the University of Wollongong, stated:

Student peer mentoring is students leading students into ways of learning, ways of being in a new environment so learning about being in a new environment. So for a new student having a mentor is a good way of feeling, being more likely to be safer, being more likely to be a survivor, being more likely to be resilient in times of difficulty. But there’s the other side for the mentor, there is a very good opportunity to share knowledge, a good opportunity to learn. From experience I think it’s a better way than ignorance because the person who doesn’t know often will raise some of the better questions from a person who thinks, she or he knows. So it becomes a mutual learning experience, becomes a mutual growth experience. It is a mutual experience and it has to be. Peer mentoring shouldn’t be about transmission of knowledge or experience… it should be a two-way speech (Participant 4).

Participant 4 noted that student peer mentoring should not necessarily rest on the transmission of knowledge or experience from one person to another, it should be a mutual learning experience – “it should be a two-way speech” (Participant 4). Participant 4’s comments resonate with Participant 2’s statement that student peer mentoring does not necessarily have a content component but is more about facilitating social networks.
Participant 5 adds another dimension to the definition of student peer mentoring, suggesting that it “falls in between whether it is mentoring, whether it is more experienced students giving less experienced students some advice about how to do things like approach their studies […] or whether it is presented as tutoring which is something else altogether” (Participant 5).

**Finding out about student peer mentoring**

Participants were asked to recall when they first heard about student peer mentoring. Participant 1 heard about student peer mentoring through already established programs in operation at the University of Wollongong – AIME and PASS. Similarly, Participant 5 first heard about student peer mentoring when PASS was implemented on their subject. Participant 3 heard about student peer mentoring through an established program but at UOW Dubai.

Participant 2 first heard about student peer mentoring after a colleague relayed her experiences at a conference she attended in 1998:

> A colleague of mine… returned from the conference and told me about this great system that someone had presented on where they had established, amongst students, (a program which) got students who were more advanced in their degrees to mentor new students that were coming in… it had been very successful and she said the exciting thing about it was the ownership of the particular program lay with students themselves so I thought that sounded really interesting. She was from a counselling background and she says ‘I really want to do this here’, at the campus I was working at, at the time (Participant 2).

Participant 4 first heard about student peer mentoring at a university in the UK in 2001. A comprehensive mentoring scheme was established:

> We took in about 300 (students) a year. Every student, every new student, had a mentor. And the mentor is someone who was in their second year or third year so automatically qualified to be a mentor.

At this particular university, as Participant 4 explains, “there was another simultaneous mentoring which was every staff member had 10 students”. The mentoring scheme was two-tiered with every first year student having a student mentor and every student mentor having a peer mentor group with a staff member.
Is it effective?

All participants were asked if they believed student peer mentoring, in their experience, to be effective. Most participants agreed that it was effective but differed on the reasons.

Participant 1 explained that student peer mentoring is effective but can be misused by some students:

…you will always have those students who aren't willing to engage with it as it is and they are still looking for that almost dependency like in high school where the teacher teaches you everything. There are still a lot of students in first year that still want that and they see peer mentoring as a chance basically to get an easy ride (Participant 1).

Participant 2 noted that the move to a mass system of education, seen in Australian higher education in the last ten to fifteen years, has meant that there are large classes and overworked academic staff - “there’s a loss of the human… it’s difficult to have a personal relationship with an academic member of staff” (Participant 2). Student peer mentoring is effective because it constructs a compensatory social network, revives the sense of the human that has been lost in higher education in recent years.

Similarly, Participant 3 noted that student peer mentoring is particularly important and effective for international and mature age students in finding a social group and practicing English language skills and broader academic skills: “for them I reckon our mentoring program would be really good to integrate them into the degree” (Participant 3).

Participant 4 believes that student peer mentoring is an effective strategy for reducing attrition – evidenced in a mentoring program they are currently involved in: “I think it has given students a sense that they are not alone” (Participant 4).

Participant 3 and Participant 4 addressed effectiveness for mentors, stating that student peer mentoring helps them solidify theories when breaking it down and discussing concepts with student mentees: a chance to “reflect on what they have to share with others” (Participant 4).

Participant 5 stated that student peer mentoring could be effective. Student peer mentoring could be effective:

What [it] should be about is […] providing advice networks that are accessible to students who may need advice […] they are going to be more comfortable in seeking advice from other students than just going
Participant 5 believed PASS to be ineffective, in his experience, at improving academic results.

**Why is it used?**

Participant 1 argued that the primary function of student peer mentoring is to reduce failure rates and improve retention:

I mean at the end of the day this is a university and it has to make money, if you have a lot of students failing it probably doesn’t look very good. Not that I am cynical of the motive but that would definitely be one motive. It’s to reduce failure rates and keep students here, see if they are not here then the funds aren't coming in. Definitely one of the motives would have to be to reduce failure rates and improve retention to the first year students and number that drops out (Participant 1).

Participant 1 believes that student peer mentoring is a way of providing extra support and encouraging students to develop independent learning skills. They also stated that student peer mentoring is used to help international students especially on the social side – “a chance to meet people in a less formal environment than the tutorial” (Participant 1). Similarly, Participant 3 recognised the extra support student peer mentoring offers for international students. They also stated that for international students, student peer mentoring offers an informal social space to practice English conversation skills and promotes cultural integration.

Participant 2 focused on the use of student peer mentoring to improve cultural capital. Student peer mentoring is especially useful for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. These students “may have issues related to finances, and who are juggling work and study and also thinking – do I really want to run up a huge debt?” (Participant 2). She believes student peer mentoring offers the opportunity for these students to meet with another peer who is more advanced in their degree to “talk to them about it, reassure ‘yeah it is a little bit tough but you know it gets better’ - that reassurance, that normalisation; I think that’s where the strength of (student peer mentoring) lies” (Participant 2).

Participant 3 stated that the University uses student peer mentoring to reduce failure rates and reduce drop-out rates:
I think it doesn’t help to have a high failure rate because my suspicion would be high failure rates result in poor university ratings… [student peer mentoring] not only develops the students but it also increases the kind of pass through rate which is, from a marketing point of view for the university, they can say we’ve got such a tiny dropout rate or such a tiny failure rate.

Participant 3 also noted that the University can also save on administration costs through student peer mentoring programs “because they don’t necessarily need to point students in different directions. Students can go to mentors and they can point them in whatever direction they need to go to” (Participant 3).

