Career Mentor Program: Annual Report

“The career mentor programme provides a great opportunity for those looking for some guidance regarding university life and beyond in an informal, friendly and non-judgmental manner.”

“Final semester before graduating was very stressful and this program helped keep me accountable to planning beyond graduation”
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What is the Career Mentor Program?

The Career Mentor Program (CMP) matches current University of Tasmania students (mentees) with Alumni (mentors) in order to broker a mentoring relationship. Mentors share with students the benefit of their individual experience, access to their own professional networks, insights into their industry, and advice on practicalities such as job search, graduate application processes and professional presentation.

The aims of the program are to:

- assist the mentee to build information about career direction
- provide the mentee with an opportunity to increase confidence and familiarity with aspects of workplace culture
- assist mentors to enhance leadership and interpersonal communication skills
- assist mentors to keep up to date with current knowledge within their field through contact with current university students
- develop mutually beneficial relationships between the University, its students, and its alumni

The CMP is extra-curricular and students don’t receive any credit towards their studies. It is available to all disciplines, for both undergraduates and postgraduates. Normally students who are in their first year of university study are not able to participate, although this can be considered in exceptional circumstances where the student has a fairly clear idea of their career direction.

The student mentee and the mentor have regular contact between May and October, approximately every 4 weeks so that they build up rapport. A significant proportion of mentors are based outside Tasmania and students connect with these distance mentors by skype, phone or email.

The specific character of each mentoring relationship is shaped by the subject area/professional background of the mentor pairs, and the student mentee’s own needs and stage of development. However, the CMP is focused on career issues, not academic support. Students and mentors identify the focus for their mentor relationship and sign off on a mentoring agreement at their first meeting. Some of the common issues include: how to access professional networks; interview skills; maintaining work/life balance; job search; acquiring work experience; graduate job applications.

Overview of the Career Mentor Program at the University of Tasmania

The Career Mentor Program is a partnership between Career Development & Employment (CDE) and the Alumni Office, and commenced as a pilot in 2011 with a limited number of participants on both Hobart and Launceston campuses. The development of CMP occurred within the context of a growing interest in the value of mentoring in workplaces and higher education institutions. Employers were beginning to recognise an untapped resource in the expertise of its experienced staff. CDE Staff identifies an equivalent untapped resource in our University of Tasmania alumni.

The program developed initially from expressions of interest from potential mentors responding to ads in the UTAS alumni newsletter. Students were sought to match with these mentors using a variety of sources – lecturer’s recommendation, culturally and linguistically
dive rice staff suggestions, direct email to student cohorts etc. The disciplines covered were largely dictated by the backgrounds of the mentors and included accounting, political science, economics, education, IT, business, theatre, nursing and medicine.

After 2 years as a small project, the Career Mentor Program received funding though the Student Services and Amenities Fees, allowing for the employment of a full-time Program Coordinator. The impact of this appointment has been profound, with student numbers increasing to 106 in 2013, and 126 in the current intake. Total mentor numbers have also increased, with 182 now registered.

The partnership between CDE and the Advancement Office is crucial for a successful program. All mentors are UTAS Alumni, allowing for a unique insight and understanding for the student mentees. Face-to-face events are very popular with both mentors and mentees, and the costs associated with these events are split across this partnership.

**Key Outcomes for 2014**

Evaluation of the Career Mentor Program in 2014 evidences the following successes, aligned with program aims:

**Mentees:**
- Exposure to and increased understanding of the workplace environment
- Expansion of professional networks
- Greater overall career clarity

**Mentors:**
- Awareness of current degree structures in the field
- Development of leadership and professional skills
- Personal satisfaction of giving back to the University of Tasmania

**University of Tasmania:**
- Development of work-ready graduates
- Provision of opportunity for continued engagement with Alumni

**Student Engagement – Profile of student participants**

Analysis of the demographic data of CMP mentees assists the program to identify who CMP appeals to most, and whether the program is reaching all areas of the University. Table 1 presents key CMP Mentee demographics, and compares them to the general UTAS population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Mentees</th>
<th>% of Program</th>
<th>UTAS Enrolment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>54.8%</td>
<td>57.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>45.2%</td>
<td>42.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>&lt; 21 years</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>36.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22-29 years</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>54.8%</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30+ years</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Gender:** The ratio of female to male registration for CMP was roughly equivalent to the overall University of Tasmania enrolment.
Age: CMP mentees were both school-leavers and mature-age students. This data suggests that students with significant experience prior to enrolling at University still see benefit in engaging with a Career Mentor. Data on age distribution is more difficult to accurately compare to UTAS enrolment. CMP excludes first year students, disproportionately affecting enrolment in the under 21 age group.

This year’s student mentee cohort represented all faculties of the University of Tasmania. A distribution of mentees by Faculty is presented in Figure 1. The greatest student enrolment was from the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Technology (40), Tasmanian School of Business and Economics (30) and the Faculty of Health (24). CMP enrolled a smaller cohort of students from Arts, Law and the Australian Maritime College (AMC) compared to 2013.

