

ALTC LSES Environmental Scan

1. Institution

Victoria University, Melbourne

2. Contact Person (and contact details)

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3. Name of Program/Initiative

Trident: a student peer mentoring program.

3.1 URL:

3.2 **Start Date/Duration:** 2010 (now in its 3rd year, 5th semester)

4. Brief outline of program

Paid Student Mentors provide peer assisted learning support through the Trident program in **three** different ways:

a. Peer-Assisted Study Sessions (PASS)

PASS is an academic support program known internationally. It involves sessions led by Student Mentors without a teaching staff member present. The focus is on students reviewing content already taught in lectures and tutorials. The Student Mentors focus on encouraging students to learn collaboratively. Participation is voluntary.

b. Peer-Assisted Tutorials (PATs)

Student Mentors are allocated a timetabled Physics tutorial. Tutors in those tutorials therefore have two Student Mentors in the classroom with them to assist students with physics. It was anticipated that the presence of Student Mentors would encourage the students to feel more comfortable to ask questions they might feel uncomfortable asking the tutor. In addition it was expected that the Student Mentors' presence would allow students to gain more personal attention, as well as assist in referring students on to other elements of the program.

StudySpace

A study area is provided for students to use for general study and networking. At allocated three-hourly time slots, the StudySpace is staffed by two Student Mentors. Students are able to ask questions of the Student Mentors to help them with their studies. Attendance at StudySpace is voluntary.

RATIONALE FOR THE STRUCTURE

By employing the same later year students to carry out all functions of the three components of the overall program, there was a synergy between the three activities that sets in place a positive feedback loop i.e. it was anticipated that personal relationships developed in one setting would carry over to other settings. It was expected that Student Mentors would be able to get to know students personally and

begin to discern who was in need of more support. In turn, by building a trusting relationship it was expected that Student Mentors would be able to suggest further follow-up in the StudySpace and/or PASS and vice versa. It was expected that this mutually reinforcing cycle would make it easier for students to articulate any issues or difficulties they are having before they fall too far behind or become disengaged or demoralised. Each week therefore students would be interacting with one of the two Mentors in their peer assisted tutorial who in turn would continually press them gently to do their study in the Engineering StudySpace so that Mentors could provide more tailored and 'just in time' support across a period of hours or even days. It was also anticipated that Mentors would also develop their knowledge of wider support systems in the university and could refer students to these services e.g. counselling, language, learning and maths support and Student Rovers in the Learning Commons.

5. Purpose/Aims

Trident was originally created as a large-scale student peer mentoring program to provide academic learning support to students in the core first-year Engineering unit Physics 1 (ENF1102) in 2010. Trident 2010 directly targeted three key regions of engagement necessary for new students to succeed: academic engagement with the subject and its disciplinary content; social engagement with staff and other students; and a wider institutional engagement with the systems, processes and procedures of the university at large. Engineering students are traditionally low users of academic support services despite often requiring extra help. As a result of the success of the Trident program in 2010, the program was continued in 2011 and 2012 and extended to Maths Engineering in 2011.

6. Breadth of program Trident runs in two core subjects (units): Physics Engineering and Maths Engineering in the Faculty of Health, Engineering and Science.

7. Category (please select all that apply and provide explanation where necessary)

| Category | Y? | Explanation |
|------------------------|----|---|
| Policy | | |
| Curriculum | Y | It is both a curricula and co-curricula program. The peer assisted tutorial component is within curricula whereas the Peer Assisted Study Sessions and StudySpace take place alongside the curricula. |
| Program | Y | It is a Students Supporting Student Learning (SSSL) program/student peer mentoring program run from the School of Language and Learning which provides various forms of academic support to students across the university. |
| Other (please specify) | | |

8. Resources (optional – we are trying to determine what sort of resourcing is necessary to make the initiative work)

- 8.0 Start up budget: The initial program had 10 mentors working 6 hours per week for eleven weeks in one unit \$19,606.82
- 8.1 In 2011 the program expanded to Maths which doubled the budget.
- 8.2 In 2012 the program continued in two subjects but with half the number of student mentors.
- 8.3 Ongoing budget: The program is funded by the School of Engineering. Funding refers to paying the student mentors for their roles as mentors.

9. Outcomes

Evaluation(s) conducted to date - Informal or formal) – and details of findings: can be read at <http://snap.vu.edu.au/staff/students-supporting-students-learning-sssl/sssl-documents/evaluation-reports>

Evidence of success: In its 3rd year of operation (currently in its 5th semester) plus In 2011, the failure rate of mentees who had not done prior physics (this also includes students who had not done physics for more than 5 years) was 21% compared to 50% for non-mentees. The failure rate of mentees who had done prior physics was 11% compared to 20% for non-mentees (see <http://www.snap.vu.edu.au/staff/students-supporting-students-learning-sssl/sssl-documents/evaluation-reports>). Trident was so successful it is now also operating in Maths for Engineering (ENF1101).

Evaluation(s) planned (and dates for this/these): These occur each semester. See url above.

Major challenges: Trident is complex. It requires teaching staff willing to have student mentors in their classrooms and willing to utilise their skills and experience in interesting/useful ways. It also requires student mentors who feel confident enough to build good relationships with the teaching staff in the tutorials. Another challenge is supporting the development of the student mentors. Another is finding suitable spaces in which to run the PASS and StudySpace elements.

9.1 **Other (Please specify):**

10. Publications/Reports (including links to those publically available) as above