Defying the odds: promoting success for refugee background and non-English speaking background (NESB) first-year students through peer support

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List of acronyms used

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<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>CSU</td>
<td>Charles Sturt University</td>
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<tr>
<td>EB</td>
<td>Equity Buddies program</td>
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<tr>
<td>EAL</td>
<td>English as an additional language</td>
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<td>FiF</td>
<td>First in family</td>
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<td>IT</td>
<td>Information technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>LSES</td>
<td>Lower socio-economic status</td>
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<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>Non-English speaking background</td>
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<tr>
<td>OLT</td>
<td>Office for Learning and Teaching</td>
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<td>PASS</td>
<td>Peer assisted study sessions: Support program included in individual units, employing a past student to work with enrolled students in that particular unit who is available in a session for those students who want assistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>QUT</td>
<td>Queensland University of Technology</td>
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Executive summary

Description

The Equity Buddies program, designed, developed, implemented and revised as part of this project, was originally conceived as a means to provide peer support to refugee background students and facilitate their acculturation to university life. The extensive literature on retention of first year students and of refugee background students in particular makes it clear that for them, many dimensions of university life are unclear, foreign, or inaccessible. Many students lack the social, academic, and cultural capital required to succeed at university.

Equity Buddies began in 2012 following extensive discussions with a group of refugee background students at the University of Western Sydney (UWS). From these discussions it was clear that defining students as “refugees” would not do, therefore the scope of the program was expanded to include any first year student who sought peer support in navigating university life.

Equity Buddies is based on a cross-level, for-credit elective peer mentoring unit. Essentially it involves pairing first-year students with second or third-year students as Equity Buddies. Both members of these mentor-mentee pairs are enrolled in the for-credit unit and are supported through participation in tutorials and de-briefing groups. The latter are conducted by students who have previously completed the unit and have been outstanding as mentors.

The unit is deliberately inclusive. Considerable effort is made to ensure that students are paired with students from different cultures or backgrounds. Students, whether mentors or mentees, are expected to participate in 40 hours of mentor-mentee activities over the course of the semester, keep a log-book, and attend debriefing and tutorial meetings each week.

Formative evaluations of students’ experiences in Equity Buddies have been carried out, based on a research approach approved by the University Ethics committee. The approach adopted by the team leaders was to document the collective experiences of Equity Buddies participants using four complimentary methods:

- semi-structured interviews with mentors, mentees and facilitators
- analysis of students’ reflective journals that had been submitted to the project leaders after they had been graded (these journals were from the 2012 mentors)
- surveys of Equity Buddies participants (in 2012 and 2013) that provided standardised answers in Likert-scale form in relation to student perceptions of the program
- open-ended questions included in the survey which provided students with the opportunity to write about their experiences and opinions.

Data collected from both mentors and mentees in 2012 and 2013 indicate that enrolled students, whether mentors or mentees, received overwhelming benefits from completing this unit.

The partner institutions, Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and Charles Sturt University (CSU), completed an audit of support services for refugee background or NESB students which demonstrated that while both institutions offered a range of student services they were not well publicised, so that many students were unaware of the existence of these services. The provision of English language and scholarly literacy support, particularly at the first-year level was considered to be essential in both institutions.
Outcomes and deliverables

The intention of the project was to establish a sustainable student-mentoring and support system for refugee backgrounds, specifically:

- Establish a self-sustaining mentoring program that will be accessible to all students from refugee backgrounds who need support;
- Promote the customisation of an existing equity, access and student services program so that the programs address the needs of students from refugee backgrounds; and
- Produce professional development resources for academic and general staff to increase their awareness of issues affecting students from refugee backgrounds.

Both partner institutions, QUT and CSU, completed an audit of support services for refugee background or NESB students and students’ needs and use of support services. The audits found that services were available but not well publicised so students did not avail themselves of the support being offered. Support for English language and academic literacy were identified as important.

At UWS, *Equity Buddies* became the means through which the project delivered outcomes. *Equity Buddies* is now a permanent elective unit offered through the university’s School of Education, but potentially open to all undergraduate students. It is a cross-level, for-credit elective peer mentoring unit that functions to improve the abilities of students to survive the first year of university life (see details in Chapter 2).

The unit encourages cross-cultural connection and understanding among students through the development of a community of learners. It also provides students with a greater appreciation of the possibility of a university as a “community” or source of meaningful social relationships. Students who complete *Equity Buddies* no longer feel so isolated and alone. Both mentees and mentors report improved academic skills including writing, referencing, understanding learning guides, talking to tutors, and seeking help. Participating students mostly indicate that they feel more capable of meeting the demands of university life.

The professional development resources created by the project included a DVD about *Equity Buddies*. In it students comment on the issues they faced and the benefit of *Equity Buddies* to them. Survey data of participant students provided information about the impact of *Equity Buddies*; this contributed to changes introduced across three iterations of the program (Appendix B).

*Equity Buddies* provides a successful means of helping refugee and non-English speaking background students, as well as those who are first in family or from backgrounds of low socio-economic status, to navigate the first year of university life. It is recommended that *Equity Buddies* should be adopted and implemented in other universities, wherever it is appropriate.

The appendices to this report provide operational details to support the adoption of the *Equity Buddies* program. The learning guide, curriculum and research protocols are available for other interested academics to use. Facilitators who run the debriefing groups, and who link student mentors and mentees with teaching faculty, are an essential element for effective implementation of the unit.
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1.1 Components of the Equity Buddies program
Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2009, following the Bradley Review of Australian higher education, the Government set a target of ensuring that by 2020, 20% of university students are to come from backgrounds of lower socio-economic status (LSES). Since then there has been a substantial increase in the proportion of LSES students entering Australian universities. At the same time and overlapping with this category, the proportion of students with refugee or with non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) entering Australian universities has also increased. While it needs to be emphasised that these students are as varied and diverse as any other cohort, the research literature does suggest that they often have particular needs that may be different from those of other first-year students (Hannah, 1999, 2000; Morrice, 2007, 2009; Silburn & Earnest, 2010). In general, support systems for first year students in Australian universities have tended to be generic (James, Krause & Jennings, 2010), although new work is now emerging on the needs of LSES cohorts (Devlin, Kift, Nelson & McKay, 2012). Nevertheless, little has been done hitherto to respond to the specific needs of refugee background and NESB subgroups within Australia’s universities (Earnest, Joyce, Mori & Silvagni, 2010).

From the outset, the Defying the Odds project aimed to create a support system that would maximise opportunities for refugee background and NESB students to gain the social and cultural capital they would need in order to succeed with university study. However, as we learned from our initial conversations with refugee background students, they did not want to be targeted or stigmatised by programs that were designed especially for them. They specifically asked us not to refer to them as refugees. Even identification through reference to a list of high-conflict countries was not considered appropriate. Thus, as the program unfolded it took the form of a peer support system open to any first-year student who felt the need for assistance. This program, which is based on a cross-level, for-credit elective peer mentoring unit, began to operate at the University of Western Sydney (UWS) in 2012. It is now a permanent elective unit offered through the School of Education, but open to all undergraduate students. The structure of the program is described in greater detail in Chapter 2. Essentially it involves pairing first-year students with second or third-year students as Equity Buddies. Both members of these mentor-mentee pairs are enrolled in the for-credit unit and are supported through participation in tutorials and de-briefing groups. The latter are conducted by students who have previously completed the unit and have been outstanding as mentors.

The Equity Buddies program is deliberately inclusive, offering a wide range of supports to all newcomers to the university. However, from the beginning, its design was constructed on the basis of an extensive review of the literature on the needs of refugee background students. It is not the case that every student who enrols in Equity Buddies will need all these supports, but the system does provide them in any case. Research on the experiences of students enrolled in Equity Buddies was conducted in parallel with the development and implementation of the program. This research is described in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. What our research shows, among other things, is that our literature review on the needs of refugee background students did identify the problems faced by refugee background students, and that the Equity Buddies program was effective in meeting their needs. Furthermore, the
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program also met the needs of other LSES and ‘first-generation’ or first-in-family (FiF) students. A brief outline of this literature follows.

First, research studies suggest that refugee students are often not aware of the support services available to them (Stevenson, & Willott, 2007). Not surprisingly, this is also true for LSES students (Devlin, Kift & Nelson, 2012) and FiF students (Ishitani, 2003; Collier & Morgan, 2008). As Devlin, Kift & Nelson (2012) argued, explicit strategies need to be implemented to raise the visibility of student support services so that students become aware of them and know how to access them. Based on studies in UK and Australian universities, Janet Hannah found that refugee background students may even be unsure about their eligibility to use English language support services, or how to access sources of advice, information and guidance (Hannah, 1999, 2000). In addition, they are often unaware of existing counselling services, so that these remain underused by refugee groups (Earnest et al, 2010). They may have low self-esteem, lack confidence, and feel insecure, and are often unfamiliar with the systems, structures and language of the institution (Stevenson, & Willott, 2007). They need specific help to locate and navigate these unfamiliar systems (Morrice, 2009).

In addition to understanding the different systems and structures of the university, refugee background students also need to become familiar with the expectations of higher education study and the particular learning and teaching styles they will encounter (Earnest et al, 2010; James, Krause & Jennings, 2010; Joyce et al, 2010; Hannah, 2000; Nieto & Booth, 2010). When they enrol in a university, they are entering a new learning culture where they have major responsibilities for their own engagement and academic progress (James, Krause & Jennings, 2010; Nieto & Booth, 2010). Depending on their countries of origin, many will have been used to formal, didactic styles of pedagogy. For them the change involved in entering an Australian university will be substantial as they will be expected to master a more critical and reflexive style of learning (Earnest et al, 2010; Joyce et al, 2010).

There are also new styles of assessment, which include the teacher not reminding students about assessments and expecting them to be self-disciplined and self-motivated (Earnest et al, 2010), and involve academic writing and/or a higher level of oral communication (Earnest et al, 2010; Yang, 2010). Refugee background students may have little or no experience with a participatory style of learning and may have difficulty adjusting to the teaching and learning style and academic expectations (Hannah, 2000; Yang, 2010). They may also lack familiarity with the tacit rules, norms, expectations and traditions associated with a university (Morrice, 2007).

As Curry (2008) argued, this combination of requirements can be characterised in terms of the different forms of cultural capital generated and regulated by universities. These forms of capital include academic or subject-matter knowledge, generic academic skills such as scholarly writing, knowledge of institutional rules and resources, and tacit or informal knowledge. Tacit knowledge can be critically important for students; it is usually possessed by students who have been attending a university for some time, is passed along through peer contacts, and includes such things as unwritten understandings about how to get by, and what you really ‘need to take seriously’.
Refugee background students may express feelings of being overwhelmed with having to try and understand multiple aspects of the cultural and social context they have entered. In contrast, long-term residents tend to have an intuitive understanding of the pedagogical and social traditions common to Australian education systems and hence are better able to focus on their academic studies (Earnest et al, 2010). The need to develop generic academic skills, such as scholarly reading and writing, oral presentation, and skills involved in using the internet and computers for research have also been highlighted as a critical issue for refugee background students (Earnest et al, 2010).

Social support for refugee background students during their university study is also essential if they are to feel comfortable on campus and enjoy positive experiences of student life. Refugee background students comment that they have fewer support networks and experience difficulty socialising with other students and academic staff because of cultural and language barriers (Earnest et al, 2010; Joyce et al, 2010). They also express concern about having limited opportunities for interpersonal interaction with people outside of their community, so they do not develop the expected social etiquette and understanding of different social situations which can link them with resources outside of their community (Morrice, 2007). This situation is often exacerbated by the lack of a common space for socialising outside of classrooms (Bond et al, 2007).