Participant 4 was mindful throughout the interview of his position at the University. One position is juxtaposed by another as he switches between what he suggests as what his position should be as dictated by his role at the institution and his own opinion as a realist:

I would hope that the main reason we do that is because, and so I speak as a person, is because we do care about making sure that individuals are being helped in ways that are useful to them. So even if it’s to make that decision, yeah, I’m going to pull out because it is not the right time. The cynical side tells me that, and it’s sad but it’s a reality, that we are preoccupied with the government telling us you have a very high attrition rate… I would hope that were doing it mostly because it is good for the students, because it is making the transition much easier, less traumatic, because it is perhaps picking up people before it is too late and leave, perhaps preventing them from accumulating debt. So there are all sort of good reasons why we’re doing it but I guess I may be too much of a realist to recognise that it’s a function of the accountability that universities have to work with today. And sometimes were doing it as a way of ticking a box… [But] I think we have discovered the mentors are gaining as much from the process as the mentees. So in a sense, it’s been good all around (Participant 4).

Participant 5 shares some of the views expressed by Participant 4: “I often think these kinds of programs get into difficulties or they have problems when they’re seen as serving two masters”. He compares two objectives of student peer mentoring programs: programs run with the objective of providing the most useful support for students who need it and programs run that have “quantifiable and measurable things that we can show to auditors who come down from the department of education to evaluate how the university is doing”. Participant 5 concludes: “sometimes I think these kinds of programs get set up by people in the power to make the decisions where it is the second thing they’ve more got their eye on.” Participant 5 questions the motivations of student peer mentoring, stating that the people involved in programs are “more concerned about showing that they are ticking the boxes that they need
to tick”. He argues that the focus is not on the pursuit of the most effective way to give students advice (Participant 5).

**Narrative alignment**

In the case study of staff and students at the University of Wollongong, participants identified that student peer mentoring is used to support the transition of students. They all also identified that student peer mentoring programs are used to reduce attrition and increase academic performance at the University of Wollongong.

Participant 2 reiterated the social benefits programs can offer transitioning students – particularly those students who are disadvantaged. Participant 2 carefully navigated the use of the terms ‘disadvantaged’, ‘LSES’ and other such terms which label students based on perceived cultural capital. Participants 2 and 4 captured Smith’s (2009) discussion of student peer mentoring and social capital. They both stated that student peer mentoring programs enhance academic social networks as they play a significant role in students’ academic achievement (Smith 2009: 5). Social contacts become conduits with which students acquire academic cultural capital: “students are able to increase their academic cultural capital when they increase their social capital and vice versa” (Smith 2009: 5).

Participants 4 and 5 however could articulate the relationship between what they should say, in the positions in which they are in, and what they personally believe. Participant 4 split his response to the question “Why is student peer mentoring used?” in two parts – a response from his position’s perspective and one from his perspective as a ‘realist’. At the very core of the responses from Participants 2 and 4 is the basic assumption, in line with the institutional narrative, that student peer mentoring programs serve students and institutions – it is a win, win situation. Student peer mentoring has at its core, in educational institutions, competing interests which are impacting in some way on the practice and outcomes of programs. Participant 5, who argued that these competing interests were impacting negatively on programs, argued that student peer mentoring does not work well when it is seen as serving two masters. He identified that ultimately the goals of the institution are favoured over the best interests and best way of delivering a support program to students.

In this chapter, I have presented data collected from interviews conducted at the University of Wollongong. In chapter four, I move to a discussion of student peer mentoring in higher
education. I investigate whether or not programs are run with the best interests of students at heart or are run in the best interests of the institution.
Chapter Four

Discussion
This thesis has identified that student peer mentoring programs are used by institutions to ease the transition to higher education for students. Student peer mentoring offers a way for institutions to market student engagement opportunities and normalise the use of student support services. By using more experienced students as mentors, normalisation can be achieved through the use of anecdotes. Student peer mentoring, when a comfortable and supportive environment is achieved, also offers a forum to raise questions, fears and concerns. The social nature of student peer mentoring programs are beneficial in the current system of mass education – a system which has had the undesirable effect of isolating students from each other, academic staff and support services. It is generally assumed that student peer mentoring can assist institutions in the pursuit of reduced attrition rates and, where academic skills are included in the program, increased grades for students. In this chapter, I discuss the competing interests evident in student peer mentoring in higher education. I analyse how identity and power function. I also discuss cultural and social capital, and the broader purpose of higher education in Australia. I conclude with recommendations for future research and action.

The competing interests’ parties have in student peer mentoring in Australian higher education calls into question the underlying motivation for programs. Institutions must meet specific goals set by the Government which means they are required to provide quantifiable data to receive funding. Institutions must balance these goals with budget constraints and in deciding what will be the most beneficial type of program for students. Student peer mentoring is more complex than it is often assumed to be. In the case study, participants were able to recognise competing interests at work. Participants 4 and 5 in particular noted the underlying financial motivations of student peer mentoring. Participant 5 argues that the main preoccupation of the institution is not in figuring out the most effective way to provide advice. Rather, the institution is more concerned with compliance. Institutions want to increase compliance in the pursuit of reduced attrition rates - which currently represents a significant financial loss nation-wide (Adams et al. 2010).

**Competing Interests**

The premise of student peer mentoring is to provide face-to-face support in a corporatized system of higher education where there has been a loss in human interaction. Critiquing the corporatisation of higher education ignores the success of student peer mentoring as a support
mechanism in a system becoming increasingly diverse with the Government’s social inclusion policy. Celebrating the successes of student peer mentoring programs’ ability to offer support and normalise experiences with peers is overly simplistic because the programs in operation across Australia serve two masters. On the one hand, transition-in student peer mentoring aims to help students adjust to higher education, encouraging persistence to benefit their lives. On the other hand, student peer mentoring helps the institution retain customers for financial benefit.

In chapter one, we discovered that attrition statistics are closely monitored by the institution in order to provide measurable outcomes to the Australian government. An institution’s commitment to and attainment of KPIs is linked to the Government’s performance funding. Student peer mentoring programs are an investment the institution makes to fulfil these KPIs. By design then, student peer mentoring programs must address the relevant targets and KPIs. Program staff members must negotiate personal interest with that of the institution at which they are employed. In the corporatised model of higher education, as Bessant (2002) explains, staff are seen to serve the interests of the corporation, to provide its finance and support its commercial endeavours (79-80).

The interviews conducted provide evidence of the passion and dedication staff have in providing meaningful support for students. Participant 2, in particular, stressed the benefits of student peer mentoring in the creation of social networks, particularly for students identified as lacking cultural capital. The design of the program, the resources developed and the training of mentors all must align with strategic goals as set by the institution. The mentors in student peer mentoring programs are the front-line men and women who offer support and deliver the program. Student mentors, like program staff, must negotiate their passion for student learning and support with the strategic goals of the institution. Mentors gain an appreciation of these goals through information provided and delivered by program staff during training. The student mentees are the focus of the relationship. Transitional mentoring is a mode of support offered to students to assist with queries and issues which may arise. In a student peer mentoring environment, student mentees can gain answers from peers without the faculty-student relationship.

