

INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY OF SCHOLARS
OR
INDIGENOUS GRADUATE MENTORING PROGRAM

June/July 2006

mentor

1. a. With initial capital: The name of the Ithacan noble whose disguise the goddess Athene assumed in order to act as the guide and adviser of the young Telemachus; allusively, one who fulfils the office which the supposed Mentor fulfilled towards Telemachus. b. Hence, as common noun: An experienced and trusted counsellor.

Oxford English Dictionary

Preamble

The motivation to develop a mentoring program for postgraduate students arose from discussions in relation to 'you don't know what you don't know', translating to 'if you don't know what's there, you don't know the questions to ask'.

Many postgraduate students are mature students who have struggled through their first and second degrees.

While those of us who have worked with non-Indigenous supervisors are extremely grateful for this, the challenge facing a number of people has been the inability to follow in anyone's footsteps. For some, not having an Indigenous mentor or role model was quite daunting.

A number of mentorship programs have occurred throughout Australia, including:

- Northern Territory Government Aboriginal Employment and Career Development Strategy Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mentorship Program (supporting Indigenous people to further develop skills and foster a more positive work environment).
- The Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership Youth Talent Development Program Mentoring Scheme (targeting a pool of high potential young people who have a strong desire and ability to pursue a university qualification).
- Curtin School Nursing and Midwifery (The Indigenous Nursing Student Mentorship Program commenced in 2004 with funding from the Nurses Board of Western Australia. It is run in partnership with the Centre for Aboriginal Studies at Curtin and aims to both increase the number of Indigenous nursing students and to provide current students with

comprehensive and culturally sensitive mentoring throughout all stages of their course.)

- University of New South Wales Research Mentor Program for Indigenous Women is jointly funded by the UNSW Equity Initiative Fund and the Social Policy Research Centre and aims to provide: career and skills development opportunity for Indigenous women researchers; support for honours, post-graduate and early career Indigenous women in developing academic careers; opportunities for Indigenous women researchers to network with professional organisations of interest and relevance; support and assistance in writing peer reviewed publications; and assistance in seeking further academic employment or undertaking post-graduate study. The program provides a mentoring opportunity for UNSW Indigenous women by employing them part-time or full-time on commissioned research projects in the SPRC and introducing them to broader professional research activities such as publication, conferences and professional associations.
- Monash University appoints an Indigenous mentor for graduate students where appropriate.
- La Trobe University has an Indigenous Employment Strategy, which incorporates a mentoring program with an Indigenous mentor.
- The Victorian Bar has an Aboriginal Law Students Mentoring Program that is available to Aboriginal law students in Victoria. It links students with practising barristers to encourage undergraduates to practise law upon graduation and consider a career as a barrister.

Mentoring is a condition that arises out of an effective relationship, and is one that takes time to build. Mentoring happens when mentees trust, feel accepted by, and view their mentors as role models.

Program Description

It is proposed that the Indigenous Graduate Mentoring Program be comprised of three components:

- one on one mentoring of undergraduates by postgraduates;
- one on one mentoring of Masters and PhD students by postgraduates and those with postdoctoral qualifications; and
- extending networks.

The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates has grown exponentially during the last five years, providing a pool of mentors in a range of disciplines.

Mentees' interests will be broad and include for example IT, law, mathematics, history, politics, philosophy, English, criminology, genetics, engineering, behavioural sciences, education, humanities and cultural studies ...

The mentors will not have only expert knowledge in their discipline area, but also knowledge of research methods, and more importantly, preferred and culturally appropriate Indigenous modes of enquiry and research.

The Indigenous Graduate Mentoring Program (IGMP) will be dedicated to ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students achieve success during their undergraduate years and beyond. The goals of the IGMP are to provide support to Indigenous students seeking to enrol or who are enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate programs, and to create a legacy of excellence in postgraduate/postdoctoral work.

It is noted that in ARC applications, 'it is strongly recommended that a Mentor (who does not need to be an Indigenous Australian) be associated with the proposal to provide specific expert advice on the subject of the research'.

Similarly, the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research states that applicants for its Visiting Indigenous Fellowship Scheme must have an internal mentor/supervisor at CAEPR, which has a record of collaborating with and mentoring Indigenous researchers.

The proposed Indigenous Graduate Mentoring Program could see a number of Indigenous mentors associated with proposals and obviate the necessity for a non-Indigenous Australian who is perhaps not aware of Indigenous research methods. Skills of IGMP mentors could be developed further through ARC and CAEPR mentor coaching.