For many refugee background students, their university experience and chances of success may be affected by stress, anxiety, health issues, and racism (Joyce et al, 2010). According to James, Krause & Jennings (2010) the monitoring of student subgroups who are ‘at risk’ of attrition or poor academic progress is a huge challenge for Australian universities, but it is essential, given the current targets for expansion and equity. Refugee background students are likely to be overlooked for targeted support because universities have not yet begun to recognise them as a subgroup.

As with refugee students entering high school, those entering universities may be exposed to prejudice and discrimination based on pervasive misconceptions about their social and cultural backgrounds (Brown, 2004; Marshall; 2010). Studies indicate that Middle Eastern and African students tend to experience higher overall discrimination than international students from other regions (Hanassab, 2006). In addition, refugee background students experience a lack of support from the beginning, feel a need for assistance in completing their university studies (Earnest et al, 2010), and feel that their teachers have limited knowledge about their lives and the pathways they have followed (Vickers & McCarthy, 2010; Bond et al, 2007). They also find that the teaching and learning styles of universities are quite different to those of high school or to other education institutions they have attended (Earnest et al, 2010).

As noted above, the design of the Equity Buddies program was developed at UWS following receipt of a grant from the Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT). At the outset, a small group of refugee background students were brought together to advise us on how to proceed. Their input and participation has been central to the success of the program. The design of Equity Buddies was also informed by our review of the literature on the needs of refugee background students. It is nevertheless, a deliberately inclusive program, offering a wide range of supports to any first-year student entering the University of Western Sydney.
It was initially offered on the Bankstown campus and its expansion to other UWS campuses is an ongoing part of its implementation. The next chapter describes the development and operation of the *Equity Buddies* program.
Chapter 2: The Equity Buddies program

The intention to create Equity Buddies can be traced back to conversations held in 2011 with a small group of refugee background students at UWS. They proposed that if a structure was created through which students could support each other in a sustained way, many of their problems would be resolved. They provided anecdotal accounts of their own experiences, in which chance encounters with more advanced students from similar backgrounds gave them the information or advice they needed. From this beginning, it was recognised that UWS itself needed to function as a community, creating new social connections in order to support the great diversity of students who attend the university.

In the next section of this chapter, a theoretical justification for the decision to establish Equity Buddies as a face-to-face learning community on campus is provided.

In recent years, universities have responded to increasing enrolment pressures, advances in technology and changes to teaching practices by increasing the emphasis on on-line learning, leading to the adoption of diverse formats of technology-based knowledge transmission. Student services support has also shifted away from face-to-face individualised student support services in favour of on-line support services and resources that are offered to students in the hope that they can, through self-help, acquire the requisite cultural, social and institutional capital necessary to become successful students. However, this move may not be as effective for all students as it cannot be assumed that on-line learning comes easily to all students nor that they have the spread of information-technology capabilities expected of them (Lorenzo, Oblinger, & Dziuban, 2007).

While much has been said about the effectiveness of online learning practices in the higher education setting (e.g. Krause, 2011), one must be cautious about asserting that they are effective for all. Diverse groups now make up a large part of the student body, and it cannot be assumed that on-line learning comes easily to all of them. For example, one large-scale Australian study found a ‘...lack of homogeneity in the incoming first-year student population with regards to technology and a potential 'digital divide' between students within a cohort of a single year level...’ (Kennedy et al. 2008, p. 17). Embracing the technologies and tools of the internet generation was by no means universal among the 2000 University of Melbourne students who participated in this study. Similar studies conducted in universities in the United States of America have come to similar conclusions; that today’s higher education student body is so diverse that a very broad spread of information-technology capabilities is to be expected (Lorenzo, Oblinger, & Dziuban, 2007).

Equity Buddies was developed to ensure that refugee background students, FiF students, LSES students and students from non-English speaking backgrounds would gain support that maximises their chance of success and supports their acculturation into university life during their first year at UWS. As the research results provided in Chapters 4 and 5 show, many students in these groups found the on-line learning environment challenging. For those with limited English proficiency, on-line advice about the conventions of scholarly writing was of little use. Moreover, the extensive role that technology plays in institutional processes such as enrolment and timetabling can provoke considerable anxiety. As the research results in
Chapter 5 indicate, many students found that one of the most useful forms of support they gained from their mentors involved side-by-side assistance on how to access and use the various on-line and computer-based technologies that play an intrinsic role in knowledge delivery and assessment, and access to library resources.

Theoretical underpinnings

Inspired by the work of Bernstein and various formulations that have followed his initial theorisation, the goal in constructing the Equity Buddies program has been to reframe the social relations of the university classroom so as to promote the interaction and participation of students with each other, contributing to their mutual understanding of each other and of the university context (Curry, 2008; Bernstein, 1971, 1990). The forms of cultural capital students need to acquire at the beginning of their university careers include acquiring subject-matter knowledge and understanding the academic expectations held for them, possessing the linguistic skills needed for proper scholarly reading and writing and developing the range of IT skills needed to navigate the on-line delivery of lectures, assessments, and Turnitin. Institutional capital includes the understanding of the university’s rules and regulations that all contribute to the management of student life in the university context (Curry, 2008). An additional and important aspect of cultural knowledge is the implicit or tacit knowledge students need to acquire in order to succeed at the university (Curry, 2008). This information relates to understanding informal institutional conventions, and its acquisition is dependent on peer contacts, particularly with older students who have had more experience within the university. It is the understanding and acquisition of these multiple forms of capital that enable students to successfully navigate the university environment on the way to obtaining a degree.

Reiterating what is stated above, there are four relatively distinct forms of cultural capital that underpin student success. The first is disciplinary knowledge, including an understanding of how it is structured and how a student might accumulate higher levels of such knowledge. The second refers to academic skills and knowledges which are partly generic but often nuanced in relation to specific disciplines, such as the ability to use and follow relevant conventions of scholarly writing. This includes the ability to understand and use a range of different conventions for citation and referencing. Facility with mathematics, statistics and technology also fall in this category. The third refers to institutional knowledges, including what the rules are, how to get an extension, how to choose a sequence of subjects that forms a ‘major’ and meets the requirements of the degree, how to upload assignments, what is plagiarism, and how to access services such as counselling, library support, and other support systems. Understanding what assignment really means may draw on disciplinary knowledge, but often there are also institutional conventions that define what is expected. The fourth form of cultural capital takes the form of tacit or informal knowledge. It has also been referred to as the hidden curriculum (Curry, 2008). It comprises knowledge about being a student that is not written down, and is unavailable on the web or in any official learning guide. This informal knowledge involves understanding what students need to do to pass a unit, whether students really ‘need’ to attend lectures, which readings are essential, and how to get by with the minimum amount of work. It may also include how to get around certain rules, and how to deal with particular staff members. This is kind of informal knowledge usually passed along between students.
In Bernstein’s work on the classification and framing of knowledge, he proposed that different kinds of knowledge can be rigidly separated from each other, or they can inter-relate more loosely. Where the contents of two subjects or disciplines are distinct, classification is strong. For Bernstein, classification refers to the degree of boundary maintenance between different bodies of knowledge; typically, boundary maintenance is strong in the physical sciences, for example. To take another example, classification is strong in most of the subjects delivered in a university degree in comparison with weaker levels of classification that might prevail at more junior levels in the school system. Bernstein’s typology also examines how teachers and students frame knowledge in various pedagogical settings. Teachers may frame the curriculum in ways that discourage or even prevent students from bringing material together across disciplinary boundaries. In addition, an important criterion in relation to framing is whether students may introduce their own everyday knowledge into the classroom (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006). The power relations between teachers and students can, therefore, be defined in terms of the extent to which the subject-matter content is constrained by strong boundaries, the degree to which teachers and students are able to rearticulate those boundaries, and the degree to which students’ everyday experience may be included as a legitimate source of knowledge.

Using this theoretical position as a starting point, the *Equity Buddies* program has been constructed as a unit of study in which the power relations between lecturers, students, and *Equity Buddies* facilitators are continually re-negotiated. Clear requirements are laid down in the learning guide as to what work needs to be done, how much work, and how it will be assessed. However, there is also space for students to interpret what this means in the context of the mentor-mentee relationships within which they are operating. It makes sense for second and third-year students to be invited to introduce their own everyday experiences of university life into the classroom and into their mentoring work, since their stories about how they overcame their initial difficulties provide essential information for the first-year students.

To summarise: *Equity Buddies* is a unit that attempts to help newcomers understand and acquire the multiple forms of knowledge they will need in order to succeed in the university context. These knowledges include both the formal and the generic academic knowledges, but also include institutional knowledge and the tacit or informal knowledge that is the provenance of the students themselves. In *Equity Buddies*, students have the power to articulate what matters, that is, what others doing the unit should know. For it is the refugee background students who know, better than the academic staff do, what will bewilder their peers or make them afraid. Likewise, based on their own backgrounds, LSES and NESB students posses a rich store of knowledge they can draw on as they engage in this peer mentoring program. As described below, information exchange flows in both directions in this unit. Lectures and tutorials help students understand how to participate in a mentoring relationship. Other lectures and on-line materials are used to deliver key information about university resources such as the library, and the counselling service. At the same time, the second and third year mentors and the *Equity Buddies* facilitators bring extensive information into the unit from their own experiences. The research outcomes in Chapter 5 indicate that the construction of this community of learners has worked very well for almost every young person who has participated in the program over the past two years.
Structure and delivery of the *Equity Buddies* program

*Equity Buddies* is delivered as an elective unit by the UWS School of Education, as part of the pathways to teaching sub-major/major in the Master of Teaching program. The project leaders specifically established a new unit within the school in order to provide a platform for *Equity Buddies*. Although most of the students enrolled in the program are in teacher preparation programs leading to primary or secondary teaching qualifications, students majoring in Psychology completing humanities majors in the Bachelor of Arts program also participate.

The first iteration of *Equity Buddies* was in the first semester of 2012, when 50 second and third year students committed themselves to one-to-one mentoring of 46 first-year students who had enrolled as volunteers. A second iteration was conducted in the second semester of 2012: this mainly catered for first-year students who had been given failing grades in their first semester. In 2013, a third iteration was conducted and this time the unit enrolled both the first-year students (as mentees) and 2nd and 3rd year students (as mentors), with a total enrolment of 152 students. The model implemented in this third iteration was found to be the most successful, so the following description of *Equity Buddies* is based on this approach. As noted below, this model now provides the basis for the ongoing implementation of Equity Buddies at UWS into the future.

Partner institutions also provided critical feedback during project meetings on the development, implementation and revisions of *Equity Buddies* and the for-credit unit, *Experiential Learning in Communities*.