Mentors in student peer mentoring programs, as expressed, are not immune to the strategic goals of the institution. They are the face of these strategic goals. The mentor, in student peer
mentoring programs, is a model student, hand-selected by the institution. The mentor thus becomes a university representative, with delegated power. Many mentoring programs insist on recruiting academically high achieving students at the University of Wollongong – PASS, In2Uni and, to a lesser extent, the Peer-2-Peer Mentoring Program. These students are often highly motivated and, if able to break down important information and concepts for students, may be very helpful in the role of mentor. High achieving students in enrichment programs may also be entitled to certain privileges\textsuperscript{18} not available to the majority of students. Students who currently lack cultural capital have the opportunity, in a mentoring relationship, to gain the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed.

Colleges and universities should restructure their mentor programs to systematically unveil the hidden curriculum and assist underrepresented students with navigating the institutional culture of higher education (Smith 2009: 1).

Cultural capital can be acquired directly from the mentor but student peer mentoring has the capacity to create social networks for student mentees. Smith (2009) argues that social capital is related to the development of cultural capital as the social network becomes a conduit to the discovery of the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in the institution. To provide insight into how student peer mentoring relationships currently function, I investigate issues concerning power and identity.

**Power and Identity**

Let us return to the origin of the modern day understanding of mentoring as established in chapter one. The Greek Goddess Athena offered advice to Telemachus, Odysseus’ son. In order to influence Telemachus, Athena disguised herself as Mentor – a trusted, old friend of Odysseus. This suggests that a mentor is used to assist with transitional stages in a person’s life, where support is given through the use of a personal relationship. In the case of Athena and Telemachus, we can also infer that this personal relationship was built on deception. Athena – a figure of knowledge, omnipotence – used the guise of Mentor to influence Telemachus’ development and also his actions. The position of Mentor was used by Athena to help Telemachus gain the courage to stand up to the suitors living in his Mother’s house and eventually lead him to travel to find Odysseus.

\textsuperscript{18} In the Faculty of Arts Dean’s Scholar Program, for example, students are able to access a dedicated study space, locker facilities, networking and professional development opportunities, a personal academic mentor and a printing and textbook allowance.
The figure of mentor and the idea of mentoring are both linked to those in positions of power and authority. In large businesses and in hospitals for example, mentoring is often used as a way to assimilate employees to their working environment and/or encourage a certain ‘way of doing’ or a ‘way of thinking’ in an efficient, cost-effective way achieved through a seemingly personal relationship. Figure 3 details the mentoring relationships in organisations, whereby knowledge, skills and ways of thinking are distributed to the new employee. Managers and executives are able to encourage the development of certain skills and knowledge in a new employee through an existing employee as a mentor. An agreement exists between the organisation and the new employee. The organisation has certain requirements or competencies that each employee needs to be aware of. The employee will receive relevant financial incentives for gaining the necessary skills and knowledge.

In student peer mentoring, a similar relationship exists. As Figure 4 demonstrates, the institution delegates power and responsibility to program staff, who in turn delegates power and responsibility to peer mentors as model students who have the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed within higher education – cultural capital.
In organisational mentoring, the mentee (new employee) is paid for working a certain way and thinking a certain way to benefit the business financially. The institution delegates power to program staff who in turn selects mentors. Freire (1997) states that the fundamental task of the mentor is “a liberatory task - it is not to encourage the mentor’s goals and aspirations and dreams to be reproduced in the mentees, the students, but to give rise to the possibility that the students become the owners of their own history” (324). Freire (1997) thus assumes that mentoring relationships are implicitly focussed on the mentee, in their best interests as dictated by them – owning their own history. Does student peer mentoring do this?

Mentors in the Peer-2-Peer Mentoring Program are trained by the institution to present information in a particular way. They are told not to speak ill of the faculty or specific lecturers and tutors. In the Peer-2-Peer Mentoring Program, material is created by the Program Coordinator and distributed to the student mentor who in turn presents the information to student mentees. Student mentors are encouraged to present the information with a personal twist – often this is in the form of a personal tip to remember certain information or simply an anecdote to normalise the use of a particular support service. Mentors, and high-achievers, are typically upper and middle class, and already possess a great deal of cultural capital. The institution distributes power to the mentor to have influence over the student’s values in relation to their perception of university and how the student seeks help at the institution. Participant 2 in the case study identified that the strength of

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19 This information has been gathered through my involvement and the role I have played within the Peer-2-Peer Mentoring Program at the University of Wollongong since 2011.
student peer mentoring is the ability for mentors to reassure and normalise student mentees who may be struggling: “talk to them about it, reassure ‘yeah it is a little bit tough but you know it gets better’”. A defining feature of the student peer mentoring model in higher education is observation. Mentors become informants. Foucault (1995), who was discussed in the introduction to this thesis, states that “the practice of placing individuals under 'observation' is a natural extension of a justice imbued with disciplinary methods and examination procedures” (228). Student peer mentoring is a natural extension of our society’s focus on disciplinary methods and examination procedures. In compulsory programs, like the Peer-2-Peer Mentoring Program, this is more overt as every student must go and thus every student is being monitored by the mentor. Weekly meetings are held with program staff to identify problems students are having. The weekly meetings also function to identify problem students.

If student peer mentoring is described as primarily functioning as a mechanism for sharing insights, experiences, ideas, guidance, problem-solving and gaining support from peers (Ramani et al. 2006: 406), reducing attrition rates and ‘monitoring’ student performance should not be the underlying functions or use for programs. The relationship becomes one of deception whereby students are monitored and placed under surveillance in the financial interests of the institution. The performance funding model, discussed in chapter one, assumes that the Government, and the policies which govern institutional funding, are best for the individual. Behind the guise of liberal education, where the individual learner is said to have autonomy, is an education system devoted to the achievement of KPIs in the financial interest of the institution and society. By gaining cultural capital, the individual, the institution and the society all benefit – everyone wins. But the focus is not on the individual as per the institutional narrative – the focus is on the financial return on the institution’s investment. To a student viewing initiatives like student peer mentoring programs, this is not the case. Students only see the institutional narrative surrounding student peer mentoring which is inherently misleading and deceitful.