Aims

The aims of the IGMP are to:

- bring students together with faculty, Indigenous Higher Education Centres (IHECs), and current graduate students;
- provide an environment of support and empowerment, via email, telephone, videoconferencing, face-to-face meetings, roundtable discussions and workshops;
- form a continuous environment that fosters success for Indigenous students in undergraduate and postgraduate study from first year through to doctoral studies;
- make available support and assistance in the writing and publication of articles for refereed journals;
- assist when developing an application for further postgraduate study;
- extend networking opportunities; and
- mentors' professional development.

The program will need to be flexible to in order that individual needs are met.

It is expected that the program will involve individual academic mentorship by a postgraduate or an undergraduate with demonstrated ability and interest in a particular field. It aims to motivate learning through encouragement, inspiration, shared passion, broad insight and appropriate challenge.

Mentees will select themselves to participate in the program.

Mentors will not be remunerated except for recognition of their contribution.

Mentors will maintain the confidentiality of the student mentees they are supporting.

Mentors are expected to view their relationship with Mentees as that of a peer role model and 'co-learner'. Mentors are encouraged to be seen by Mentees as a fellow student who will share their study skills and are supportive and encouraging of them to gain the skills required in finishing their current studies.

Mentors can expect to gain:

- personal satisfaction;
- professional development, including the development of high mentoring skills
- increased levels of commitment to their fields; and
- opportunities for self-reflection and self-renewal.

How will it work?

- a) Mentors and mentees sign up for a program through the IGMP website, completing a profile with their information,
- b) Mentees are then presented with up to three potential mentors. They may choose one of these, or opt to let the Directors attempt to make the match for them.
- c) Once a match has been made and the mentor confirms her/his availability, the e-mentoring begins immediately and the relationship lasts for the duration of the degree course or a mutually agreeable end time.

Kaye Price (University of Canberra) and John Williams-Mozley (University of Southern Queensland) will initially coordinate the program, with the assistance of Peter Read (NCIS, Australian National University) where the IGMP website will be hosted.

Price and Williams-Mozley will establish the group of Indigenous Mentors and use their Higher Education network to promote the program.

To consider:

A submission to DEST as per press release below.

SUPPORTING INDIGENOUS HIGHER EDUCATION

18 July 2006

The Australian Government's response to a report by the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC) includes the implementation of a number of key initiatives aimed at building partnerships between the education sectors to work for the advancement of Indigenous students in higher education.

The Minister for Education, Science and Training, the Hon. Julie Bishop MP, today launched the Council's policy paper *Improving Indigenous Outcomes and Enhancing Indigenous Culture and Knowledge in Australian Higher Education*, and announced an immediate \$1.73 million investment to support several key priorities in the Council's paper.

The paper reflects the outcomes from the inaugural Indigenous higher education Conference, *Education Led Recovery of Indigenous Capacity: reshaping the policy agenda* held in November 2005 and forms the basis for the Council's strategic direction over the next three years. The Council's Strategic Plan identifies seven key priority areas, which Council believes will assist in closing the divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in higher education.

"The Australian Government supports the Council's vision of formalising partnerships between the education sectors to develop a joint approach in encouraging young Indigenous school leavers into further studies and professional careers," Minister Bishop said.

The \$1.73 million funding package, to be implemented immediately, includes:

- \$750,000 for partnership projects to encourage universities to increase the number of cross-sectoral partnerships and pathways for Indigenous students;
- \$600,000 to call for expressions of interest to develop three or more lighthouse national projects of two years duration to develop cross-sectoral collaboration including guaranteed pathways, particularly for mature age students;
- \$310,000 to commission research including a study of the first year experience of Indigenous students; a study of strategic models of what works in the higher education sector to support Indigenous people; and an evaluation of the role of the Indigenous Education and Support centres;
- \$50,000 to award two International Scholarships under the Endeavour Programme; and
- \$20,000 to recognise and award cross sectoral partnerships.

"Clearly there are also areas where our universities can also promote the prominence of Indigenous people in the core business of academic endeavour. This includes, increasing the recognition of Indigenous staff and symbolism of Indigenous culture on campus, and in particular, improving participation of Indigenous people in university governance and management," said Minister Bishop.

“The Government looks forward to an ongoing collaboration with Professor Langton and the members of the IHEAC, and the Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee, to continue the work outlined by IHEAC in an effort pursue the best outcomes for Indigenous students and staff.