The *Equity Buddies* curriculum

The *Equity Buddies* curriculum aims to bring students together to form learning partnerships through which they learn from each other, with a focus on acquiring the multiple knowledges required to succeed and to enjoy university life. Mentors meet with their mentees for two to three hours each week, engaging in mutually-negotiated activities that are sometimes social and sometimes academic. Presentations delivered by academic staff cover the ethics and practice of mentoring, academic literacy, and information about UWS resources such as the library and student counselling. Students attend three one-hour lectures and a one-hour tutorial each week for nine weeks. In addition, they attend debriefing groups led by student facilitators for one hour per week over eight weeks, and are required to complete 40 hours of work which is composed of mentoring or being a mentee, completing their log books, preparing materials for their mentoring sessions and responding to readings. Through weekly writing in their log books, students provide the teaching staff with a diary of the activities they have completed. For the student, the consistent process of recording what is going on and reflecting on it provides a basis for codifying their own understandings of what is involved in doing well and benefiting from the university experience.
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**Equity Buddies students**

The participants in *Equity Buddies* include mentors (second and third year students) and mentees (first-year students). Both groups gain course credit for their participation in this unit. In earlier iterations of *Equity Buddies*, only the second and third year mentors were enrolled. Unfortunately, there were cases where the first-year students did not sustain their commitment to the mentoring relationship beyond the first three of four weeks of the semester. As these more confident or time poor first-years drifted away, mentors often faced difficulties in completing the unit requirements as they did not have a mentee with whom to work.

A number of factors contribute to decisions about the formation of mentor-mentee pairs. Native English speakers may be paired with students whose English proficiency is limited. Alternatively, some students prefer to have a mentor who speaks their own language, who can provide an explanation of some of the more exotic institutional practices they are encountering. Where possible, the academic staff teaching the unit encourages students to pair up across ethnic divides, in order to support increased cross-cultural understanding among groups that often remain sequestered on campus.

There are many different ways that students might pair up and each of them has different advantages. One way that students balance these multiple concerns is through a mix and match process that can take place within the debriefing groups described below. Students complete a survey in the first lecture and are individually allocated to tutorials in order to create a balanced number of mentees and mentors in each tutorial.

**Equity Buddies facilitators and de-briefing groups**

A universal message from the practical and scholarly literature on mentoring is that steps must be taken to support mentors and ensure that they are not exposed to demands that are beyond their capabilities (see for example, Department of Education and Training, NSW, 2005; Norman & Feiman-Nemser, 2005). An important and effective way to achieve this involves holding weekly de-briefing meetings, led by facilitators. In the *Equity Buddies* program, the first facilitators were the refugee background students who had been our initial advisors. In the second and third iterations of *Equity Buddies*, additional facilitators were recruited by inviting the most effective mentors who had completed the unit to take up this role. A continuing feature of *Equity Buddies* is that many of the facilitators are still refugee background students. They have been given positions of leadership in guiding the learning and relational nexus between mentees and mentors in the unit.

A second important function of the facilitators is that they act as mediators between the academic staff and the students. The position of facilitators in relation to mentors and mentees is illustrated in Figure 1.1. The facilitators guide the mentors in mastering the demands of the unit such as keeping log-books of weekly interaction with their mentees, applying the readings to the everyday experience of mentors and mentees, troubleshooting problems as they arise, and ensuring that students take their work seriously. They also have the responsibility of keeping the academic staff up to date with any problems or difficulties students were having that required the input of the teaching staff. In 2012 and 2013, the
facilitators were paid as UWS employees, drawing on project funds. In carrying out their leadership roles the facilitators themselves develop considerable cultural and social capital, as discussed in Chapter 4.

Sustainability and cost

Initially, Equity Buddies needed substantial fiscal support, in part to cover the cost of employing a project manager while the initial model was being pilot-tested, and in part to cover the costs of the formative evaluation research reported in Chapters 3 and 4. This research continued over two years and it has allowed the identification of what works, and settle on a well-functioning model.

Since Equity Buddies is a for-credit unit, students are motivated to participate and do not need to be paid for their services. This arguably makes Equity Buddies more cost effective and sustainable than some other peer support programs, which do provide small payments to students. These constraints appear to limit the size and reach of programs such as Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) which, in some universities, pays the leaders during their training and also pays them to deliver PASS sessions. An alternative is to ask students to carry out mentoring work as volunteers. However, where the goal is to engage LSES, FiF and refugee background students in this work, this policy is not appropriate as these students often need to work to support themselves.

The standard policy of Equity Buddies is to pay facilitators for their participation. Those facilitators who are not paid are those who can gain course credit through their enrolment in service learning units, or who are participating in order to fulfil the Field Experience requirements of the UWS Social Work degree. A very small number of facilitators are needed to support the Equity Buddies program; typically a facilitator spends only one hour per week to support six or seven mentors or mentees. At project completion, the project
leaders estimated that *Equity Buddies* could be sustained provided that UWS advanced a payment of $5000 per annum. The University has agreed to do this, and as a result, *Equity Buddies* has now become an established and on-going program within UWS.

*Equity Buddies* functions as a for-credit cross-level student mentoring program delivered by the UWS School of Education, but open to students across all schools within the University. Plans have been made to extend the program from the Bankstown campus to the Penrith campus. Extension to other campuses will depend on the endorsement of *Equity Buddies* as a unit contributing toward course completion by schools other than the School of Education. The research we have conducted indicates that *Equity Buddies* is an effective program for both the mentors and the mentees, with both groups gaining social and cultural capital through their participation. This research is presented in the next two chapters.
Chapter 3: Studying the program

This chapter provides a concise account of the information gathering processes used to evaluate the program. The data gathered were also used in a formative sense to enable the project leaders to refine and develop the Equity Buddies approach. It also formed part of the dissemination process for the project with the internal reference group and the basis of discussions with both partner universities.

Ethics approval

The project received ethics approval from the University of Western Sydney Ethics Committee early in 2012, by approving our application submitted through NEAF. Ref HREC-9460.

Data for the project were gathered from four main sources:

a) individual interviews with facilitators in 2012 and 2013
b) small group interviews with mentors in 2012
c) surveys completed by mentors (2012 & 2013) and by mentees (2013)
d) analysis of reflective essays submitted by participating mentors in 2012.

The use of student essays as a source of data was an innovative but potentially sensitive activity. There was a possibility that students’ responses as recorded in their essays might have been unduly influenced, or there may have been a fear among students that if they did not consent to submit their essays for inclusion in the research that this might influence the grades awarded to them. These issues were resolved by gaining consent from the students after their essays had been graded. Where students submitted a consent form before their work was graded these forms were kept in a sealed envelope that was not available to the teaching staff until after all grades had been submitted.

Design of the study

The purpose of the research was to document the activities associated with the implementation of Equity Buddies and to obtain reliable and comprehensive information about the experiences of the mentors, mentees and facilitators who participated in the first year and the second year of the program (2012 and 2013). Some of these experiences are able to be quantified and measured through instruments such as surveys. However, the process of quantification requires that predictions be made about the range of possible experiences. As a result, experiences or activities that could not easily be predicted would have been excluded.

Another possible approach would be to create narratives that describe the experiences of some of the individuals who participated. This form of data collection would have placed a strong emphasis on individuals and would have drawn attention away from the collective experiences of Equity Buddies as a program that focused on community building. This
approach might also have revealed personal details of students that would make it difficult to ensure the anonymity of participants.

Therefore, the approach adopted by the team leaders was to document the collective experiences of Equity Buddies participants using four complimentary methods:

a) semi-structured interviews with mentors, mentees and facilitators
b) analysis of students’ reflective journals that had been submitted to the project leaders after they had been graded (these journals were from the 2012 mentors)
c) surveys of Equity Buddies participants (2012 & 2013) that provided standardised answers in Likert-scale form in relation to student perceptions of the program
d) open-ended questions included in the survey which provided students with the opportunity to write about their experiences and opinions.

Analysis of the reflective journals was a labour-intensive process and was only carried out in 2012. This was an important exercise as it indicated what changes should be made to the Equity Buddies program, as well as leading to amendments to the survey. The numbers of mentors and mentees that consented and participated in surveys and interviews is indicated in Table 3.1 below.

**Table 3.1 - Numbers of mentors and mentees participating in surveys and interviews**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number enrolled</th>
<th>Responses to survey</th>
<th>Number interviewed</th>
<th>Reflective essays analysed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>50 total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentors</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>152</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentors</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentees</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, the facilitators were interviewed by an independent researcher in 2012 and again in 2013. In 2012, four facilitators were interviewed. In 2013, all seven facilitators were interviewed.

Data from these four sources have been analysed and presented in the next chapter. The combination of extended written texts available in the reflective essays with statistical information from the end of semester surveys have allowed the authors to present a comprehensive portrait of the functioning of the Equity Buddies program. The statistical information indicates the extent to which any generalisation applies to all participants in the program. A more nuanced description of what the program has achieved is created by using typical citations from the student essays and interviews.
Chapter 4: Meeting student needs through creating a learning community

As already indicated in Chapter 1, the structure and curriculum of the Equity Buddies program was designed to help students with refugee backgrounds, FiF students, or LSES students, to achieve effective transitions into university life. Chapter 2 provided an overview of the literature on the first-year experience as well as reviewing the literature on refugee background students entering universities. In this chapter we provide an account of initial university experiences through the voices of the first-year students who enrolled in Equity Buddies. This is complemented by the reflections provided by their mentors. Consistent with the literature reviewed earlier, it is not surprising to find that the students we worked with found their first-year experiences challenging. In this context, Equity Buddies functioned as a mentoring program, creating forms of social connection in order to maximise the likelihood that participating students would complete first year and make a successful transition into university life.

The results achieved through the Equity Buddies program are divided across two chapters. The current chapter describes how the academic and social needs of first-year students in the program were met through the creation of a community of support. The achievements of this mentoring community are presented in a more detailed way in Chapter 5, through a focus on the acquisition of the various forms of knowledge capital that students need to possess if they are to succeed in their university experience.

Surviving the first semester

For many first-year students, starting out at university is an overwhelming experience. Many first-years expressed feelings of loneliness, lack of confidence, and uncertainty about what is expected of them. In their reflective essays, two mentors wrote about their first year mentees as follows:

Naima said she had difficulties in the transition to university. She said the culture of university and the study style are very new to her, and she does not have any friends and social connections... If she cannot understand about something and is unsure of what to do she has no one to turn to, to ask.

Equity Buddies puts students in contact with a mentor who they ask for help ... It helps them realise that they are not alone.

Mentees and mentors alike appreciated the opportunity to form supportive friendships. Two student responses to the open-ended questions that formed part of the end-of-semester survey illustrate this:

Question: In what ways do you think the EB (Equity Buddies) program helps first-year students?

Mentor: I thoroughly enjoyed my experience in the EB program. I enjoy helping people and this program allowed me not only to help my mentee but also other first year students... I have enjoyed my participation and have learned a great deal.
Defying the odds: promoting success for refugee background and NESB first-year students through peer support

Mentee: This program not only helps with academic work but also with socialising. Having a mentor not only helped me with the assessment but also enhanced my self-esteem and self-confidence.

Friendships between first and second year students are often deeply appreciated. As one first-year student commented, “…It helps with the small things that people are afraid to ask help for…” Another mentee told her mentor that “if it was not for your motivation, help and support I would not have continued at university as you became a friend and helped me through all the hard times I have faced over the weeks.”

Student responses to the end of semester survey indicated that first year students do need help, that their mentors were able to provide help, and that student friendship networks were strengthened through participation in the program (See Table 4-1).

