

## Virtual mentoring Guidelines

### Introduction

Gifted and high potential students are linked with students from a university by using the internet - specifically online communication - for the mentoring contact.

Selected year 10, 11 or 12 students work with a mentor (ie tertiary student) in an area of mutual interest. The work undertaken may take the form of a work requirement that is included within the core curriculum of the student's studies (this may be work completed as part of an elective).

Early pilot programs included students from schools in the Barwon South Western Region and Gippsland Region. Mentors from the University of Melbourne were from two departments - Philosophy and Environmental Science. Projects completed by the students included:

- Time: Physics and Philosophy
- Air Pollution in the Latrobe Valley
- Communism/Socialism versus Capitalism
- Animal Testing
- The Meaning of Life, the Universe and Whatever Lies Beyond
- Is Philosophy Valuable?
- Point Lillias: Not A Chemical Storage Dump

Later programs included mentors from Philosophy, Environmental Science, Geomatics and Political Science.

In general the mentor is expected to communicate with the student on a regular basis averaging two hours a week for 10 to 15 weeks. Ideally the program commences in mid May and concludes early October. In this way the contact is spread over a greater length of time. The commitments of the tertiary students are considered in the planning of the program by avoiding examination clashes, vacations etc. The university is encouraged to offer (academic) credit for the mentor's participation in the program.

It is strongly suggested that the project outcome be published on-line either through the university's or the school's website and that it be presented to an audience consisting of the current group of mentors, students, teachers, parents and other interested persons.

### Selection criteria

#### Schools

Schools should nominate a staff member who will liaise with the tertiary institution. The staff member's role is outlined below. Essential to the success of the program is established online communication for the length of the project.

Each school should nominate at least two students, though the students need not necessarily be allocated to the either the same area of interest or the same mentor.

In order to enable students to participate in the program the staff member will be required to:

- nominate a curriculum area (which may be part of an elective) and a specific work requirement that the student will complete during contact with their mentor. Ideally this will be an area within the contact teacher's curriculum expertise
- be familiar with the workings of the internet, and specifically online communication, and have easy and frequent access to this facility
- assist to develop, and attend, an initial briefing day for all participants at the tertiary institution when the role and responsibilities regarding the program are outlined
- accompany the students to the tertiary institution for their workshop presentations at the end of the program.

#### Students

Students should be selected based on the following criteria:

- highly able and focused learner

- self motivated and independent learner
- teacher nomination and self nomination
- commitment to complete the project and present the final outcomes to an audience.

Essential selection criteria

- regular online communication access.

### **Mentors**

Mentors will be:

- selected on the recommendation of lecturer(s)
- selected through self nomination
- currently studying in an area of interest and currency to the student
- prepared to work with at least two students (possibly from the same school)
- have some experience of working with secondary students e.g. youth camps, community work.

### **Administrator: tertiary institution**

Two events should be organised:

- initial briefing day to be held at the university
- final publication of workshops and the presentations

The role of the liaison person from the university is to:

- select the mentors
- assist in the collation of information for program participants
- provide schools with the university dates and work with schools to determine the timeline for the program
- if possible organise some activities that introduce the Year 10 students to aspects of university life e.g.
  - lectures
  - tutorials
  - residences
  - student union
  - campus life in general.

The role of the contact teacher at the schools is to:

- select the students for the program
- forward the materials listed to students following selection:
  - information regarding mentoring
  - guidelines of the program for students and teachers
  - project brief proforma
  - timeline of the program, including start and finish dates at the university
  - permission form outlining requirements and expectations of the students, covering the first and last contact days
  - online communication protocol contract.
- forward materials listed below to the mentors (via the University liaison person) following selection:
  - information regarding mentoring
  - guidelines of the program for students and teachers
  - project brief proforma
  - outline of the program, including start and finish dates at the university
  - online communication protocol contract.

At the first contact day the following should be provided to students and mentors:

- a contact list of all participants in the program including online communication, fax and mailing information
- information regarding online communication protocol
- a project brief that will be completed by negotiation by the end of the initial day.  
(*This material to be compiled by the university and the schools.*)

## **Communication**

### **Mentors and students**

Following the initial briefing day of the program, online communication between the mentors and the students should be facilitated by the establishment of the moderated by use of online communication tools such as a conference list, wiki or sharepoint.

The use of the online communication tools is recommended to remove the issue of student/mentor pairs working in isolation. Student/mentor pairs are able to know how others are progressing.

### **Contact staff member**

Administrative details for the school and the tertiary institution should be exchanged through the list. It is expected that a response from the school will indicate the successful receipt of the information.

### **Questions and queries**

Any questions regarding communication and administration by the students should be directed to the contact staff member in the first instance.

The tertiary institution liaison person is the first contact point for any queries from the mentors.

## **Program format**

The following sequence is suggested. Schools and the tertiary institutions involved should discuss this and reach consensus regarding the program.

1. Call for Expressions of Interest from schools requesting the nomination of students, staff member and addressing of the selection criteria.
2. Call for Expressions of Interest addressing of the selection criteria from tertiary students.
3. Selection of students and mentors.
4. Students and mentors matched, based on information provided by each party.
5. Briefing day where project work is negotiated.
6. First online communications include all participants posting their profile.
7. Work on project - see timeline.

## **PROPOSED TIMELINE VIRTUAL MENTORING PROGRAM**

### **Early February**

- initial discussions between schools and tertiary institutions

### **February**

- mentors and students nominated
- projects identified/developed

### **April**

- briefing for mentors

### **Early May**

- meeting day - students/mentors/teachers

### **Early May – mid September**

- work on project takes place

### **Late September**

- project completed to the satisfaction of both student and mentor
- students finalise work for on-line publication
- publication of project on university and/or school website completed.

### **September - October**

- presentation days at University
  - presentation skills workshop
  - presentations by students.