Buell (2004), in a study of mentoring, describes the “cloning model” of student peer mentoring. The cloning model encourages the reproduction of the values, qualities and traits of the mentor. The cloning model operates when a mentor seeks to produce a duplicate copy from a top-down position. The mentee is not encouraged to become independent or to be
creative, but instead is encouraged to comply with the mentor and duplicate his or her values, with the emphasis on the mentor himself or herself and not on the process or even the mentee (Buell 2004: 64). Buell (2004) when concluding the study suggests that the cloning model is one of the most prevalent today. The cloning model is prevalent in higher education, but not as Buell (2004) describes. Student peer mentoring programs utilise model students. Model students are trained by staff to present certain information in a particular way. The mentor is not necessarily aware that they are encouraging the reproduction of values, qualities and traits evident in themselves because material is created for them and certain behaviours are trained. The cloning model in student peer mentoring programs in higher education then is not instigated by the mentor; it is encouraged by the programs themselves.

Program benefits are limited to a measurable outcomes; reductions in attrition rates and grade increases linked to the provision of funding. This means that other benefits more traditionally accredited to mentoring such as happiness, support, personal development are not directly measured and/or reported on. Consider an imaginative case of a student who leaves university to pursue a career in journalism. The student, who participated in a transitional support program, is approached by a recruiter after their writing ability was discovered on a university related blog. The institution, instead of celebrating the individual’s success and their own success in developing a resource which made the success possible, does not view this as a success story. The student represents a statistical increase in attrition through no fault of the institution or the transitional support program. The individual success of the student and the success of the institution in providing a platform and the relevant skills to succeed on the platform are marred by the institution’s inability to retain the student. Away from quantifiable measures and attainment of Government KPIs, institutions have lost the ability to celebrate individual successes.

The motivations for instigating student peer mentoring programs are inherently economic in favour of the institution and the Government. Although payment for higher education in Australia is generally deferred\(^\text{20}\), students are customers. Peer mentors are also students and thus any reimbursement from the institution is small compared to tuition fees. Power is distributed to mentors to influence the way a student thinks about and talks about higher

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\(^{20}\) For Australian citizens and permanent residents, university tuition fees are deferred through the HECS-HELP and FEE-HELP schemes. The schemes are non-compulsory (up-front payments may be made instead) and not available to international students or New Zealand citizens. International students do not receive Commonwealth supported places.
education. This is to the financial benefit of the institution. The overarching assumption is that higher education is financially beneficial to society; the increase in human capital as a result of high participation rates in higher education represents considerable returns on the initial investment of taxpayers’ funds.

The Point of Education

Student peer mentoring is being used to tackle issues of a mass education system. Underrepresentation and high attrition rates are of particular concern in Australian higher education. It is important to consider the worth of education for the individual and society. As participation rates at universities increase and attainment levels grow, there is the assumption that productivity increases. The market indicates that university graduates earn more than high-school graduates - US estimates have ranged from $279,893 to $1 million over a person’s working life time (Pilon 2010). In Australia, DEEWR (2012) state that “skilled workers commonly earn more, with school leavers earning around 42% less than a university graduate” (28). McCluskey (2011) argues that there are numerous problems with simply concluding that because enrolment, degree attainment, and wages for people with university education all rose along with spending, increased in funding for higher education was a good investment. Problematic, as McCluskey (2011) argues, is that we may in fact be “fuelling credential inflation, in which the difference between earnings for people with a bachelor’s degree and those with only a high school education are large not because one attains valuable skills pursuing a degree, but because degrees are so commonplace” (12). McCluskey (2011) explains that perhaps the degree has come to signal some basic threshold level of intelligence and work habits: “that employers reflexively screen out job seekers without degrees” (12). DEEWR (2012) concludes that a person is at an increasing disadvantage when looking for work if they have a low level of education, or have not completed post-school study: “there has been a marked increase in the proportion of Australian workers who hold post-school qualifications” (30).

Getting a college degree isn’t solely about increasing students’ earning potential, and in no way guarantees they’ll get better jobs or have a higher quality of life. But the process itself prepares them to take advantage of a more expansive set of career opportunities and to blaze their own trails. As a society, are we really prepared to deny that opportunity to a generation of kids, simply because they don’t have money? (Sweeten-Lopez 2011)
McCluskey (2011) argues that taxpayers have been forced to invest too much money in higher education for too long without justifiable benefits for society. Sweeten-Lopez (2011), critical of a simple cost-benefit analysis, argues that the skills students gain from participation in higher education prepare them for a higher quality of life. Higher education has become a place of job-training, generic training as it may be. Student peer mentoring is used, as seen throughout this thesis, to reduce attrition and ensure participation from at-risk groups. We need to question if higher education actually increases economic prosperity and to what extent it benefits the individual. We need to question a system which still suffers from underrepresentation from LSES and indigenous students. As McCluskey (2011) concludes, public investment could be more worthwhile elsewhere.

**Recommendations**

I view mentoring as a collegial relationship which is not bound by the limits of time. It is a gesture of goodwill in which one person is helped by a more experienced person. For me, mentoring is not bound by specific targets or even set goals. It has at its core the broader goal of bettering oneself. The help offered is often reactive not proactive as the mentor and the mentee work together to overcome difficulties. To mentor is to show genuine concern for another, motivated by common decency and a genuine desire to help out. The underlying motivation for mentoring should not be to receive immediate benefits, monetary or otherwise.

Behind the informal guise of student peer mentoring there is an ulterior motive. There is no doubt that student peer mentoring program staff have a genuine interest in student and their successes whilst studying at the institution. However, monetary preoccupations, of the Government and institutions in Australia, have led to an obsession with attrition statistics which can detract from the successes of mentoring more generally. If a program does not perform in terms of its measurable benefits it risks cancellation under the corporatised model. Mentoring is explained as a relationship which provides support in a transitional stage in a person’s life not a transition to a particular field, institution or organisation. Higher education should be accessible to everybody, whenever they are ready. Some people may never be ready for higher education – it may not work for them. Student peer mentoring programs should be places of support for students in institutions where an understanding for the demands of learning at university, the purpose of higher education and how these align with the individual goals of the student are discussed openly. No program should be cancelled for
not meeting quantifiable outcomes. Mentoring should be assessed on its inherent merits alone and should be designed more specifically to address the needs of students.

Higher education, more generally, has been positioned as the easy-way to a more productive and equal society. Deep societal issues, such as socio-economic inequalities, have been addressed through the use of student peer mentoring programs where model students are positioned above the student. Investment in the Government’s social inclusion policy has not solved these deep societal issues. Student peer mentoring should be utilised in high schools where meaningful discussions about education can be had. Before this can happen, there needs to be alternatives to higher education. For society to function, not everyone can obtain the highest paying job. A functioning society requires labourers, retail staff and cleaners - everyone has an equally important role to play. Public investment should be directed into the creation of apprenticeships.