Table 4-1: First-year student needs and support provided

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions [with some different wording for mentees]</th>
<th>% who agree or strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mentors(^a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most 1(^{st}) year students need face-to-face help when they first arrive at UWS</td>
<td>88.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many 1(^{st}) year students find the first weeks of Uni overwhelming [I found the first few weeks overwhelming]</td>
<td>83.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I now have more friends at UWS</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was able to identify [My EB mentor was able to identify] the support my 1(^{st}) year student needed [I needed]</td>
<td>86.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In my opinion the EB program is helpful for 1(^{st}) year students</td>
<td>81.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

End-of-semester 2013 survey, responses on a five-point Likert scale. (a) Mentors N= 60, (b) Mentees N= 44

Although the university does provide on-line resources designed to assist students, exactly where these resources are and how to access them seems to be opaque to many. Most students who were enrolled in Equity Buddies were quite unaware of many of the on-line support services. It was through the Equity Buddies tutorials that they learned about these services, and this was true for both mentors and mentees. In response to the end-of-semester survey question “I now know more about the resources UWS offers”, 78% of the mentors and 85% of first year student mentees agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

An additional problem with on-line resources is that some students do not possess literacy levels needed to use them. A refugee background first year student wrote that she was “overwhelmed by the UniStep Academic Skills Guide, realizing “…that there was no possible chance for someone like myself (sic) to even make it passed the first assignment…” This
same student went on to say:

The vocabulary used in the guide was too complex for me which also was the core reason I could not comprehend and make use of the guide as a whole.

In the absence of face-to-face student services, resources designed to help students develop appropriate scholarly writing skills have been converted to on-line resources. For students with limited English literacy, this is not always helpful.

Creating a learning community

In constructing the Equity Buddies program the goal was to promote the interaction and participation of students with each other, contributing to their mutual understanding of each other and of the university context. Through their participation in Equity Buddies many students seemed to discover for the first time that if you use relationships as a resource you can solve problems, do better work, and feel more confident. In his reflective essay, one student mentor wrote ‘... This gave me a completely different idea about what the university experience can be. It’s not just about results’. This was not an isolated comment. Many students were surprised that ‘community building’ and ‘networking’ could be so powerful.

Survey results indicate that, in 2013, three out of four of the mentors and mentees noted that following their participation in Equity Buddies, they now have more friends at UWS. In 2012, when only the mentors were surveyed, 85% of them also indicated that they now have more friends at the university.

The structure of Equity Buddies consists of a series of mutually reinforcing parts, each of which contributes to the operation of the other parts. Like all such arrangements, the functioning of each piece supports the operations of the other pieces; a chain of connection is created and it is the overall success of these interrelationships that account for the strength of the program.

This structure was illustrated in Figure 1.1 in Chapter 1. These different components of the structure consist of the teaching staff who provided guidance, access to resources and problem solving; the facilitators who linked the teaching staff with the concerns of the mentors and mentees and who troubleshot problems arising from the reports of students in their debriefing groups. Not least are the mentors and mentees themselves whose experiences of troubles, insecurities, need for information, lessening motivation, and or suggestions for handling the relational aspects of the mentoring relationships all fed into the dynamics of the unit. Together these pieces contributed to the community of learning that Equity Buddies encouraged. The individual dynamics of each piece provided specific forms of relational learning in addition to contributing to the technical and academic knowledge of mentees and often, mentors as well.

Each segment of the chain is reinforced by a review group which operates to bring people together for discussion and the sharing of ideas and experiences. From such interaction each group in the chain learns from other members of their group, gains a sense of trust and support and becomes more effective in fulfilling their specific tasks. For many students the debriefing groups were “the highlight of the unit.” For example, the teaching staff provide tutorials in which basic information of use to both mentors and mentees is provided. This
may include a review of academic literacy, or lectures by counsellors or librarians explaining the resources they control. Such information is often unknown to students whether first-years or more advanced in their studies.

Facilitators hold weekly, separate debriefing groups for mentees and mentors. In these groups problems, experiences, and knowledge are shared and the facilitators guide the mentors in how to improve their connection to their mentees. For the mentees in their debriefing groups, the facilitators help solve problems they may have with their mentors not really helping or not being able to follow the assistance provided by the mentors. Facilitators act as mediators between the mentors and their mentees, and between the mentors/mentees and the teaching staff. Each week the facilitators have a meeting with the teaching staff to provide feedback on the progress of the unit and the reaction of students to their assignments, problems they may face with their mentors/mentees, and generally troubleshooting for other problems that may arise.

The mentors and mentees met at least once a week for about two hours. In these sessions specific academic help was provided by the mentor in such tasks as academic writing; reading the work of mentees and making suggestions for improvement; providing help with organising mentee’s time schedule, or clarifying aspects of the learning guides of different units. Additionally, it was anticipated that mentors and mentees, by working together, move from an instrumental connection to one of friendship and regard.

As will be explained, the acquisition of knowledge in Equity Buddies was relational; that is the mentors often found that the information or assistance they gave their mentees encouraged the improvement of their own work in similar areas. Mentors indicated for example, that in helping their mentee with time management or writing, their own skills in these areas also improved. While mentees improved their academic performance through the coaching of the mentors, the mentors felt an “increase in self-confidence in my own abilities to help others.”

In helping mentees, some mentors analysed their own literacy level and learned about their own writing and reading skills. Some mentors learned that they needed to pay more attention to punctuation, spelling, grammar, sentence and paragraph structure. They learned the importance of drafting and re-drafting, as well as proof reading their assignments. They learned that attending workshops on writing could also be useful and that “doing the weekly readings also helps you get the best out of a subject”. The facilitators also affirmed that the mentors’ skills improved through having to help their mentees.

Their research was really better now because they had to find resources for their first year students. So their research skills really improved. Their writing skills improved.

Mentors testified that they had improved their own grammar and writing skills, learned how to proof read, reference and manage their own time better through having to do this with or for their mentees. One mentor mentioned how receiving the positive feedback about the improvement in the mentee’s results reinforced her own use of proof reading. Another mentor said, “Professionally, I have improved as when I constructed a timetable for her I also completed one for myself, helping her with constructing essays refined my
understanding allowing it to be instilled within me.”

One consequence of the mentor/mentee connection was the building of friendships and the enhanced sense of belonging in the university. As one student said, “The mentoring sessions became a relationship and not just a task what (sic) I have to complete for this unit . . . because it was a relationship where empathy can be felt. . . .” Mentors became a source of support when their mentees felt like dropping out of university. They gave emotional support and helped their mentees work through options to solve problems. Some mentors also introduced their mentees to their own friends and to other social groups on campus.

Cross-cultural interaction and learning

All students who participated in Equity Buddies interacted with and learned from people whose cultural backgrounds were different to their own. This was not merely a process that broadened the perspectives of Anglo-Australians; students from immigrant families reported similar learning, and a growth in respect for others. For example, a Christian Iraqi decided – after making friends with a Lebanese Muslim – that Islam was not always a ‘punitive and narrow’ religion. A Somali immigrant sympathised with and supported a newly arrived Vietnamese international student who was still struggling with English.

Students were conscious that in the unit “it was important to understand each other and build an environment where everyone is welcomed and treated equally regardless of their race or colour of skin.” Interacting with students from different cultures encouraged students to question the stereotypes they had about people of different religions. One student affirmed that “Being a part of the ‘community,’ Equity Buddies has given me the opportunity to work with people that I possibly would never have made contact with. . . . Prior to moving to Sydney in 2010, I had never seen a Muslim before let alone built a friendship with one.” Another student commented, “It (Equity Buddies) has allowed me to make new friends with students whom I would not have normally spoken to, largely due to different cultural beliefs and backgrounds.”

Another outcome of cross-cultural interaction was to encourage students to be more open-minded and gain different perspectives on life. One student said, “I felt that I have been shown a different perspective on university life and gained some knowledge of another culture.”

Equity Buddies enabled students to participate in a genuine learning community, and for those who plan on becoming teachers, it gave them a model of what a learning community could be like.

Participating in the Equity Buddies network and mentoring my partner/coach has changed the image of how I want to be perceived as a teacher. For example, the reading about knowledge capital by Wenger assisted me in becoming aware that mentors, tutors, and teachers are not just what they seem to be, they are a part of the classroom/learning community. Thus, they are not there to just teach students course work, but also to teach students about life.

With the creation of a learning community among its participants Equity Buddies enabled everyone involved to experience what a true university community could be like. For the Defying the odds: promoting success for refugee background and NESB first-year students through peer support
individual mentors and mentees their participation enabled them to feel more of a part of the university and to value the friendships and social possibilities that were possible because of the learning community *Equity Buddies* established.
Chapter 5: Acquiring relevant forms of knowledge capital

Many first-year students feel overwhelmed by the new and unfamiliar tasks that the university requires of them. Research that exposes the substantial challenges faced by first-year students who are from families of lower socio-economic status, who are refugee-background students, or who came from non-English Speaking backgrounds has already been reviewed in Chapters 1 and 2. Bourdieu’s (1979, 1993) classic theorisation proposed that various forms of specialised knowledge capital constitute the explanatory link between socio-economic background and educational outcomes. Extending from this framework, Curry (2008) has distinguished three broad forms of knowledge capital which are important in the higher education context: these include the academic, institutional and informal knowledges that are intrinsic components of the university experience.

This conceptual framework has already been discussed in chapter 2. It was noted that academic knowledge, as a broad category, includes both disciplinary knowledge, as well as generic scholarly abilities. Since the Equity Buddies program is an open elective at UWS, students from a wide range of discipline-specific courses enrol in it. As a result, Equity Buddies does not attempt to provide mentoring for first year students related to the specific disciplines they are studying. Rather the focus is on generic academic abilities such as the ability to use and follow conventions of scholarly writing including essay structure, vocabulary, referencing, understanding the learning guides and knowing how to complete assessments.

Mentors are also encouraged to help first year students acquire the institutional knowledge they need to deal with university rules and regulations, to access university resources such as the library and the counselling service and use them effectively, and to master online information systems related to blended learning delivery, plagiarism management through Turnitin, and the submission of assignments. Chapter 4 provided an extended description of the ways in which the mentoring process created lasting friendships among students, allowing them to share various forms of informal or tacit knowledge, thereby helping them to manage the academic demands of the university. The three forms of knowledge capital - academic, institutional, and informal - often overlap and are interdependent. Taken together they provide keys to success at university. Enhancing first year students’ possession of these forms of knowledge was a primary focus of the Equity Buddies program.

Academic knowledge capital

If we look first at the experience of the mentees, it is no surprise that most of them have major concerns around mastering the academic demands of university life. The end of semester survey conducted in 2013 indicated that a substantial majority of the first-year students surveyed felt that they needed help with academic writing (see Table 5.1). The mentors’ responses almost exactly matched those of the mentees: in response to the statement “many first-year students need help to improve their scholarly writing” 86.8% of the first-year students and 88.0% of the mentors either agreed or strongly agreed. Writing
assignments proved to be a big problem for first year mentees. Many mentors provided intensive support in guiding the improvement in the writing capabilities of their mentees. As one mentor explained:

I asked my student to email me a piece of her work so that I could analyse her literacy level. I analysed the work. . . (then) went through my analysis of my student’s work with her and helped her to be able to analyse her work herself. I read through her assignments and checked her sentence and paragraph structure. I edited her punctuation and grammar, and provided her with useful feedback. Gave her some tips, such as reading her work aloud, so that way she can see if it all makes sense.

Many mentors read over their mentees’ assignments and corrected their grammar, as well as provided tips such as suggesting that mentees read their assignments out loud.

By doing this little exercise it has helped her to read through her work carefully when proof reading it. She actually never proofread before, so this was a first for her. She learnt how important proof reading is, to all assessments. By gradually picking out more errors every time we meet, I have seen her bring a copy of an assessment a couple of days before the due date with all markings and errors that she has fixed up.

Doing this together with their mentee helped the mentees to develop their own proofreading skills. Mentors also helped their mentees understand what it meant to write objectively and not to be subjective in their arguments.

