



Student Transitions: Example of transitions practice

Title: General Degree Mentoring Project

Transition(s) the practice supports: Transition to University

Abstract:

Mentoring project to support mature students making the transition from FE Colleges and Access to HE Courses. Students are allocated a dedicated Postgraduate Mentor, also a mature student, who can provide them with support and guidance in year one of study at University of St Andrews. The Mentor acts as a single point of contact for any queries and can ensure the students know where to access information or go to for help.

Description:

It has been recognised that University of St Andrews can be a challenging environment for those who return to study after a significant break and making the transition from a further education college to university. Many of these students have family or caring responsibilities and most do not live within St Andrews. The Widening Access Team felt that it was very difficult for this cohort of students to form a network with other similar students due to the disparate nature of the modular structure. It could easily be the case that this type of student could come and go to class with no real interaction with fellow students, and hence have no peer support.

Peer support is a vital part of the student experience, particularly in year one when students are not only finding their feet academically, but also finding out about the day to day student life which residential students are able to source through Hall Wardens, roommates and more senior students in hall.

It was felt that while we encouraged this group of students to apply, the right sort of support was not available to them on arrival which had a detrimental effect on the retention and progression of this cohort.

For the September 2013 entry of SWAP Access/HNC/HND students the Mentoring Project was put into place to determine if by providing this support, the retention of this cohort could be improved.

The cohort was made up of 12 MA & BSc General Degree students from both Fife & Dundee Colleges as well as 2 students from FE Colleges out with the local area. The student mentor is part time postgraduate student who completed undergraduate degree at St Andrews as a mature student.

Mentor led sessions were run prior to Orientation week where the new students were given the opportunity to find out more about how matriculation, advising, student finance, support services as well as finding about the Students Union and how to get involved. They were offered the opportunity to meet with their Academic Advisor and discuss module choices prior to the Advising process. They were also shown the Commuter Student Room. This helped to allay some of their apprehensions about starting study and ensured that they had all met and got to know one another before the start of term

Into the semester sessions were held to cover essay writing, note taking and exam skills.

The mentor provides ongoing support, via drop in sessions, Facebook group and email and is the first point of contact for any queries or problems. They will meet with the students individually on a regular basis as well as co-ordinating social events. Issues varied from academic difficulties, to more complex personal issues which required Student Services Support. The mentor is there to provide a point of contact and often the students will contact the mentor in situations where they would not normally feel they can approach advisors/student services. The mentor can assist in making that contact and ensuring that the right support is put in place as quickly as possible.

Of the first cohort, 11 of the students progressed to second year successfully with one student being on a leave of absence for personal and health reasons.

At the end of the academic year a feedback session produced very a very positive response from the students many of whom felt that they may not have completed the year without both the mentor and peer support from the group.

The cohort for September 2104 was 20 students, again a variety of MA and BSc General Degree Students. The pre-sessional event was extended to run over two days, after feedback from the first cohort and study skills sessions have also taken place.

The mentor continues to provide face to face and email support on regular basis, as well as co-ordinating social events. However, a very positive outcome for the project is that much of the day to day support is now provided to the first years by the returning students. They have formed a very strong group, supporting and encouraging each other.

First semester results for all students have been good, with all second years obtaining strong academic results and all first years progressing into the new semester.

Contact details:

Joanna Fry
T: 01334 462346
E: Schools Access

Admissions
St Katherine's West
16 The Scores
St Andrews
KY16 9AX