Future research into student peer mentoring should focus on how institutions can best support students. Research in the field more generally needs to critically analyse how mentoring relationships are working in higher education, paying close attention to issues with identity and power. Perhaps student peer mentoring can be better utilised in high schools in which students can have meaningful discussions about their choices. Currently, there is little objectivity as universities seek to recruit everyone they can.
Conclusion
This thesis has developed an understanding of student peer mentoring within the context of Australian higher education. We have developed an understanding of how educational policy, and broader social policy (social inclusion), shapes the discussions and definable uses of programs in Australian higher education. Behind the informal guise of student peer mentoring there is an ulterior motive. The monetary preoccupations of the Government and institutions have led to an obsession with retention statistics which can detract from the successes of mentoring more generally. I question the strategy adopted by the Government and the subsequent pressure placed on institutions to maximise enrolment numbers in their own financial interest. Student peer mentoring is being used to address issues with attrition and completion rates. They are run in the best interests of the institution not the individual.

There is an assumption that student peer mentoring offers a medium for disadvantaged students to gain cultural capital. There is a belief that higher education is a good thing for every person and their success in it will create positive outcomes for our economy – economic prosperity. The real purpose of higher education is job-training through the attainment or refinement of generic skills. We have placed significant emphasis on academic success, ignoring industries which rely heavily on non-academic skills. Higher education should be available to anybody and no one should be disadvantaged in their choice to attend. Some may never be ready and our system encourages those people to participate anyway. We have graduates who have struggled through degrees, run up a mountain of debt. Some of the most successful students are employed in entry level positions. It is assumed that everyone should participate in higher education because there is an assumption that everybody has equal access to it. Higher education has replaced other job training institutions such as Teaching and Nursing Colleges. The result is high student debt; a devaluation of those who are not academic and choose not to attend university; and a labour market flooded with post-secondary education which in turn has devalued higher education.

There continues to be underrepresentation from disadvantaged groups in Australian higher education. The issue requires the emphasis to be taken of higher education and students being made aware, in high school, of the options available to them for further learning and for job training through apprenticeships. Student peer mentoring cannot address deep societal issues in a thirteen week transitional support program. I question how higher education can address them either.
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Appendices

1. Student peer mentoring across three universities in NSW, VIC and WA

University of Wollongong, NSW – Peer-2-Peer Mentoring Program, Faculty of Arts

The transfer from High School to University is an exciting time for students but it can also be daunting. In a new environment it can take some time to make new friends, work out how the university operates or even find a good spot for lunch. With this in mind, the Faculty of Arts has designed the Peer-2-Peer Mentoring Program to take the confusion and anxiety out of getting started at the University of Wollongong.

The Peer-2-Peer Program:

- Connects small groups of first year students in the Faculty of Arts to experienced Bachelor of Arts Student Mentors.
- Provides access to university services, academic, extra-curricular and social, that will help you maximise the value of your degree.
- Is a mandatory degree component for all incoming Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Arts (Dean’s Scholars), Bachelor of Communications and Media Studies and Bachelor of International Studies students

Information for Commencing Students

Your mentor will be able to point you in the right direction from the outset of your time at university which means you have more time to focus on the great on-campus community. You’ll get to meet with your mentor once a week in small groups to work through any issues you’re currently experiencing as well as learn more about the different opportunities available to you as a student at the University of Wollongong such as:

- Internships
- Volunteering and work experience
- Student conferences
- Professional development programs
- Extra-curricular programs
- Careers advice including finding work on-campus
- Library services
- Student support services
University is also a time when lasting friendships are made that endure long after students have completed their studies. The Peer-2-Peer Mentoring Program gives first year students the opportunity to get to know like-minded students who face similar challenges and hurdles while adjusting to university life. The program allows for students to meet people from different backgrounds and with different experiences. The program actively encourages you to get to know your fellow mentees, share your knowledge, and develop into active members of the university community together.

**Victoria University, VIC - Student Circles in Arts, Faculty of Arts**

This Student Mentoring Program focuses on easing the transition to university in the first semester. Student mentors, who are second or third year students, facilitate group mentoring sessions during the semester: two at the beginning, two in the middle and two before the exam period. First year students are allocated to a Student Circle and a Student Mentor provides support and advice to their Student Circle group. Student Mentors are trained in basic facilitation skills by staff from the Faculty, Teaching and Learning Support and Student Services.

**Edith Cowan University, WA – FBL, Faculties of Business and Law**

Starting out at university can be a daunting and challenging time. Having an experienced student as your mentor gives you access to a great source of information on things that happen in the university and they act as a sounding board for any of your questions or concerns.

The FBL Peer Mentor Program is designed to assist new students make the transition into university life as smooth as possible, by providing a support network and opportunity to meet new people during your first semester. As part of accepting your university offer to study a course from the Faculty of Business and Law you will automatically be invited to take part in the program. Once you have registered, you will be placed in a group with students studying...
similar courses to you. Your group will meet several times during the semester as well as keep in email contact.
2. Student peer mentoring models in Australian Higher Education

So we know that student peer mentoring programs are used across higher education institutions in Australia, but what kinds of programs are being run? Mentoring programs are predominantly used in Australian universities to provide transitional support for commencing students (see Appendix 1 for a full list of mentoring programs run in Australian universities). Some universities run mentoring programs to assist with the transition from university to careers – often labelled as career mentoring programs. There are also a number of mentoring programs which connect current university students with high school and primary school students such as the University of Wollongong’s In2Uni Program and La Trobe University’s In2Science Program. Growing in popularity over the last few years is the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) which connects indigenous high school and primary school students with indigenous and non-indigenous university students. Mentoring has taken on various forms in Australian universities. Hall & Jaugietis (2011) argue that SPMPs have been adopted by many universities to enhance the experience of first year students to assist them in making the transition from school to university (41). The focus of this paper is transitional support SPM programs but I will document other forms to understand their wide use.

In an attempt to present the models currently in use by Australian universities, I have composed categories. Whilst categorising Programs in this way, I recognise that many features can and do appear across many. For example, a peer learning program concerned with academic support and increased subject results may also support students through tertiary transition and seek to highlight support networks throughout the institution – although this is often not marketed as a goal to students. It is also important to note that categories of SPM do not formally exist – I have categorised them.

When and Why

Compulsory or non-compulsory: Ideally, any mentoring relationship should be voluntary. Detrimental mentoring relationships can often exist if a mentee does not want the help or guidance being offered. Many SPM program administrators opt for compulsory programs to ensure attendance. Although it can be disheartening when many hours are put in to getting programs off the ground only to discover that there is little or no interest, making a program compulsory has the potential to be detrimental. Attendance at programs perceived by students...
to enhance their understanding of concepts or troubleshoot problems many experience when entering the university environment will generally be higher. Attendance at programs is often an indicator of how useful the information and the environment are for the students. In compulsory programs, although attendance is in a sense guaranteed, it is hard to measure whether or not it is useful for attendees on a weekly basis. Non-compulsory programs often need to have defined marketing strategies to increase attendances periodically throughout the semester. This process can be quite time-consuming and expensive, depending of course on the size of the program.