Table 5.1: Academic knowledges – needs and outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Mentors(a)</th>
<th>Mentees(b)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Neither</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strong D</td>
<td>Strong A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many first-year students need help to improve their scholarly writing</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most first-year students understand what their assignments mean and what</td>
<td>55.2</td>
<td>29.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they are expected to produce</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My own understanding of how to do academic writing has improved</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My own understanding of how to do referencing has improved</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

End-of-semester 2013 survey, responses on a five-point Likert scale, with responses “Disagree/Strongly disagree” and “Agree/Strongly agree” aggregated and expressed as percentages. (a) Mentors N= 60, (b) Mentees N= 44

Evidence that the mentoring process was successful in helping first-year students to improve their writing comes from responses to the survey item “My own understanding of how to do academic writing has improved” where 81.6% of the mentees either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement (see Table 5.1). An additional benefit of cross-level mentoring is that the mentors also improve; 70.7% of the mentors either agreed or strongly agreed that their understanding of academic writing had improved (see Table 5.1)
Referencing also acts as a source of considerable mystery for many students. First-year students consistently lose marks because of poor referencing; most have never learned it in high school. They ask “So what does it mean by referencing?” While the university does provide on-line resources that explain the conventions of referencing, many first-year students find it difficult to use these resources. In the Equity Buddies program, tutorial time is allocated to referencing; it is discussed in the debriefing groups, and mentors are asked to work with their mentees, making sure that they understand what is involved. In many cases it was necessary for mentors to sit with their mentees and go step by step through issues around referencing.

This diligence evidently pays off: by the end of first semester in 2013, 73.7% of the first-year mentees agreed or strongly agreed that their own understanding of how to do referencing had improved. As a further indication of the ways in which Equity Buddies benefits both mentors and mentees, over half the mentors also noted that their understanding of referencing had improved (see Table 5.1).

Understanding the essay question is a major challenge, as is “writing coherently”. One mentor describes the process she worked through with her mentee.

Through my assistance, we were able to deconstruct a practice essay question, to find the key words, and I guided her through the structure and the type of writing required in an essay. This three hour lesson was both a relief for us both as she was finally confident with her understanding of an essay structure.

Other mentors reported that first-year students had problems with analysing questions and thinking critically about the issues. One first year student wrote:

Like I can write about it but I don’t understand the question. What is the question asking me? I don’t know -- what does it mean critically evaluate?

Mentors found they had to help their mentees construct an argument, stay on topic, develop good flow in the argument and use evidence. They found that first-year students were unsure about how to write in different academic genres, such as essays and reports. They were also unclear about what the university standard of writing entailed. Mentors introduced their mentees to the assignment guidelines and marking criteria, and showed them how to use these to improve their writing approach. One mentor helped her mentee by taking her through the process of planning and drafting an essay.

... [this] led me into the drafting process where I elaborated on the ideas I created from the brainstorm period. This drafting process alone was a very effective strategy for me as I had all the steps in front of me a potential. This helped me decrease my anxiety and stress levels immensely.

Mentees found receiving feedback on their drafts to be extremely helpful. It also enabled them to more effectively “…engage in discourse and ask questions and enhance their drafts”. First-year student’s responses to the survey indicate that most of them are not at all confident that they “understand what their assignments mean and what they are expected
to produce”. Only one in five of the first years agreed or strongly agreed with this statement and two in five disagreed or strongly disagreed (See Table 5.1). Over half the mentors were of the opinion that first-year students do not understand what their assignments mean.

Mentors generally felt that the problem was not with having ideas but with first-year students not knowing how to express them “clearly and coherently when writing academically”. Many mentors found that the mentees did not know how to improve their writing. Occasionally migrant, refugee or international students also encountered problems when assignment questions required an implicit knowledge of Australian life.

Mentors were also particularly helpful when mentees were overwhelmed by being required to do something completely outside their previous experience. Mentors were able to help by providing a structured approach and practical and emotional support, as demonstrated in the following example.

The first part of her assignment also required her to present her writing task to her tutorial class, with the assistance of two power point slides. Considering she hasn’t presented in front of a group of students, previously, she seemed overwhelmed at the idea of having to do so. [I told her that] that it isn’t as bad as it seems, and told her to practice in front me, in which I provided feedback, such as increase eye contact, don’t look down too much at your papers, don’t read/ talk too fast and try not to move around a lot. ... A few days later, I received a phone call from my very excited first-year claiming she had received 7.5/10 for her presentation, and thanked me. This, in turn made me feel nearly as happy as her, because she had also stated ‘I couldn’t have done it without you’. Hence, allowing me to appreciate my role as a mentor, as well as a friend.

As in the case above, there is some evidence that the mentoring process not only provided support but also resulted in improved grades.

Institutional knowledge capital

In their reflective essays, Equity Buddies mentors explained how many of the first-year students feel overwhelmed by the amount of information they are confronted with when they start at university. This is compounded by not knowing who to ask for help. They are afraid to ask fellow students because they think that they are disturbing them, or that other students “simply do not want to help”. Lack of confidence in English also inhibits a new student’s ability to ask for help. Mentors and mentees both reported on the difficulty of making new friends at university. By sharing with others, especially their mentors, mentees learnt that their experience was not unique and this helped to decrease their sense of being isolated.

Two first-year students commented on the difference between university and high school.

At school at least there are teachers to ask or explain to you what to do, here it is all on your own, and I didn’t know that, yeah, it was very hard.

.. and it is a bit harder because we don’t have the support that we had from teachers. I’ve moved straight from high school to uni and it’s so much different, so
like teachers approach to everything and how they distance themselves, they are very kind of distant from the kids.

In contrast with high school, the university is a large and impersonal institution. Students need to become familiar with many rules and practices, and this often presents difficulties as their responses to the end of semester survey show (see table 5.2).

Table 5.2: University resources and services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Mentors(^{(a)})</th>
<th>Mentees(^{(b)})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree Strong D</td>
<td>Neither</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The paper based information UWS provides meets first-year students needs</td>
<td>22.4 34.5 43.1</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-line resources students such as vUWS are easy for 1st years to access</td>
<td>22.4 29.3 48.2</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-year students generally find Turn-it-in easy to understand and use</td>
<td>48.2 25.9 25.9</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most first year students find it easy to use library resources</td>
<td>53.5 27.6 19.0</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

End-of-semester 2013 survey, responses on a five-point Likert scale, with responses “Disagree/Strongly disagree” and “Agree/Strongly agree” aggregated and expressed as percentages. (a) Mentors N= 60, (b) Mentees N= 44

Many dimensions of university life were problematic for first year students. Mentors reported that their mentees often “lacked the confidence” to approach lecturers and tutors for advice and feedback. Many mentees were unsure what resources such as counselling were available for them and how to access these resources. Most first year students had no idea how to ask for an extension. A common problem among first years is the difficulty of asking questions or speaking out in tutorials. Nevertheless, first year students need to learn to be independent – e.g., to check for important dates such as when assessments were due, read their Learning Guides and follow the written instructions in the Guide, and know how to use computers.

As student responses to the end of semester survey show, only 54.1% of first year students considered that the paper-based information provided by the university met their needs. Their mentors were even less impressed, with only 43.1% of them considering that the paper-based material was adequate. One in ten of the first-year students and two in ten of the mentors strongly disagreed that the paper-based materials met their needs. By the end of the semester 73.7% of the first-year students reported that they found on-line resources easy to use. Interestingly, their mentors were less positive: fewer than half of them thought first years used these resources easily. The discrepancy between mentors and mentees may reflect the possibility that first years have become more confident by the end of semester; while their mentors remained aware of what a struggle it had been.

Many mentees did not know how to use the library and had no idea of the resources available in the library. Even by the end of the first semester only 50% of first years agreed that it was easy to use library resources. When they entered the university, some students
stated that they had never borrowed a book before. As explained by one mentor, speaking at the about his mentee,

She has never borrowed a book from the library and does not realise the wonderful resources it holds. I showed her how to research for books, journal articles, and newspapers and she was surprised at how useful the library is to her academic life.

Some mature age students returning to study also had difficulty using computers, accessing the library, and using library resources. Again in these cases their mentors had to work side by side with them to take them through the steps. In some cases, mentors reported that their mentees had “difficulty navigating and understanding the vUWS site” and did not know how to take on line quizzes or how to access online lectures. Some mentees also needed to be shown “how to submit assignments and how to check their work using Turnitin.” There is once again a discrepancy between the end-of-semester responses of mentors and mentees, with three quarters of the mentees saying that they found Turnitin easy to use, and only one quarter of the mentors agreeing with them. It would appear that by the end of first semester mentees had picked up the relevant techniques, but there mentors knew that this has not been an easy path.

Informal knowledge capital

Acquiring informal knowledge about how the university runs and how to succeed as a student occurs over time, and is usually the product of students passing on such knowledge to other students. Some of this informal knowledge could be described as “tacit knowledge”. Students will share with each other tips that they have gleaned, and cannot share with academic staff. For example, students who have completed particular courses will work out exactly how much work you really must do if you are under pressure (for example, due to family circumstances) and need to settle on a mere pass. They can advise other students on which readings you “need” to do, and which readings could be skipped.

A more explicit example of informal knowledge capital is time management. Both the survey and the interview data indicated that the more experienced mentors realised that a major problem with their mentees was planning and organising their academic schedules. Particularly relevant was the issue of balancing the demands of student life with other responsibilities the students may have. Time management became a noted topic of discussion among the mentors and their mentees. In some instances the facilitators provided the mentors with specific information related to this topic. It was quickly identified as being very important. Students who were also mothers and wives shared information with each other about childcare, or about ways of protecting their own time by working in the library at night.

One mentor described his mentee in the following way:

She has found it difficult to balance between her duty as a mother and her studies. Her time is disordered, as she finds the skill of time organisation very difficult, trying to keep up with all her priorities; studying, cooking, cleaning and caring for her children all at the same time. . . .The way I assisted her was that last week I helped her create a table for her study for all her subjects, including time for her children,
husband and free time. This in turn surprised her, as she could now not only be able to strive high (sic), but also have plenty of time for family.

Mentors encouraged their mentees to “keep a calendar and mark when assessments were due,” and plan ahead and “don’t leave doing your assignments until the last minute.” Mentees were encouraged to “plan their activities and leave time to do their work.”

Mentors found that at the beginning of the first year most students lacked confidence to approach lecturers and tutors for advice and feedback.

Some first year students tend to keep their struggles to themselves as they are too scared to approach their teacher as they feel like their questions might sound silly.

Yeah, and you know how some students they get embarrassed you know to ask a question in a class because they think you know they are going to be judged as being stupid or you know, like what’s wrong with you? That’s a silly question, so they are just going to put their question like in a reserve you know, oh no we are not going to ask, let someone else ask. Yeah, and no one asks the question and no one knows the answer.

Yes because as I said, it was like a bridge between the staff and the students, you know. Sometimes like we get hesitate (sic) to email our lecturer or you know our tutor because we feel that you know, they are going to judge us, they are going to mark our assessment you know.

They were able to encourage their mentees to email and/or talk to their tutors and advise them on appropriate ways to approach academic staff. When the mentees did this, not only did they receive valuable advice or feedback, their confidence also increased. This also gave them more confidence to ask questions and to seek out information in the future. This improved the mentees’ feeling of wellbeing at university as they now knew “who to ask and who to trust” to gain valuable information. In one case, a mentor modelled approaching a librarian for help for her mentee. As the librarian responded positively, this also enabled the mentee to have confidence in asking librarians and other staff for help.

