



2009

Discovery Mentoring: Creating Student Connections


Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute, Virginia Commonwealth University

Amy Armstrong
Virginia Commonwealth University

Melanie Boynton
Virginia Commonwealth University

See next page for additional authors

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/wilder_pubs

 Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Downloaded from

https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/wilder_pubs/32

This Research Report is brought to you for free and open access by the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs Publications by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact libcompass@vcu.edu.

Authors

Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute, Virginia Commonwealth University; Amy Armstrong; Melanie Boynton; Sylvestine Branch; Bettina Peacemaker; and Rebecca Pousson

Discovery Mentoring: Creating Student Connections

Team University: Dr. Amy Armstrong, Ms. Melanie Boynton, Ms. Pat Branch, Ms. Bettina Peacemaker, and Ms. Rebecca Pousson

Project Description:

Team University proposes to develop a student-to-student mentoring program which would match undeclared, incoming first-year students to mentors. This program facilitates the objectives of University College by building upon their efforts to create a “small community” feel in a large university.

Project Goals: (measure through retention and GPA statistics)

- Enhance the community experience of undergraduate undeclared students
- Improve orientation experience of incoming first year students
- Increase student retention in the targeted population 2 percentage points
- Form long term relationships between underclassmen, upperclassmen, and alumni

Strategies:

Team University conducted informational interviews of mentoring programs and VCU leaders across the university to assess strengths, weaknesses and gaps, with the intent of filling an unmet need.

Action Steps:

- Present proposal to University College for consideration and review
- Encourage the incorporation of the proposed mentoring program into the Discovery Advising Department
- Link the VA mentoring program to University College so that they might provide resources, training, or any other identified need to the program coordinator and the orientation advisors who will be serving as mentors
- Track through cohort study students who have similar characteristics to the mentee’s on measures of retention and GPA

Outcomes:

This project is intended to address Theme II of VCU’s 2020 Strategic Plan: “Achieve national recognition as a learning-centered research university that embraces a world-class student experience.” Such a mentoring program would enhance the student experience of our incoming first-year students and help our declared students to connect more strongly with VCU through personal relationships with students and alumni.

Process Observations:

- Knowing our individual Meyer-Briggs types was extremely helpful in understanding our various personalities and qualities
- Capitalizing on our talents allowed us to achieve our goals
- Commitment was key
- The experience created long term relationships and opportunities for future collaboration

Discovery Mentoring: Creating Student Connections

Team University

Amy Armstrong
Melanie Boynton
Sylvestine Branch
Bettina Peacemaker
Rebecca Pousson

Team University

Theme II of VCU's 2020 Strategic Plan: “Achieve national recognition as a learning-centered research university that embraces a world-class student experience.”

Where we started...

- ▶ Student feedback – Student Government Association
 - Jibrán Muhammed (SGA President, Monroe Park, 2008-2009)
 - Gabriel Walker (SGA President, Monroe Park, 2009-2010)
 - Jennifer Austin (SGA President, MCV, 2008-2009)
 - *More Mentoring options for VCU undergraduates*
- ▶ VCU Staff Senate
 - Tammy Berwanger (President, 2008-2009)
- ▶ Consultation with team sponsor
 - Dr. Stephen Gottfredson (Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs)
 - Identification of undeclared students as a target group

Information gathering

- ▶ Paul S. Tribble (President, Christopher Newport University)
 - Faculty mentorship program for Honors College
- ▶ Carrie Connolly (Coordinator of Student Affairs, VCU Honors College)
 - The Honors College Mentorship Program--upperclassmen volunteer to serve as mentors, offering support and assistance to new honors students during their first semester at VCU.
- ▶ Edwin E. Blanks (Special Assistant to the Dean & Director of Business Services, VCU School of Education)
- ▶ Dr. Catherine W. Howard (Vice provost, VCU Division of Community Engagement)

Information gathering

- ▶ Gordon McDougall (Assistant Vice President for Alumni Relations, VCU Alumni Association)
- ▶ VCU University College
 - Daphne Rankin, Director of Student Engagement
 - Art Esposito, Director of Discovery Advising Program
- ▶ Douglas Knapp (Director of Development & Alumni Affairs, VCU School of Business)
 - Ram to Ram
- ▶ And many others.

Mentoring: A literature review

- ▶ **Common themes** (Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2004)
 - Frequently cited outcomes for mentees include support, empathy, encouragement, counseling, and friendship.
 - Frequently cited mentor outcomes include collegiality and networking, reflection, professional development, and personal satisfaction and growth.
 - Most frequently cited outcome for schools includes improved grades, attendance, and behavior of students.

Mentoring: A literature review

▶ Retention and Academic Success

- Mentoring programs that address both life and school-related issues provide the support needed for academic success including retention and timely graduation (Ferrari, 2004).
- Evidence that mentoring has a positive influence on grades and retention (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Pagan & Edwards-Wilson, 2002-2003; Thile & Matt, 1995).

The undeclared student

- ▶ Students who are undecided about what major is right for them.
- ▶ 866 incoming undeclared students (Fall 2007)
- ▶ Approximately 81 percent retention rate

University College

- ▶ Central home for university-wide programs and resources that help enhance students' undergraduate experience.
- ▶ Academic advising
- ▶ Learning support
- ▶ Core education
- ▶ New student programs and orientation

Discovery Advising Program

- ▶ Individual advising sessions
- ▶ Group workshops
- ▶ Interest inventories/assessments
- ▶ UNIV 103, “Education and Career Planning”

Discovery Mentoring Program

- ▶ Enhancement of University College's Discovery Advising program
- ▶ Pilot study (200 incoming first-year students)
- ▶ Self selection at acceptance
- ▶ Mentors
 - Second semester sophomores
 - Orientation advisors
 - Incentive: early registration
- ▶ Early registration/campus visit (April)

Discovery Mentoring Program

- ▶ Mentoring vs. Advising
 - Regular meetings
 - Periodic Social functions
- ▶ Mentor training and support

Assessment

- ▶ Participant feedback
- ▶ Cohort Study
 - Include control group
 - Retention
 - G.P.A.
 - Advising appointments
 - Declaration of major

Beyond the pilot

- ▶ Ongoing recruitment
- ▶ Establish mentoring continuity/connections across campus
 - School/department connections
 - Alumni connections (Ram-to-Ram)
 - Virginia Mentoring Partnership

Team University

Any Questions?