



## **Blurred boundaries: an investigation of the roles of Student Writing Mentors and Language and Learning Advisers**

### **Key Words**

writing mentors, peer learning, language and learning advisers

### **Abstract**

Formal peer mentoring programs are now becoming more common in Australian universities (Cornelius, Wood & Lai 2016). These programs have a variety of objectives, and may be based on different models of peer learning (Boud, Cohen & Sampson, 2001; Harrington, O'Neil and Bakshi 2007). One model which focuses on student learning and assignment writing can be described as being loosely based on the practices of Writing Centres on college campuses in the US (Winder, Nakamaru 2010; Kathpalia, & Koo, Swit Ling 2016). Harrington, O'Neil and Bakshi (2007) argue that such student writing mentor programs need to be continually evaluated, and that there is value in writing mentors reflecting on their capacity to facilitate a dialogue with other students around writing practices. Deakin University offers a program where student Writing Mentors (WMs) work with peers in 'drop in' one-to-one sessions. This program is coordinated by Language and Learning Advisers (LLAs) on four campuses of Deakin University. While the title of the program suggests a focus on assignment writing, the overall aims include helping students interpret academic expectations, and better understand how they can succeed with their studies. An evaluation of the program in 2016 found that students believed that the assistance they received from WMs was helpful, and that it contributed to improving their confidence as a learner. However, the Writing Mentor Program also aims to facilitate a two way reciprocal learning process with WMs learning from their peers, and from sharing reflections with other Writing Mentors on their interactions with students. Since the program commenced five years ago, questions have arisen about the boundaries between the roles of LLAs and WMs. The coordination of the program by LLAs includes planning and implementing a variety of professional development for the Writing Mentors. The study presented here aims to inform a component of the professional development program, which facilitates the identification of differences, similarities and boundaries between the roles of WMs and LLAs. Evaluation data will be collected through surveys completed by WMs pre and post the professional development intervention. Professional development includes LLAs observing a Writing Mentor 'drop in' session, and then facilitating a guided reflection with the WM. WMs will also be asked to observe at least one student consultation facilitated by an LLA. While WMs and LLAs are still engaged in observation and guided reflections, we would predict that the post intervention survey will show greater understanding of the complexities of both roles. It is anticipated that this study will highlight the need for a more structured approach to developing a 'shared understanding' of the roles of WMs and LLAs.

### **References**

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