Acquiring an understanding of the informal and unwritten rules of university life is critical for success. Yet it is only through direct relationships with other students that these understandings can be achieved. Perhaps one of the most compelling reasons to institute a system of cross-level mentoring for credit is that it makes it possible for first year students to form relationships with more advanced students and benefit from the support they can offer.
Chapter 6: A synopsis of reports from partner institutions - CSU and QUT

This chapter will provide a synopsis of the two studies conducted by the partner institutions in this project, Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and Charles Sturt University (CSU). Dr Karen Dooley (QUT) and Dr Ninetta Santoro (CSU) investigated the support systems available for students with refugee backgrounds (SRBs) or students with English as an additional language (EAL) within these two institutions, and the information provided here is drawn directly from their reports.

The synopsis begins with an overview of the demographic and institutional context of each university. This is followed by a description of the design of the studies conducted in each institution. Key findings relating to the two investigations are presented in two sections: (1) available support services and resources and (2) students’ needs and student use of support services. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the recommendations made from both studies.

Background

In 2012 at QUT, out of a total enrolment of approximately 40,000, there were 202 EAL students representing 2.68% of the total number of commencing students. In the faculties of interest to the QUT study, the enrolment of students with EAL backgrounds ranged from 1.08% (15 students) in Education to 2.61% (59 students) in Health to 4.29% (63 students) in Business and 4.49% (65 students) in Science and Technology. The proportion with refugee backgrounds (SRBs) was significantly less than the EAL proportion; the best estimate was that there were approximately 80 refugee background students at QUT.

CSU student enrolments since 2008 have shown an increase in the number of students from diverse cultural backgrounds across all campuses and faculties. Out of a total student population of almost 35,000 students in 2012, there were 5,581 first or second generation immigrants, with 3,210 from nations where English is not the predominant language. The 5,581 students represent 15.95% of overall CSU enrolments, and they can trace their origins to 173 distinct national contexts.

First and second generation SRBs at CSU originate mainly from Sri Lanka (273), Cambodia (81) and Pakistan (51) with smaller numbers across other refugee producing societies such as, Iran (19), Zimbabwe (13), Colombia (8), Myanmar (4) and Bhutan (3). As with QUT, the overall number of SRBs at CSU (462 students) was significantly less than at UWS.

Both studies focused on obtaining comparative data on:

- The academic and support needs of EAL students in general and SRBs in particular
- The support services considered most benefit EAL students in general and SRBs in particular
- Suggestions regarding improvements in the academic and other support services for SRB and / or EAL students
Defying the odds: promoting success for refugee background and NESB first-year students through peer support

Study designs

Both the QUT and CSU studies adopted qualitative research methods. The studies were composed of two phases: (i) Phase A – review of the services and resources available to the target student group; and (ii) Phase B – interviews with target group students, individually (CSU) or in a focus group (QUT). CSU also used a questionnaire to gather demographic data from the target group students. Both phases of the research were conducted more or less simultaneously.

The CSU study entailed interviews with 10 EAL student participants. The QUT study was more extensive, entailing three sets of interviews; i.e.,

1. Interviews with three staff members who were involved in the provision of academic and social support for EAL students in general and SRBs in particular (these were support staff and language and learning advisors),
2. Interviews with 15 EAL students, most from refugee producing societies (e.g., Ethiopia, the Middle East) or countries of refugee transit (e.g., Kenya, India) or both (e.g., Sudan), and
3. An interview with an ex-QUT staff member who had provided academic and social support for SRB students.

Key findings

Support services

Queensland University of Technology

Specialist support for SRBs has been built into an expanding suite of services. The study indicates that SRBs’ academic, language and welfare needs have been specifically targeted as part of the widening participation agenda at QUT. In particular, support staff have worked with African student leaders and the African Club. There is an existing peer mentoring program for at-risk students. Students valued support that (i) is differentiated for diverse needs; (ii) is pro-active in anticipating need; (iii) provides equity for students with diverse resources for university study; (iv) provides connectedness to the contingencies of students’ experiences; and (v) is responsive to student needs as these arise.

Potential seems to exist for further leveraging of peer support, for example, through informing lecturers about possibilities presented by associations such as the African Club. Emerging needs concern students’ transition from QUT into workplaces during and at the completion of courses.

Charles Sturt University

CSU provides a range of general support services that can be accessed by on-campus and off-campus students: a) Health and Counselling, (b) Equity support, which includes advice, advocacy and support for students who have been educationally disadvantaged, including anyone entering under a Special Consideration for Admission Access scheme, (c) Religious support, (d) study support, which includes academic learning support and skill development including English language support (e) careers support and (f) social clubs. These support services are not directly targeted or promoted to SRBs or EAL students.
Students needs and use of support services

Queensland University of Technology

The QUT study used the categories from the UWS analyses of the coaches’ reflections on areas for which first years requested support, from the first iteration of the project: (i) time management; (ii) assignments; (iii) referencing; (iv) English and academic literacies; (v) library; (vi) loneliness and friendship; (vii) the virtual learning environment; and (viii) orientation. It also found a further category of need related to moving from the university and into the workplace.

The QUT study found similar academic and social needs of SRB/EAL students as those reported by the UWS study. In relation to time management, four of the fifteen students mentioned time-related problems, including the volume of material to be covered, difficulty “maintaining control” of the workload during field experience and the volume of written work to be completed. The students indicated that their time-related problems remained unresolved and made few suggestions for dealing with them. English proficiency can create or intensify time management problems for EAL students and SRBs who need to read and write large volumes of material within a constrained time period. This problem may persist beyond first year.

In respect to assignments, every one of the fifteen QUT students spoke of difficulties with assignments. Several common themes were: (i) understanding assignment requirements; (ii) lecturer expectations of student autonomy in the preparation of assignments; (iii) development of ideas for assignments; and (iv) marking and feedback. All but one of the students had sought help with assignments from language and learning advisors (LLAs).

Most of the students spoke of having problems with their early assignments. Some of the problems related to understanding the role of criteria, some to the meaning of terms such as “argue”, “analyse”, “summarise” and so forth used in criteria sheets and assessment task sheets. Problems such as these were attributed to differences between educational cultures. Students spoke of differences between educational institutions in their countries of origin. However, students generally indicated that although they had experienced initial problems, they had come to understand assignment requirements.

Students made some general comments about accessing help with their assignments. Difficulty in locating services was mentioned by several students who spoke of their struggle to get assignment help and the limited amount of help available. Two of the students spoke also of pressure from EAL peers to refrain from being seen by lecturers to need help. Where lecturers and LLAs were mentioned extensively in discussion of sources of help with assignments, peers were not.

Students spoke positively of the efforts of LLAs to make it clear that their services were not only for international students, but also for domestic students – SRBs and other immigrant students from high conflict countries included. Some of the students said they had been reluctant to approach services labelled as ‘international’ lest it come to light that they were domestic students. Two students spoke also of the potential of the African Students Club as a source of academic help.
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Assistance with ‘ideas’ was mentioned as a problem in the preparation of assignments, especially identifying main and peripheral ideas.

Referencing is difficult for EAL students and SRBs who have little or no prior experience of the practice. Students may require explicit instruction in the technicalities of referencing conventions. One student suggested that there should be an “extensive lecture” on referencing and extra help for people who need it most. Peer mentors are one possible source of assistance.

All but one of the fifteen students indicated that they had English and academic literacy difficulties, in particular, difficulties with writing in English. The difficulties described by the students related to both oral and written language. Seven of the fifteen students emphasised the difficulties caused by the pace and accent of talk in lectures and tutorials. Students could not follow lecturers and were unable to contribute to tutorials or felt excluded from participation. One student said that he had struggled not with formal oral language, but with slang used in friendship groups; his English was too formal for everyday social communication around the university. With respect to written language, students highlighted difficulties English presented them in their assignments, beyond those mentioned above. One of the LLAs described the students’ difficulties around “genre gymnastics” as an impediment to students as they were confused by the multiplicity of genres required in assignments rather than by the content of the assignments alone. She attributed the problem to “gaps in cultural capital” for students who had undertaken their earlier education in other educational systems. The other problem with written language concerned reading. Some students spoke of the difficulties of reading in English for assignments and of completing weekly readings.

Most of the talk about the library concerned information retrieval. In general, the students in this study spoke enthusiastically about the assistance provided by library staff. Several students appreciated lecturers’ efforts in organising library sessions in their units and another praised a lecturer for providing examples of how to find scholarly articles. Friends were mentioned as sources of library help by a few students, too, including a student who had been unable to find the accession number given her by a librarian. In one focus group some of the students were critical of the library as a learning environment. They said that the number of books and computers was inadequate. One student spoke of surprise at the norms of behaviour in the library in comparison to those of their country.

In relation to loneliness and friendship, nine of the fifteen students spoke about friendship. The students report isolation along ethnic, linguistic and other lines of social difference and look to lecturers and the university to redress this. Their comments suggested limited relationships with majority group students. Explanations of the segregation within the student group varied: Age difference, uncertainty as to whether or not it was culturally acceptable to approach majority group student, majority group students might not know how to approach EAL students, a cultural problem.

The QUT study found that student technological capabilities and dispositions to the virtual learning environment were divergent. At one end of the continuum there was considerable interest and skill to the other end where students cited technological incompetence or
English language proficiency as reasons for needing face-to-face information. Paper-based and face-to-face information remain important for some of the students, especially when newly enrolled. Several students said that they had experienced some difficulties early in their course because they didn’t know they should check their QUT email account every day. With respect to pedagogy, students expressed support for recorded lectures and other online materials. They spoke of previewing material before tutorials and reinforcing content after lectures. Lecturers came in for criticism for using Blackboard in “inconsistent ways”. From the data it is not clear whether this is a criticism of individual lecturers using Blackboard inconsistently or of the lecturers in a course not using Blackboard in an identical fashion.

The students had divergent experiences of Orientation. In general terms, the QUT study found that the students who did go to Orientation found it “good” for becoming familiar with the physical and virtual learning environments and “settling” into QUT. Two students said that working out the public transport system to and from university had been their main problem during Orientation week.

Charles Sturt University

The CSU study found three themes, two of which were similar to both UWS and QUT studies: English and academic literacies, loneliness and friendship, and an additional theme related to social networks beyond the university.

In relation to English and Academic literacies, all students reported difficulties with written English and in particular were confused about academic conventions such as referencing, despite having attended academic writing workshops where these protocols were covered. Seven of the ten students had accessed academic and English language support. Their participation however, was hugely variable. One student reported that she didn’t know English language assistance was available. Other student comments related to difficulty understanding the feedback given by their tutors, and about how to improve their work, and why they received the grades allocated to their assignments and exams. Two students commented that having Powerpoint materials before the class was particularly helpful but not all lecturers believed this was a good practice.

On the whole the students felt isolated from the Australian students. This was due in part to feeling as though they had little time to socialise but also because they felt there was a “big gap” between their culture and the Australian students, for example, especially around alcohol consumption. Most reported that they found their lecturers friendly and relaxed but that language was a difficulty for them, especially when lecturers used colloquial language. This familiarity and informality between lecturers and students in general was different for EAL students. They reported feeling uncomfortable as it was different to their own cultural experiences.
Most of the students reported having social networks of other students from their own cultures. They relied on their families and long-established friends for social interaction. Those students who were studying off campus were more likely to be close to their own cultural communities and reported less incidents of loneliness than those studying on campus where they were in an unfamiliar location. None of the students were involved in any social clubs - only one knew these groups existed. Only one student (Nepalese), on the recommendation of a lecturer, had accessed the counselling services.

