

Peer Mentoring in the Faculty of Business and Entrepreneurship (FoBE): Challenges and the Way Forward for the Faculty at the National University of Samoa (NUS)

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Abstract

This study discusses the significance of peer mentoring programmes in the context of Higher education and postulates the benefits and challenges. It discourses on the challenges faced by the FoBE peer mentors and maps out the way forward for the Faculty.

Keywords: Peer Mentoring, Higher Education, Challenges, Faculty of Business and Entrepreneurship, the National University of Samoa

Introduction

The context of Higher education (HE) has changed drastically over the past three decades since the inception of the formal mentoring initiatives in HE (Darwin and Palmer, 2009). Higher education institutions (HEIs) are progressively identifying the significance in terms of professional and organizational development (Hakro and Mathew, 2020; Johnson, 2007; Mladenovic, 2012). Other benefits discoursed include, prospects for augmented exposure to philosophies and a primer to persons who can be supportive to the mentee (Penner, 2001), fostering a professional rapport that supports individuals to obtain skills desired to remain pertinent and competitive in the HE academic environment (Dean, 2009), and to support learners' socioemotional and personal growth and/or professional growth (Fedynich *et al.*, 2016; Gill *et al.*, 2012; Higgins, 2000; Higgins and Kram, 2001). Scholarships mention student transition and retention, enhanced sense of belongingness (Terrion, Phillion and Leonard, 2007), and inter-cultural friendships (Devereux, 2004), augmented communication and organizational skills (Calder, 2004; Glaser, Hall and Halperin, 2006), higher levels of achievement (Shrestha *et al.*, 2009), improved self-awareness and self-confidence (Heirdsfield *et al.*, 2008), positive methodologies to learning (Dearlove *et al.*, 2007; Fox *et al.*, 2010) and benefits to the institution, coordinating staff and students (Elliott, Beltman and Lynch, 2011). Mentoring is a bi-directional, multidimensional, profoundly delicate and extremely customized process where mentors recognize their mentees' preceding experiences, fortes, flaws, ambitions, principles and professional goals (Montgomery, 2017). Mentoring exposes both the mentor and the mentee to multifaceted and dynamic interpersonal and behavioral patterns that necessitates open communication methods and approachability, focusing on mutual goals and challenges, driven by desire and stimulation, founded on a kind personal affiliation, and built on mutual respect and trust, allowing discussion of knowledge, and permitting impartiality, partnership and role modelling (Eller *et al.*, 2014; Lucey and White, 2017). The essential thrusts of mentoring relationships thrive on the mentor's understanding of mentoring (Irby, 2013). It also premises on feedback which efficaciously drives the mentoring relationship (Allen *et al.*, 2010).

The literature advocates that within HEIs, peer mentoring is constructed upon egalitarianism in power distribution. The advantage accrued is that via reflection, mentors are able to contest mentees' viewpoints and deal with complications and trials as they rise. Therefore, through awareness-raising mentors empower mentees to develop the structural context of academia (Cropper, 2000). University-wide peer mentoring programmes offer manifold affirmative outcomes for the mentors, and potentially for HEIs managing and supporting the programmes (Beltman and Schaeben, 2012). Studies have recurrently enthralled on the concerns of mentees slightly more than for the mentors, prominently leading to discreetly less appreciation of the mentors' experiences (Haggard *et al.*, 2011),

including outcomes for university student mentors (Hughes, Boyd, and Dykstra, 2010). Thus, the need for research. The next section of the paper presents the background on FoBE's peer mentoring.

Background: Overview of the FoBE Peer Mentoring in the National University of Samoa

The National University of Samoa was established via an Act of Parliament in 1984. It is governed by the NUS Act (2006) and NUS Amendment Act (2010). The University is also subject to the requirements of the Public Finance Management Act (2002) and Public Bodies Act 2001. The NUS is also actively involved and engaged through its commitment to the Government's Strategy for the Development of Samoa (SDS) 2017-2020 via its training, research and consultancy. The Education Sector Plan (ESP) also provides the framework for NUS. The Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (MESC), the National University of Samoa and Samoa Qualifications Authority (SQA) are the implementing agencies of the education sector objectives (Groves, 2019; Strategic Plan, 2017/18-2020/21). The University's teaching and research mandates are delivered through six faculties namely: The Faculty of Science, Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Business and Entrepreneurship, Faculty of Education, Faculty of Health Science, Faculty of Technical Education and three centres namely: Centre for Samoan Studies, Oloamanu Centre for Professional Development and Continuing Education and the Centre of Excellence in Information Technology plus the School of Maritime and Training (NUS, 2020). The Faculty of Business and Entrepreneurship's peer mentoring programme journey began in 2016 as this was when they joined with the Faculty of Arts at the NUS. The aim of the programme was to support learners' to be successful scholastically, socially and personally. The welfares attested include: guidance and support particularly for freshmen students, opportunities to network and build relations as well as equipping students with skills and resources via series of workshops. Given the COVID-19 pandemic, peer mentoring has received more prominence, given the disruptions instigated as a consequence of the pandemic on students' lives and on their learning. Presently, FoBE has seven peer mentors. These mentors are primarily second and third year students who work with mentees that is; the freshmen students (ie: first year). Peer mentors have been serving as co-facilitators, working in partnership with the Faculty and staff and have served as the main guide for students in their learning journey. This study seeks to discourse the mentors' experiences of the challenges in peer mentoring in the FoBE at the NUS.