**Remedial or non-remedial:** Remedial programs are provided or intended for students who are experiencing learning difficulties and/or are socially/financially disadvantaged. In remedial programs students are often personally invited via phone, email or mail. There is an attempt to reach out to the student perceived as at-risk without explicitly labelling or identifying. This process is often time-consuming and can raise uncomfortable conversations – *why was I invited to participate in this program and my friend wasn’t?* A common institutional answer to this question is *this is a trial program and you were randomly selected to receive an invitation to participate.* One cannot escape the fact that remedial programs often suffer from stigmatisation and are thus underutilised by the students who stand to benefit most from them.

**Transition in or out or neither:** SPM programs are commonly used to provide students with information and strategies to help them adjust to higher education. Thus there are many programs offering support during the transitional stage. It is generally assumed that a student’s first semester is critical in terms of their transition to higher education, particularly for those attending right after high school.

Transition-out programs are less common than transition-in programs due, in part, to the current emphasis in Australian higher education on the First Year Experience (FYE). Transition-out programs concern themselves with the transition from university education to a relevant career path. Current students are connected with alumni mentors who have established themselves in a career similar to that of the aspiring mentee.

**Academic:** PM programs are used by many institutions to help students’ increase subject marks and/or enhance study skills. A common academic SPM program used at Australian
universities is the Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) Program. PASS is based on the Supplemental Instruction (SI) model developed by Deanna Martin at the University of Missouri – Kansas City in the 1970’s. The model is also referred to in Australia as Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) and is sometimes categorised as a ‘peer tutoring’ program. Academic mentoring is generally attached to subjects or units that are: perceived by students as difficult; often core degree components; feature consistently high failure rates. By being attached to a particular subject or unit, the model offers the promise of increasing student marks in a way that can be easily: tracked; compared with non-attendees; and thus easily reported to lecturers, coordinators and other stakeholders. Academic mentoring has also been associated with programs in which academic members of staff mentor students.

How

One-to-many: The dominant model in Australian higher education. Mentees are grouped with a single mentor to discuss their collective issues and help each other reach appropriate solutions and additional information through the guidance of the mentor. Variations of the one-to-many model have been known to exist, with more than one mentor offering support to student mentees.

One-on-one: A mentee receives a personal mentor. This system of mentoring is most common in traditional mentoring relationships. The mentor is normally older and is thought to be more knowledgeable than the mentee. The one-to-one model offers a lot more flexibility in terms of how the relationship is formed and progressed, i.e. mentor and mentee can often meet ad-hoc to discuss issues; the mentor is freely contactable.

Buddy systems: Buddy systems are cooperative arrangements whereby individuals are paired or teamed up and assume responsibility for one another's instruction, productivity, welfare, or safety. At West Virginia University, a system whereby "buddies" are assigned to incoming first-year students is offered. These buddies are advanced students who can interact freely with the new students and can provide them with advice, encouragement, information, etc. This model is very similar to one-on-one mentoring. Buddy systems are common of primary schools, where each student is assigned a buddy to look after - on a school excursion, for example.
3. What Programs do Australian universities run?

**Australian Catholic University** – No peer mentoring programs

**Australian National University** – SIGN Mentoring Program

**Bond University (Bond College)** - Our mentoring programs are designed to help students in the new environment, to grow and to flourish in the exciting world of learning. Students receive feedback on their academic progress in weeks 4, 7 and 8 of semester, in addition to written feedback on assessments. Academic skills sessions and one-on-one help is available if students require extra assistance. Weekly attendance monitoring and regular welfare checks ensure students are integrating into university life in Australia

**Carnegie Mellon University** – Alumni Mentor Program: How the Mentor Program Works, as a mentor, we'll pair you with a student interested in your field of employment or career path, or who shares a similar background. You can help by offering career guidance, academic advice, and wisdom gained from your personal and professional experiences. This provides students an opportunity to build personal relationships and expand their professional network as they transition into the marketplace.

**Central Queensland University** - The Student Mentor & Leadership Program assists new students in undergraduate and postgraduate programs at domestic campuses and flex to quickly feel at home at CQUniversity and to provide support during their first year of tertiary studies. Student Mentors are students who have 'been there' and survived, as well as having acquired a great deal of information about the tertiary education environment and how the 'system' works.

**Charles Darwin University** - The NorthSTAR programs involve tertiary students from Charles Darwin University mentoring secondary or primary students in science. The program is modelled on the highly successful Science/Technology Awareness Raising program of Murdoch University in Western Australia. The aim of the program is to raise the awareness, support and interest of science among school age students. NorthSTAR's objective is to provide tertiary students with the opportunity to develop skills that will be useful in industry and to raise the awareness, interest and support of science among school age children.
**Charles Sturt University** – Distance Education Students: Student Mentoring: The Student Mentoring Program is designed to help the new students (internal or distance study) with the transition to university life. Sometimes a friendly face, phone call or an email might be just what you need to spur you on. It might also prompt you to ask that question you've been wondering about. Our mentors are experienced students who know what it feels like to balance study and life. They will also direct you to the relevant support services.

**Curtin University** - Curtin runs two student mentoring programs to help students coming into and leaving the university. In the START mentoring program, senior students provide support and advice to new students making the transition into university. In the NEXT STEP mentoring program, Curtin alumni and staff provide support and an industry perspective to students nearing completion of their degree, to assist them with their transition to graduate employment.

**Deakin University** – Alumni, Bus/Law, Arts/Edu, Career mentor. Peer Support Programs - Do you remember feeling confused when you started at Deakin? Peer Learning Programs offer you an opportunity to make a difference. There are lots of personal growth and benefits when you provide peer support or mentor someone else. In fact there are no better ways to gain personal and professional leadership skills than to put it into practice as a peer leader. Plus it's a great way to build up your resume, as you enter the final phases of your university life. Most peer mentor programs require you to have been a Deakin student for at least two trimesters but please check the eligibility requirements of individual programs for more information. Being a Peer Leader will show you have leadership, initiative, enthusiasm and passion for building relationships. Many employers will look at your extra-curricular activities - beyond your studies and degree – when deciding on whether you're the right person for the job. As the Mentoring Programs have a rigorous recruitment process, you will also benefit from the opportunity to take part in an rigorous application and interview process. As a Peer Leader you will participate in compulsory training and leadership development, and be given tips and tools on how to help students. You will be encouraged and empowered to utilise yours and those of your fellow mentors' experiences as a Deakin students to help other students. Peer Leaders are generally recruited during the second half of each Trimester.
**Edith Cowan University** - The Peer Mentor program assists new students in building social and academic networks so they settle more quickly into life as a student and have a more successful, productive and positive personal and academic experience. Mentoring groups are led by later-year students who have volunteered and trained to be mentors. Groups meet several times during the semester in person and by email to chat about their university experiences. Mentors are experienced students who are a great source of information and a sounding board for questions and concerns about university life. The program is a good way to meet other students and perhaps begin new friendships. Taking up the opportunity to learn from an experienced peer is a great way to familiarise yourself with new surroundings and fast-track that 'I belong here' feeling.