Students’ suggestions

The following suggestions are derived from students’ comments as well as from the audit of the universities existing support services.

Queensland University of Technology

Speaking to the difficulty of locating services for assignment assistance, one student suggested that the university should dedicate more money to provision of assignment help and yet another, that lecturers, tutors and peers should provide EAL students with more help at the beginning of their courses in order to prevent problems later. The students wished that lecturers would explicitly teach to assignment requirements and make exemplars available and commended lecturers who did these things.

Peer mentoring exists at QUT however there is the potential for further leveraging of peer support, for example, through informing lecturers about possibilities presented by associations such as the African Club. Emerging needs concern students’ transition from QUT into workplaces during and at the completion of courses. In ongoing development of SRB support, consideration of several conditions should be maintained: (i) differentiation; (ii) pro-activity; (iii) equity; (iv) connectedness; and (v) responsiveness.

Charles Sturt University

Most students did not know about the services available to them with the exception of health services, but didn’t think these support services were relevant for them anyway. The students generally suggested that the provision of English language support was their greatest need. They suggested that there needed to be more flexibility around the provision and timetabling of this support (differentiation and pro-activity). No mention of peer support or mentoring mechanisms was provided in the CSU report.
Chapter 7: Summary and conclusions

Both project partner institutions, QUT and CSU, identified during the project that the role of mentoring support for refugee background students or NESB students deserves further analysis in their institutions. While the institutions offered a range of student services, students’ feedback was that these are not well publicised, and that many students are unaware of the existence of these services. The provision of English language and scholarly literacy support, particularly at the first-year level was considered to be essential in both institutions. Discussions were initiated at each institution about the possibility of providing a similar support strategy at QUT and CSU.

At the UWS, Equity Buddies, was initially designed to provide support for UWS students with refugee backgrounds. Later it was expanded to include students who are of low socio-economic status (LSES), or the first in their families (FiF) to attend the university. Equity Buddies delivers clear benefits for the mentors as well as the mentees who participate in it. These benefits include a stronger sense of ‘community’ on campus, improved writing and referencing skills, better time management, and importantly, greater cross-cultural understanding.

The broader significance of this project is that it demonstrates that students, many of whom are new arrivals or even students from refugee backgrounds, can provide very effective supports for first year students. Mentors found that in the process of doing this work their own academic skills improved. All students who participated in Equity Buddies interacted with and learned from people whose cultural backgrounds were different to their own. This was not merely a process that broadened the perspectives of Anglo-Australians; students from immigrant families reported similar learning, and a growth in respect for others. Several examples illustrating the dynamics of these interactions were cited in Chapter 4.

Students come to UWS from very diverse ethnic backgrounds and often they remain sequestered within these ethnic groups after enrolling. By structuring opportunities for our students to know and support each other academically and socially across these divides, we could well make significant contributions to improved cross-cultural understanding in the Greater Western Sydney region.

In conclusion, some of the more satisfying and heart-warming outcomes of the Equity Buddies program emerged from mentors’ comments such as those which follow:

I hope that more emphasis is placed on creating friendships within universities because I have now come to the conclusion that they are instrumental in changing a person’s attitude towards learning and creating a better experience while studying.

I have used this experience as a chance to explore new knowledge outside the textbook, and I believe through my interactions with my first year student, the lessons learnt will also contribute to my personal development.

I have learned on the side that first year students really do need their support, and
as us being their senior, we are there to ease that pain for them.

I have learnt that not all learning takes place in a formal setting and community/network based learning is just as useful.

In summary, the university is not just an educational institution where one acquires a piece of paper by merely passing exams. University life may also encourage new friendships, exposure to a new life style and new challenges, as one juggles social, educational, family and financial commitments.

Not only were newly arriving students supported through *Equity Buddies*, and in many cases encouraged to complete first year when they might otherwise have dropped out. Equally important were the changes in the lives of the mentors themselves, for they came to see the university as a place where they could form new friendships, help other people, and create a learning community.
References


Defying the odds: promoting success for refugee background and NESB first-year students through peer support
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Appendix A  Excerpts from 101874 Experiential Learning in Communities (ELC) Learning Guide

Unit outcomes
On successful completion of this unit, you should be able to:
1. Apply academic knowledge to issues and problems encountered in UWS-based projects and community agencies;
2. Apply observation, reflection, and interpretation skills in identifying issues affecting community agencies;
3. Analyse problems and synthesise information useful to the ongoing concerns of the agency;
4. Identify and apply strategies to resolve issues and meet the needs of culturally diverse groups in public sector, non-profit community agencies and at UWS;
5. Identify and recognise and be sensitive to issues of cultural and social diversity and their impact on the acquisition of social capital of individuals and groups;
6. Develop products of potential benefit to the communities and agencies in which they do their placements;
7. Communicate effectively in various modes to a wide variety of stakeholders

Assessments
Assignment 1: Structured reflection #1 (50%)
This assignment requires you to reflect on your experiences and goals for the unit. Your reflection should focus on what you have learned so far, your initial conversations with your coach / mentee/ peer buddy and your goals for the rest of the unit. Your reflection needs to answer these questions:

 ▪ What were your initial expectations about the Equity Buddies support network?
 ▪ What are/were the areas that you needed assistance with from a coach to improve your experience at UWS?
 ▪ What have you learnt from being involved in the Equity Buddies support network?
 ▪ What kinds of preparation have you done as part of being involved in Equity Buddies support network?
 ▪ How will this learning assist your UWS experience?

Length: 1000 – 2000 words
Due date:

Process
To do this you must:

 ▪ Reflect on your expectations of the unit (recorded in your Log Book from week 2 of the semester) and the interactions and activities you have been involved in (recorded in Log Book from week 2).

 ▪ Reflect on your experiences so far for the semester in relation to being part of the Equity Buddies Network. Draw upon your notes, readings, activities and ideas recorded in your Log Book.

 ▪ Use the questions to take notes from your written reflections in your log book.

 ▪ What were your initial expectations about the Equity Buddies support network?

 ▪ What are/were the areas that you needed assistance with OR provided assistance with to improve your experience at UWS for your mentee/ peer buddy? such as: academic life, social life, UWS culture, balancing work-study-family responsibilities, academic literacy and any other area you think is important. Take each area and note specific tasks and skills that you find/ found challenging.
What have you learnt from being involved in the Equity Buddies support network? Be specific and relate to the areas that you wanted support with or gave support to your buddy; about yourself, resources, understandings, skills, knowledge about UWS, library, support services etc..

What kinds of preparation have you done as part of being involved in Equity Buddies support network? List tasks, readings, activities, experiences, meetings

How will this learning assist your UWS experience? What has been the effect of having a coach/ mentee/ peer buddy on your outlook on UWS student life, social and academic life.

Write a 1000-2000 word reflection.

Present your work professionally demonstrating appropriate academic literacy including APA referencing. This Learning Guide provides a range of links and suggestions to help you.

Assignment 2: Structured reflection #2 (Log book + final reflection)
In this assignment you will reflect upon your involvement in the Equity Buddies Support Network in a progressive way across the semester. Your log book will be a created over the semester, finishing with a culminating reflection.
Length: 1000 – 2000 words
Due date: Weekly from week 2; Final Reflection + log book XXXX, by 5pm
Use the template provided on vUWS to create your weekly logbook and upload each Friday.

Purpose
This assignment assists you to keep a record of your time, interactions and activities as part of the Equity Buddies support network. It is also a place to record information you want to find out about, information you have located, information from others that you want to keep a record of, a place to write comments and concerns, a place to draft plans and ideas, a place for you to write up your reflections at the end of each tutorial and support network meeting. From this information you will write a summation of your learning with reference to literature.

Process
To do this you must:

- Record reflections at the end of each tutorial session in a print and/or electronic log book.
- Create a plan to meet with your coach/ mentee/ peer buddy each week for 9 weeks (from week 3 of semester) – record this in your log book.
- Record where you met, when and what you did each week and for how long.
- Record any activities you worked on or actions taken during the week and for how long.
- Keep notes of thoughts, feelings, concerns, ideas and reflections.
- Keep notes on what you read each week + any questions you have that you want to ask your coach / mentee/ peer buddy etc.
- Write your responses to the weekly reading as part of your log book and upload to vUWS site with an account of your activities and hours.
- Record any support network meetings and Equity Buddies social gatherings.
- List any resources, including UWS ones, you have tried and write a comment about them and their usefulness or not.
- Notes can be written, photos, videos, mash-ups, audio or a combination, eg annotated image.
Write a final reflection of your experience in the unit – benefits, limitations, impact, etc. Ensure you include references. Your reflection should focus on the following:

- In your work as a coach/mentee(peer buddy in this unit, what helpful or meaningful activities did you participate in? (You may wish to comment on both social relationships/social activities as well as educational activities and things you learned yourself)
- What specific insights did you gain about yourself or about other students?
- What access to resources, useful information or material did you obtain?
- How did you use these resources in your meetings with coach/mentee(peer buddy? How did the assigned readings influence the approach you took?
- What difference did the interactions and activities in the Equity Buddies support network make? In what ways do you think your input was useful to your coach/mentee/peer buddy?
- What did you learn about your coach/mentee/peer buddy & other fellow-students in the unit from this experience?
- How did this contribute to your personal or professional development?
- What have you learned about yourself in doing this coaching?
- What effect do you think coaching will have on your own outlook on UWS student life, working with others, and being part of the network?
- How has your involvement changed your understanding of what matters?

Log Book Reading Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Response probe 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; year/ mentees</th>
<th>Response probe 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt;/3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; year mentor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LOG BOOK #1: Wenger, E., Traynor, B. &amp; de Laat, M. (2011) Chapter 2: Communities and networks (pp 9-13).</td>
<td>What would you like to achieve in your first year at UWS? What might make this difficult? How could having a mentor this semester help you achieve your goals?</td>
<td>By enrolling in this subject you have agreed to be a mentor to another student. What strengths do you bring to this role? How do you think you can help? What do you expect to learn from this work yourself?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibbons, A (n.d.) Getting the most from mentoring - recent developments and learning. Accessed 9/2/2012. <a href="http://www.coachingnetwrok.org.uk">http://www.coachingnetwrok.org.uk</a></td>
<td>Gibbons What do you think Gibbons means that “the mentor’s role is essentially to accelerate the rate at which a person learns?” Explain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOG BOOK #3: James, R., Krause, K. &amp; Jennings, C.</td>
<td>James, Kraus &amp; Jennings identify a whole range of factors that influence students’</td>
<td>James, Kraus &amp; Jennings identify a whole range of factors that</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adjustment to university life. Which factors do you think may play a part in your adjustment to university life? Please explain.

How important is face-to-face contact with lecturers and students in quality learning? In what ways do ICTs compensate for this lack? Or do they? Explain.

Influence students’ adjustment to university life. Which factors in the adjustment to university life do you think are most important? Please explain. Also discuss how you will help your First Year student overcome these potential risks. In what ways would loneliness or feeling out of place influence students’ engagement with learning and with university life?


‘..our findings indicate that new students need support to deal with not only the academic culture shock of adapting to the higher education environment, but also the emotional shock of moving from the familiar home environment to a very different life at university’. (p.719)

Reflect on this quote in relation to your own experience so far at university and your involvement in the *Equity Buddies* support network in ELC.


