



Online strategies to recruit and train Student Mentors: opportunities for development and integration with face-to-face strategies

Key Words

peer learning; student mentoring; recruitment; training; ongoing development; online technologies

Abstract

Recruitment, training, and ongoing development strategies are critical to the success of peer mentoring programs (Rodrigo et al., 2014). Recruiting students whose expectations and attitudes towards mentoring are aligned with the objectives of the program, as well as providing them with initial training and ongoing development opportunities, is of vital importance to ensure that programs fulfil such objectives (Ehrich, 2004; Harmon, 2006). Face-to-face recruitment and training, however, can become time-consuming tasks and can be difficult to organise due to students' increasingly busy schedules. Moreover, face-to-face sessions may not be feasible in multi-campus or cross-institutional peer mentoring programs. Online technologies provide learning and communication tools to overcome time and distance barriers when recruiting and training Student Mentors. Online tools, when used in conjunction with face-to-face strategies, offer flexible learning environments that can be adapted to respond to Student Mentors' varying developmental learning needs. Recruitment and pre-mentoring training, on the other hand, can be strengthened when online technologies are employed to streamline the first stages of recruitment and training. At Victoria University, the Students Supporting Student Learning (SSSL) Unit has implemented blended recruitment and training/development strategies in their multi-campus Student Mentoring programs. The introduction of online recruitment and training processes involves several steps or stages for potential Student Mentors to complete. Whilst the first online stages assess students' skills and motivations to become mentors, the last stage introduces them to the principles of peer mentoring and scaffolds basic mentoring skills that are then further developed in face-to-face training. Ongoing learning development is based on a blend of face-to-face and online weekly sessions that involve reflective activities, quizzes, and multimedia resources. Rather than replacing face-to-face sessions, online development sessions provide valuable opportunities for reflection and peer-to-peer learning. Student Mentors work collaboratively and/or individually on mentoring scenarios to provide audio and video-based responses (e.g. role-plays), develop their communication skills through online activities, and participate in discussion forums. Online activities are employed to inform further face-to-face training sessions, and provide valuable data about mentors' development and experiences throughout the semester. In this workshop, participants will be guided through the process of designing and implementing online recruitment, training, and ongoing development strategies for Student Mentors at Victoria University; in particular, strategies to identify recruitment and learning objectives, finding appropriate online technologies, and connecting face-to-face and online sessions. Examples of tasks and questions used in online recruitment and training modules, as well as Student Mentors' responses, will be presented. Participants will have the opportunity to discuss how these activities can contribute to effective recruitment and training/development, and how face-to-face and online activities can be integrated. Data on students' evaluation of online recruitment and training/development strategies will also be presented. Finally, participants will have the chance to discuss how the online activities and strategies presented in this workshop can be adapted to suit specific needs in their peer learning programs, and what potential challenges may exist.

References

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