**Flinders University** – Inspire Mentoring Program. What is Mentoring? Peer mentoring in this sense offers school students a young adult who can provide an unbiased ear, scholastic support and a positive role model through building positive, nurturing and trusting relationships. **Peer Mentoring Program: Flinders Law School Peer Mentoring Program – What is it?** The Flinders Law School Mentoring Program is an eight week program that aims to assist you in your transition to life in the Law School. This Program will provide you with a mentor who can answer your questions and make your transition to university life easier. Your mentors are current students in second year or above. Your mentors are other students who have some experience and understanding of the University, who will listen to your questions and find ways of helping you to resolve issues and find information and solutions.

**Griffith University** - The School's (Education and Professional Studies) peer mentoring programs are designed to support students both academically and personally in adjusting to the challenging and often overwhelming experience of the first year at university. Students also have the opportunity to share their experiences with other first year students.

**James Cook University** - Student Mentor Program, About the student mentor program, Cairns mentors, Townsville mentors

**La Trobe University** - The Student Career Mentoring Program links students and recent graduates with qualified industry professionals, La Trobe staff and alumni for a career mentoring relationship. The program operates across all campuses. **In2science** is an exciting
and innovative program that gets to the heart of science and mathematics through the placement of university students as peer role models to engage with school students and support teachers in the classroom.

**Macquarie University** – Mentors@Macquarie - Macquarie University’s Mentors are student volunteers who assist first year students with their adjustment (or transition) into university life. In 2011, more than 4000 new students were helped by our friendly Mentors during Academic Orientation, which takes place in the week prior to classes. The program is run by students for students and is a fun, relaxed and enjoyable way to meet new people and give back to your university. Our Mentors are typically undergraduate students, both Domestic and International, though Postgraduates are welcome to apply if they completed an undergraduate degree at Macquarie University.

**Monash University** – Alumni-Student Mentoring Program, PASS, Business and Economics

**Murdoch University** – Murdoch Mentoring Program - **What is Mentoring?** Mentoring is a team of Murdoch students volunteering their time to meet with a small group of first year students assisting them to get through the challenging and at times stressful first semester of university. It is not academic tutoring but just sharing the tips and tricks that you already know, after all you are well on your way to succeeding in your studies. You remember what it was like...being swamped with information – that sinking feeling. Trying to enrol, finding out what tutes and labs are all about, finding out you have four assignments due all in the same week, working out how to access the services you need and even just finding your way around.

**Queensland University of Technology** - Counselling Services provides training for peer mentors at QUT. Peer Mentors are trained, experienced students who might provide a friendly face, a contact point, or advice and support on thriving as a student. Research and experience has shown such programs to be a very useful part of a student's early experiences at university.

**RMIT University** - Mentoring and Peer Tutoring in the College of Science, Engineering and Health (SEH) – extensive use of mentoring Programs in the College of SEH

**Southern Cross University** - The **Student Mentor Program** connects students who are undertaking their first study session at Southern Cross University with other students who are
further along in the same course or discipline. New students then settle in to university life quickly and successfully. Catering to all first year undergraduate students of any age and background, domestic and international, whether studying on any of our three campuses or by distance education, you will be matched with a student mentor who has 'been there and done that'; someone who can answer your questions about how things happen at SCU.

**Swinburne University of Technology** - What is a FrEngIneer? FrEngIneers provide assistance to predominantly first semester students, helping them with the transition to university life.

**University of Adelaide** - Peer Mentor Support Program, What is a Peer Mentor? A Peer Mentor is a current student who volunteers to help new students settle in and provide a student's perspective of Adelaide and university life. The Program's Peer Mentors are a mix of international and local students who assist new students in the Welcome Centre, design and run after-hours activities, host a full social program so that you can meet others and experience some of what Adelaide has to offer.

**University of Ballarat** - The change to university life can be challenging. Whether you are coming to university from high school, TAFE, the work force or another path, there will be common challenges to overcome. These might include finding somewhere to live, having to build a new network of friends, and managing a busy work/home/study life. To support your transition to university, UB provides you with a Mentor who is in the second or third year of your course. Having already experienced life at UB, Mentors provide first-hand support to new students in the first few weeks of their study, when it matters most.

**University of Canberra** - PALS (Peer Assisted Learning Sessions) PALS offers regular peer learning sessions run by students who have previously succeeded in the unit. The sessions are timetabled, available to all students enrolled in the unit, and highly interactive. Leaders are given thorough training and are supervised by the PALS coordinator. The program has been carefully researched across numerous universities in Australia, the UK and the US, and has been shown to make a significant difference to student grades.

**University of Melbourne** - First Year Peer Mentoring Program, The First-Year Peer Mentoring Program is a great way for new students to learn about the University and the Faculty of Business and Economics. Mentoring groups are led by later-year students who
have volunteered and trained to be mentors. Groups meet once a week for the first four weeks of each semester, starting in Week One. The program provides new students with a support network, opportunities to meet new people and a chance to ask experienced students all sorts of questions, Law and Graduate peer mentoring programs exist as well.

**University of New England - Welcome to the UNE Peer Support Program.** The Student Support Team has taken over the co-ordination of the Peer Mentoring Program as part of its engagement and retention activities at UNE. This involves placing new students who have indicated they would like a mentor for their first semester of study with another student preferably studying in the same discipline and who has successfully completed at least 2 years of study.

**University of Newcastle - Student Mentor Program -** The aim of the Student Mentor program is to provide student support to new students of the University of Newcastle. While studying can be quite an overwhelming experience for new students, the mentoring program is designed to make the transition into student life as enjoyable as possible. Student mentors draw upon their own experiences to assist new students to adapt quickly and settle smoothly into university life. Contact is made via fortnightly email between students with the option of face to face meeting at a campus coffee shop.