The report is available at: http://www.dest.gov.au/improving_indig_outcomes.htm

Media Contacts:

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PACKAGE OF \$1.730 MILLION FOR INITIATIVES FOCUSSED ON IHEAC’S PRIORITIES 1, 2 and 4.

1. Up to **\$750,000** on 10 partnership projects to encourage universities to increase the number of formal cross-sectoral partnerships and pathways for Indigenous students.

- This includes funding in the order of \$50,000 each to expand projects which are proving to be excellent models in this area – for example – the Indigenous Doctors’ Association project in medical education and the summer schools, which perform a valuable role in assisting Indigenous students connect with higher education.

2. Up to **\$600,000** to call for expressions of interest to develop three or more lighthouse national projects of two year duration to develop cross-sectoral collaboration including guaranteed pathways, aimed at mature age students who are already in the workforce (and not for example, years 11 and 12 students).

3. **\$10,000 per annum over two years**, to support the Council in making awards to recognise outstanding project partnerships to bolster education sectoral partnerships.

4. **\$50,000** to award two **International Fellowships from the Endeavour Programme** commencing in 2007.

5. **Up to \$310,000 to commission the studies or research** sought in the IHEAC recommendations, including:

- **up to \$80,000** for a study of the first year experience of Indigenous students, to be done in consultation with the AVCC;
- **up to \$80,000** for a feasibility study of the *Dare to Lead* and *What Works* models to determine how these activities could be used strategically in the higher education sector; and
- **up to \$150,000** to evaluate the roles of Indigenous Education and Support Centres.

Total Package: \$1.730 million

Ten Tips for Effective Mentoring

- 1. Maintain regular contact.** Mentors should assume they are the givers in the relationship. Consistent contact models dependability and builds trust. At least weekly contact is recommended.
- 2. Always be honest.** Trust and respect are the foundations on which mentorships are built.
- 3. Avoid being judgmental of a mentee's life situation.** Acceptance without conditions communicates that your concern comes without strings attached.
- 4. Avoid excessive gift giving.** Don't do for a mentee what s/he can do for him/herself. Your greatest gift is to help a person discover his/her own solutions to problems.
- 5. Don't expect to have all the answers.** Sometimes just listening attentively is all people need.
- 6. Help your mentee access resources and expand support networks.** Discuss the importance of maintaining positive relationships.
- 7. Be clear about your expectations and your boundaries.** Set up ground rules and communicate them.
- 8. Avoid being overwhelmed by your mentee's problems.** Remain calm and dispassionate to help mentees solve problems.
- 9. Respect confidentiality.** Good friends do.
- 10. If the relationship seems to stall, hang in there.**

Adapted from

http://nationalservicerresources.org/resources/newsletters/resource_connection/volume_2_number_1/mentoring_myths_and_tips.php

Aboriginal graduate is now a mentor



Paul Niesler

Paul Niesler, one of the first Aboriginal students to complete a Master in Business Administration (MBA) from the Curtin Business School (CBS), is avidly mentoring indigenous students also enrolled in the course.

Five years ago Niesler, a tradesman by profession, was struggling to find a pathway into university. Poor literacy skills and not having the self-confidence to “put yourself out there warts and all” was the biggest stumbling block according to Niesler.

Niesler attributes a lot of his success to Graduate School of Business lecturer, Margaret McCabe. McCabe put him on the right path and he enrolled in Curtin’s Recognition of Prior Learning Program for mature-age students.

A year into the degree, Niesler decided not to just complete the degree, but to embark on a master program as well.

“It was Margaret’s mentoring and the chance to be able to attend campus and have that face-to-face, interactive contact with lecturers and other students which enabled me to go on to do my master degree,” Niesler said.

The following year, Niesler applied for, and was awarded, the CBS Indigenous Studies scholarship which enabled him to purchase a computer and funded his HECS fees.

Soon to take up a position as Research Officer for the Curtin University Postgraduate Student Association, Niesler derives satisfaction that he is able to give something back to the indigenous community through mentoring and supervision.

“I’ll pick them up when their wings fall off and make sure they don’t lose too much confidence in the falling,” he said.

Not content with his master degree, Niesler is planning to study for a PhD which will focus on Aboriginal society and learning.

“It’s a matter of gaining enough self-confidence and having the support on campus to guide you,” he said.

Posted: 3 April, 2003

http://newsbytes.curtin.edu.au/archive/alumni-a/a_Apr3abgrad.html