Reflect on the two types of approaches to essay writing presented in the paper: Surface and Deep. What type of essay writer are you? How different is essay writing at university to high school or previous experience in education? What implications does this have for you as a learner at UWS?

Reflect on the two types of approaches to essay writing presented in the paper: Surface and Deep. What type of essay writer are you? How different is essay writing at university to high school or previous experience in education? What implications does this have for your 1st year buddy as a learner at UWS?


Think about the two types of support mentioned in the article: ‘from above’ and ‘from below’. What specific support/s have you drawn on this semester, so far, and for what purpose? What types of support/s were they – from above or from below? How useful were they? If you haven’t drawn on any then what were the reasons you didn’t?

Think about the two types of support mentioned in the article: ‘from above’ and ‘from below’. What specific support/s have you drawn on this semester, so far, and for what purpose? What types of support/s ‘from above’ or ‘from below’ have you found useful for your 1st year buddy?

Semester break


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Lecture Topic</th>
<th>Tutorial focus and activities</th>
<th>Readings and other Preparation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Student Counselling services</td>
<td>Helping others Buddy meetings, reading and activities Debriefing group meeting</td>
<td>LOG BOOK #4: Wilcox, P. Winn, S. &amp; Fyvie-Gauld, M. (2005) ‘It was nothing to do with the university, it was just the people’: The role of social support in the first-year experience of higher education, Studies in Higher Education, 30 (6), p. 707-722.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>NO LECTURE</td>
<td>How can I help? Supporting each other Needs analyses Buddy meetings, reading and activities Debriefing group meeting</td>
<td>LOG BOOK #5: Green, W. (2007) Write on or write off? An</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Academic literacy: Helping</td>
<td>Thomson &amp; Droga (2012)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Complete the Wenger et al personal narrative and upload.

In the Vickers & McCarthy article what were some of the factors that made learning difficult for students with refugee backgrounds? How may similar factors affect First Year students and their adjustment to university life? What lessons can be learned from their experiences that may be useful to you?

Defying the odds: promoting success for refugee background and NESB first-year students through peer support
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>NO LECTURE</td>
<td>Academic literacy: Refining and editing assignments</td>
<td>Buddy meetings, reading and activities, Debriefing group meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Thomson &amp; Droga 2012)</td>
<td>[1st assignment due]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>NO LECTURE</td>
<td>Support for each other</td>
<td>Buddy meetings, reading and activities, Debriefing group meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>NO LECTURE</td>
<td>&quot;My journey so far&quot;</td>
<td>Buddy meetings, reading and activities, Debriefing group meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>NO LECTURE</td>
<td>&quot;What worked for me&quot;</td>
<td>Buddy meetings, reading and activities, Debriefing group meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>NO LECTURE</td>
<td>&quot;Celebrating our successes&quot;</td>
<td>Buddy meetings, reading and activities, Debriefing group meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>NO LECTURE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>NO LECTURE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>NO LECTURE</td>
<td></td>
<td>[Log Book + Final reflection submission]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B  Survey instruments

Beginning of Semester Survey for ELC students
In the Experiential Learning in Communities (101874) unit,

- If you are a 2nd or 3rd year student -- your main activities will be to mentor a first-year student and participate in de-briefing meetings with other mentors.
- If you are a 1st year student -- your main activities will be to participate in the mentoring partnership and hold a weekly meeting with other 1st years.

To help us assign you to a tutorial group and a de-briefing group, and link you to students you could assist, we are asking for some background information. This information will be treated as CONFIDENTIAL.

Please write your name here __________________________________________________ Course: ___________________

Student No ___________________ Mobile Phone No (optional)____________________

- I am a 2nd year student who would like a mentor to provide academic support

| When are you available for a tutorial? Check all the times that are possible for you | When are you available for a de-briefing group? Check all the times that are possible for you |
|---|---|---|
| Times | Tuesday | Tuesday | Monday |
| 10.00am to 11.00 am | | | |
| 11.00am to 12.00 noon | | | |
| 12.00 noon to 1.00 pm | | | |
| 1.00 pm to 2.00 pm | LECTURE | LECTURE | |
| 2.00 pm to 3.00 pm | | | |
| 3.00 pm to 4.00 pm | | | |
| 4.00 pm to 5.00 pm | | | |

PART 2: You, your background, & your pathway to university

1. Please tick one box: Are you:   Female □1   Male □2

2. When were you born?  ____/____/19___

3. Are you an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island person?  Yes □1   No □2

4. What year are you up to in your degree program at UWS?
Completed first year □1  Partially completed first year □2
Completed second year □3  Partially completed second year □4
Completed third year □5  Partially completed third year □6

Defying the odds: promoting success for refugee background and NESB first-year students through peer support
Defying the odds: promoting success for refugee background and NESB first-year students through peer support

5. What degree program are you enrolled in?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree Program</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BA -M Arts</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA - M. Tch</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Social Science</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA (Psychology)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Ed (Birth-5)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Policing</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Social Work</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Community Welfare</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Comm &amp; Social Devel</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (write here)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Was there a gap between when you left high school and when you commenced your UWS degree?

No: I entered UWS the year after I finished my HSC, with no gap [ ]
Yes: there was a gap of ------ years between when I left school and when I entered UWS

Question 7: Please tick how often you speak English in your home. If you only speak English, tick 5 ‘always’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In my family we speak ENGLISH</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you speak any languages other than English, please answer Q 8 and Q 9

Question 8: Apart from English, I also speak

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S-E Asia &amp; the Pacific</td>
<td>1 Samoan, or Tongan, or Fijian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Filipino/Tagalog</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Other Pacific/SE Asian Language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia / Indian Sub-continent</td>
<td>4 Mandarin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Cantonese/other Chinese</td>
<td>6 Vietnamese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Hindi</td>
<td>8 Tamil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Other Asian Language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>17 Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Dari</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Turkish</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 Pashto /Farsi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Assyrian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 Other Middle Eastern Language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European languages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 French</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 Italian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 Serbo-Croatian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 Polish, Ukrainian, Russian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 Other European Language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 9: In relation to the language you indicated above,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16. How often do you speak this language</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Questions 1 to 12: These questions focus on the needs of 1st year students & EB**

*Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Most 1st-year students need face-to-face help when they first arrive at UWS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The paper-based information provided for 1st year students is easy to access</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The paper-based information UWS provides meets 1st year students needs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. On-line resources for students such as vUWS are easy for 1st years' to access</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. 1st year students generally find Turn-it-in easy to understand and use</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Most 1st year students understand what their assignments mean and what they are expected to produce</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Most 1st year students find it easy to use library resources</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Many 1st year students need help to improve their scholarly writing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Many 1st year students find the first few weeks of Uni are overwhelming</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I was able to identify the support my 1st year student needed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. The 1st year student I mentored benefited and gained useful support</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. In my opinion the <em>Equity Buddies</em> program is helpful for 1st year students</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13. **In what ways do you think the *Equity Buddies* (EB) program helps 1st year students?**

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

14. **What could be done to make EB more helpful for 1st year students?**

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Questions 15 to 24: These questions focus on your experience in the EB program

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>By being a mentor in Equity Buddies</strong>—</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15. I have a better understanding of how to help other students with their learning</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. I now have more friends at UWS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. I know more about the resources UWS offers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. I learned more about students from other cultural backgrounds</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. My own understanding of how to do academic writing has improved</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. My own understanding of how to do referencing has improved</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. I have further developed my friendship networks at UWS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Meeting with my facilitator and others in the De-Briefing group was very beneficial to me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. The De-Briefing group meetings are essential for supporting mentors in the <em>Equity Buddies</em> program</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

24. Do you have any other comments about your own experience in the EB program?
**Equity Buddies (EB): End of semester survey - Mentees**

**Questions 1 to 14:** These questions focus on your experience as a first-year student and your experience in Equity Buddies

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Many 1st-year students need face-to-face help when they first arrive at UWS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I found the paper-based information provided for 1st year students easy to use</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The paper-based information UWS provides meets 1st year students needs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. On-line resources for students such as vUWS are easy for 1st years’ to access</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I found Turn-it-in easy to understand and use</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Most 1st year students understand what their assignments mean and what they are expected to produce</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>7. I found it easy to use library resources</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Many 1st year students need help to improve their scholarly writing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I found the first few weeks of Uni were overwhelming</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. My Equity Buddies mentor was able to identify the support I needed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. My Equity Buddies mentor provided me with useful support</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. In my opinion the Equity Buddies program is helpful for 1st year students</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13. In what ways do you think the Equity Buddies (EB) program helps 1st year students?

__________________________

14. What could be done to make EB more helpful for 1st year students?

__________________________
**Questions 15 to 22: These questions focus on your experience in the EB program**

*Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participating in Equity Buddies means that --</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15. I now feel that I belong at UWS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. I have more friends at UWS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. I know more about the resources UWS offers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. I learned about students from other cultural backgrounds</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. My own understanding of how to do academic writing has improved</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. My own understanding of how to do referencing has improved</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. I have further developed my friendship networks at UWS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Meeting with my facilitator and others in the De-Briefing group was very beneficial to me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>23. The De-Briefing group meetings are essential for supporting first year students in the Equity Buddies program</td>
<td>1</td>
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**22. Do you have any other comments about your own experience in the EB program?**

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Appendix C  Focus group interview schedule

Mentees
1. Why did you want to come to university? (Was there a clear reason?)
2. What were your expectations of university life when you enrolled?
3. What have you found about university life to be most difficult so far?
4. What new social relationships have you formed through Equity Buddies?
5. What insights have you gained from your Equity Buddies coach about how to succeed with university study? What useful student support material did you learn about, or obtain?
6. How has this changed the way you approach assignments and study?
7. What suggestions do you have for us, about supporting students who are unfamiliar with university life and study requirements?

Mentors
1. Thinking back to your 1st year at university, what do you think were the most difficult things to manage?
2. Now, thinking about your 1st year student, what things were he/she finding most difficult to manage?
3. Our goal in Equity Buddies is to ask you as coaches to help students get more out of university life and manage university study requirements. In what ways do you think you have been able to do this?
4. What useful student support material did you learn about through Equity Buddies?
5. Has this changed the way you approach your assignments and study? If so, how?
6. What new social relationships have you formed through Equity Buddies? What new insights did you gain from these relationships?
7. What suggestions do you have for us about improving the Equity Buddies program?

Facilitators
1. If you think back to your first year at university, what were the things that you found difficult to manage in at first?
2. Did you attend school for some years in a country other than Australia? If so – how does the Australian approach to learning differ from what you were used to? Was your own schooling interrupted?
3. Students with refugee backgrounds, or others who are new to Australia, often find university life challenging. What do you think UWS could do to make things better for these students?

4. What issues outside of the university make it difficult for these students to succeed? (We are thinking of home life, support for study, and home responsibilities for example). What do you think can be done about these things?

5. When you phoned students and talked to them about Equity Buddies, what did they tell you about their concerns? What aspects of university life seem to be most difficult for them to manage?

6. We have tried to connect with first-year students – e.g, in O-week – we tried to make sure they know support is available – what suggestions do you have about this process?

7. You were a facilitator for Equity Buddies coaches – so you met with a group of coaches several times – right? What influence do you think you had on the coaches in your group?

8. Regarding the work that Equity Buddies coaches did with first-year students, what benefits do you think this had?

9. What do you think the coaches learned from it? What comments/suggestions do you have? What issues do you think we need to pay attention to?

10. What have you learned from being a facilitator in Equity Buddies?