**University of New South Wales -** Peer Mentors are experienced students who provide support to new students making the transition to university life. You can be part of a peer mentoring program as a new student, or by becoming a peer mentor. Visit the peer mentoring website for full details. Want to join a peer mentoring program? Coming to university can be both exciting and challenging. It involves adapting to new experiences and expectations. The first-year peer mentoring program can help you make the transition to uni life as smoothly as possible, by providing support, opportunities to meet new people and benefit from the experience of other students. Many faculties and schools offer peer mentor programs. There specific mentoring programs for students arriving from rural / interstate locations; students coming from other educational institutions with credit transfers (Uni or TAFE); mature aged students; university preparation program students and international students.

**University of Notre Dame -** Commencing students are invited to join The University of Notre Dame Mentor Program. This initiative aims to make your transition to university in
Australia more enjoyable by linking small groups of new students with an Australian student mentor. **Benefits of the Program:** Starting at a new university is an exciting, challenging and sometimes stressful time. Your mentor can help you: make sense of how the University works, find your way around campus, locate banking and other services you need in Fremantle, connect to other students, staff, clubs and programs. This program is an initiative of the Student Life Office.

**University of Queensland** - We run two programs; **Jumpstart** and **Thrive**. You can choose to do one or both. **Jumpstart** runs from July 10th through to the 13th which is the week before Orientation week. This program involves volunteer mentors teaching new students about UQ's administration and technology and being involved in a variety of activities around campus. Two mentors usually work with one group of approximately 20 students. Where possible new mentors are paired with experienced ones. The Feb 14th is mentor training, and the rest of the week is the program itself. Jumpstart serves both domestic and international students. It has been established for about 3 years and co-ordinated by Trish Taggart. Jumpstart is run at St Lucia, Ipswich and Gatton campuses. Students wanting teaching experience would benefit from this experience. **Thrive** involves contact with domestic students for their first semester at UQ. Most mentor contact will be via email. Mentors, supported by staff and a Blackboard site, will be guided to contact their mentees with information about topics and workshops appropriate to the time of the semester. For example, during the first week mentors will be asked to make sure their students have worked out their time table. The mentors will also informally check up on their students to monitor their progress and assist them or refer them to Transition staff for support. This program is new and will start afresh each Semester with the new cohort of students.

**University of South Australia** – **Global Experience Mentor Program**, international postgraduate Masters in Teaching Mentor Program, **e-pal Program**: The e-pal Program has been set up to help first time University students during their initial weeks of study. It recruits volunteers to assist new students as they embark on their journeys. E-pals assist new students in a variety of ways, by introducing themselves using email contact and then by offering assistance and help from week to week until new students find their feet and feel more confident in their environment.
**University of Southern Queensland** - The USQ Career Mentoring program is designed to connect you (the mentee) with an experienced industry professional (the mentor) in order to prepare you for the transition from university to employment. In the program, you are given the opportunity to develop the tools, knowledge and networks necessary to achieve their career goals through a mentoring relationship.

**University of Sydney** - The University of Sydney Business School Student Mentoring programs aim to enhance the new students' sense of belonging to a learning community. The program is designed to assist new students to build academic and social networks so that they settle more quickly into life as a student in the Business School and therefore have a more successful, productive and positive personal and academic experience. This is achieved by small groups of new students meeting and undertaking a range of formal and informal tasks under the support and direction of a mentor. The postgraduate program runs for the first six weeks of semester and the undergraduate program runs for the first four weeks of semester.

**University of Tasmania** – Career Mentor Program, PASS, Mentor Program (School of Human Life Sciences): Starting at University can be a difficult time for some students. Depending on individual circumstances it can involve juggling work, home and study commitments. Some students have been out of the education system for some time. To someone new and unfamiliar with university it can seem overwhelming or maybe just confusing and tough. The Mentor system aims to assist students make this transition more smoothly, thus maximising their chances of academic success. Its purpose is to minimise the 'culture shock' of being a new student on a new campus, often in a new city, state or even country.

**University of Technology Sydney** - UTS:Law International Students Mentoring Program, UTS:LAW would like to invite you to take part in the International Students Workshop, whether you are a new international student or an ongoing student. It is an excellent way to meet, connect with and learn from fellow international students studying law. At the workshop there will be speakers from: Student Services, Network Café, UTS Library, who will speak about the services offered to international students studying law at UTS, and offer tips and advice on how to succeed in your studies.
University of the Sunshine Coast - Mentoring: a helping hand for first-years, The University's mentor program again eased the school-university transition for students new to the campus. The initiative individually pairs new students with more experienced, responsible and academically successful enrolled students. The aim is to help mentees connect with their studies, lecturers, other students and the University in general—particularly in the first few weeks of semester.

University of Western Australia - UniMentor is a university-wide program that aims to assist you to adjust to university life by matching you with mentors who can answer your questions. Your mentors are students in second year or above, studying the same or a similar course to you. You will meet with your mentor in a small group of commencing students (mentees). You will first meet your mentor group at the UniMentor linkup for your degree-specific major or if you haven’t determined your major, then your “area of interest”. This group can meet regularly during semester – at times which you organise together – to socialise and discuss issues that may be concerning you. Contact can also take place by telephone or email if you prefer.

University of Western Sydney - MATES@UWS Mentoring Program: MATES@UWS is about providing first year students with the opportunity to be connected with later year students to make social networks and acquire knowledge and skills to help settle into life at University.

University of Wollongong – Peer-2-Peer Mentoring Program, In2Uni, PASS

Victoria University - Arts, Education and Human Development Peer Mentoring Programs Below are some of the peer mentoring programs that may be helpful for students in the Arts, Education and Human Development faculty. Student Circles in Arts (Footscray Pk & St. Albans) This Student Mentoring Program focuses on easing the transition to university in the first semester. Student mentors, who are second or third year students, facilitate group mentoring sessions during the semester: two at the beginning, two in the middle and two before the exam period. First year students are allocated to a Student Circle and a Student Mentor provides support and advice to their Student Circle group. Student Mentors are trained in basic facilitation skills by staff from the Faculty, Teaching and Learning Support and Student Services.
4. Higher Education Funding Policy – A Timeline

The Mills Committee – 1950

The Murray Committee – 1956

Australian Universities Commission (AUC)

The Martin Committee – 1961

Higher Education Agreement with the States (1973)


The National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET) - 1988

*Higher Education: A Policy Statement – 1988*

*Higher Education Funding Act – 1988*

Unified National System (UNS) – 1989

Relative Funding Model – 1990


Abolition of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET) – 1996

The West Review and Proposed Reforms to the System – 1998

Research Funding Reforms – 1999

Australian University Quality Agency (AUQA) – 2000

Productivity Commission Report – 2002

The Review of Higher Education – 2002

The Bradley Review – 2008

*Note: Based on information presented in Jackson 2003.*