Literature Review: Challenges

Some of the key issues identified in the literature on the challenges facing peer mentoring are premised on the deficiency of resources (both financial and human resources) within the HEIs, poor time-management (amid mentors and mentees); premature departure from the arrangement devoid of its full benefits being realized as well as the failure of the mentoring relationship (Colvin and Ashman, 2010; Cropper, 2000). Feldman et al. (2013) stresses that that poor time management on the part of the mentee and mentor were the foremost characteristics of unsuccessful mentoring programmes. Alternatively, the mentoring relationship is also impacted by the academic forte of the mentor and the trust and confidence that the mentees have on their mentors (Fox and Stephenson, 2006). The muddling frontiers of academic counselling, career counselling and emotional support also may cloud the mentor's ability to guide the mentee (Anderson and Shore, 2008). The relationship amid the mentor and mentee is also complicated by expertise, experience, and power (Smith, 2007), whilst peer mentors are encountered with disputes of power and resistance, the significance of careful planning and adjustment which is desirable afore adding peer mentors into courses (Smith, 2008) cannot be undervalued. The relationship is also impacted by the mentor's skills (Dearlove et al., 2007; Husband and Jacobs, 2009; Terrion and Leonard, 2007). The frustration of the mentees may also be doubled if the mentor flops to meet their anticipations. Thus, the implications for mentor recruitment and selection becomes noteworthy (Terrion and Leonard, 2007). Implications for mutual deliberations amid the mentor and mentee also significantly impact the attainment of peer mentoring goals (Dearlove et al., 2007). Scholars have also discoursed the implications pertaining to virtual

deliberations amid the mentors and mentees where the human interface is absent which makes mentoring perplexing (Smailes and Gannon-Leary, 2011).

Methodology

This study has undertaken an exploratory review of the secondary literature sourced from mainly journals and is premised on the FoBE peer mentoring workshop by Naz (2020).

Discussion and Implications

First of all, in the workshop, the seven FoBE mentors' identified resource constraints as the foremost challenge. These were mainly concerning stationeries, laptops, access to printers for mentors' as well as having an allocated space which serves as a "walk-in" session for the mentees. Thus, to resolve this issue, FoBE has drafted a concept paper including the requests for resources to be submitted for the proposal for Education Sector Funds. Also, to deal with the issue of space, FoBE is presently identifying a bigger space which could serve as a "walk-in space" filled with resources and materials for mentors' and mentees.

Secondly, the recruitment and selection of the mentors' was identified as another challenge. Here it was imperative to note that the "quality of the mentors' was particularly significant". Of course the quality of the mentor also influences the level of engagement with the mentee. It was highlighted in the workshop that the criteria for recruitment and selection should be specific. For FoBE, recruiting passionate and apposite mentors is an important component of a prosperous mentoring programme. Though, the authors are cognizant that finding apposite applicants can seem overwhelming, retaining mentors' is yet another budding issue. Thus, establishing a set criterion for recruitment and selection and matching mentors' and mentees should pave the way for enhancing a productive relationship.

The third challenge was marketing and advocacy of the programme itself. The mentors' felt there was a need to market the peer mentoring programme for FoBE. Thus, social media site such as Facebook was utilized to realize the requests from the mentors. Further to this, posters and flyers were prepared and posted on the FoBE notice board as part of advocacy efforts. In future, FoBE sees that being part of a Faculty where marketing is one of the key disciplines, it is pertinent to deploy word-of-mouth marketing as the strategic value cannot be underestimated and also to use more marketing materials. As part of the advocacy and campaign for FoBE, it is important to engage the current mentors, mentees, and members of the partnership that could potentially discuss and speak about the benefits of mentoring as well as the challenges. For FoBE another important aspect could be to bring in mentors and mentees who could offer testimonials about the effects and prominence of mentoring. Strategies to recruit mentors could include the local print and electronic media as well as creating email campaigns to reach the specific people the Faculty aims to recruit. Another strategy for recruitment could be tracking second and final year students in specific disciplines with high averages to be peer mentors. Even recruitment drive kick-off events could be an avenue to increase awareness and momentum for the uptake.

Fourthly, in the workshop, the mentor's role with the mentees was questioned. Thus, the need for training and supervision was deliberated upon. For FoBE as the way forward it is particularly important to spend time with the peer mentors to determine individual and group mentoring approaches. Another important determinant is providing mentors guidance on dealing with crisis situations, thus mentors need to know whom they can contact should a crisis emerge.

Fifthly, rewards and recognition also received attention and it was highlighted that it was a significant aspect of sustaining the morale as well as retaining the mentors. FoBE's approach to resolve this issue is to recognize the efforts of the mentors publicly through its website, social media, word-of-mouth and publications. It is mostly significant to also appreciate the mentors personally and in

writing and through regular workshops and meetings, soliciting their feedback and encouraging them to partake in the planning stages.

Other challenges which have not necessarily been highlighted through the workshop, but which the authors believe are important aspects of FoBE mentoring relates to providing mentors and mentees with the apposite tools and resources, such as meeting checklists, expectation agreements, goal setting frameworks, and training materials. It is more so vital for FoBE to also track the success of mentoring.

Conclusion

The Higher education sector is rapidly inflexed with kaleidoscopic primacies and objectives. To meet the learners' needs, HEIs are focused on the transformational benefits of peer mentoring. The mentoring process described in this paper was not systematized or incentivized at this stage. Thus it can be envisaged that for FoBE inculcating cultural sensitivity and cross cultural training for faculty, administrators, mentors and mentees to augment student support through peer mentoring combined with methods promoting collaboration of learner perspectives of the didactic environment with administration to co-design innovative tactics to support students should be at the forefront to effectively manage the peer mentoring programme and appositely address the challenges.

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Disclaimer

This study is primarily aimed at exploring the challenges with specific reference to the peer mentors' at FoBE to be able to chart the way forward to address the challenges for a more sustained experience.

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