The Career Mentor Program is of particular benefit to distance students, providing an additional level of support and guidance that can be more difficult to access when studying away from the main Tasmanian campuses. In 2014 there were 12 distance students enrolled in CMP, but only 2 from the Sydney campuses (Figure 2). This will be addressed in 2015 by more targeted advertising to Distance and Sydney cohorts, for example through the well-established social media channels for these groups.
In 2014, 70% of CMP mentees were enrolled in undergraduate programs, as demonstrated in Table 2. Feedback from our pilot program in 2011 indicated that greater benefit is derived when students have some experience in tertiary study. For this reason, CMP is open to undergraduate students who have completed at least 12 months study. Postgraduate students are not subject to this restriction.

Table 2: Career Mentor Program Mentees by Enrolment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrolment</th>
<th>Mentees</th>
<th>% of Program</th>
<th>UTAS Enrolment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>54.8%</td>
<td>76.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>45.2%</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This represents a sharp increase in the number of postgraduate student mentees, with 37 participants compared to just 11 in 2013. In addition, the participation rate of postgraduate students in CMP (45.2%) is higher than the average postgraduate enrolment at UTAS. This difference must also be viewed within the context of exclusion of 1st year undergraduate students from CMP.

International Student Engagement

In 2014, 35 (27.8%) of the student mentees were international students, as shown in Table 3. This participation rate is much higher than the UTAS enrolment of 17.5%.

Table 3: International student engagement with CMP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Mentees</th>
<th>% of Program</th>
<th>UTAS Enrolment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>72.2%</td>
<td>82.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>International</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Student Retention

The Career Mentor Program has a high success rate for student mentees making initial contact with their mentor once the match has been confirmed. This contact is the sole responsibility of the student, establishing the student-led mentoring model. In 2014, 3 of 126 mentees failed to make unprompted contact with their mentor.

Despite this high rate of contact, retention of students following the initial meeting can sometimes be a challenge. Both mentors and mentees reported finding time for meetings, barriers of distance mentoring and lack of response as reasons why the mentoring relationship did not continue.

The first strategy to enhance student retention is the Mentoring Agreement. All mentoring pairs are asked at their first meeting, face-to-face or by distance, to discuss and agree upon the topics relevant to the student that will be covered during the program. Participants agree to continue the relationship for the duration of the program, or if this is not possible, agree to contact the coordinator.

The CMP Coordinator hosts a mid-program networking event, at which mentors and mentees share experiences in the program. This event also serves as an indirect reminder to those students who have not been proactive in the relationship. The Coordinator contacts all mentors soon after the mid-program event to assess progress of each mentoring pair. Any issues can then be followed up with individual students.

Student Evaluation

At the end of the program, student mentees were invited to complete a short online evaluation regarding their experience of CMP. A total of 62 mentees (49%) responded. Overall the students’ responses were very positive, with 97% of respondents stating that they would recommend the program to other UTAS students.

Mentors and mentees engaged in a wide range of career and workplace related activities through the program, as presented in Table 4. Consistent with Program aims, the most common mentoring activities undertaken with mentors were discussion of career-related topics; feedback on resumes and application material; referrals to mentors’ colleagues and networks; and workplace tours.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentoring Activity</th>
<th>Number of mentees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open discussions/email exchange on career-focused topics</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewing and giving feedback on my resume/application material</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral to other colleagues/network contacts</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tour of the mentor’s workplace</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invitation to professional networking events</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessing professional associations</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysing a relevant sample job advert</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using online job sites</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mock interview practice</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work experience</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace shadowing</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CMP is largely a self-directed program with primary responsibility for driving the relationship falling on the student. Mentor and Mentee pairs make their own arrangements regarding frequency and method of communication. It is suggested that each pair communicate at least
once per month. Tables 5 and 6 outline the frequency and modes of communication reported by student mentees.

**Table 5: How many hours per month did you have contact with your mentor?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contact with mentor (hours per month)</th>
<th>Number of Mentees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 1 hour</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 hour</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4 hours</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 4 hours</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6: How did you connect with your mentor?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Method</th>
<th>Number who engaged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face to face meetings</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social networking (eg LinkedIn, Facebook)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skype/Viber</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Career Clarity**

One goal of CMP is to improve student mentee career clarity. Students were asked at the time of registration to rate on a scale 1 to 10 “How would you rate your clarity about your career direction and how to get there?”. The same question was asked in the evaluation. There was, on average, a 2 point increase in career clarity for students who participated in the Program. The overall increase in career clarity for mentees who responded to the evaluation survey was statistically significant.

![Figure 3: Mentee perception of career clarity at registration (before) and after completion of CMP (after). Students reported a significant increase in career clarity following the program (p<0.0002, n=62)](image)

This is the first time mentees have been asked to quantify career clarity as a measure of overall Program impact. In 2015, it is recommended that a shorter scale of 5 or 7 points is implemented. Too many options can be cognitively challenging, and respondents may be unable to discriminate to such a precise level. A shorter scale will still allow for differentiation between responses before and after participation in the Program.
Mentor Participation

The Career Mentor Program commenced in 2011 with 20 UTAS Alumni mentors. In 2014 we had 182 mentors registered for the program, with 94 actively matched to mentees.

The Career Mentor Program recruits mentors who are graduates of the University of Tasmania, providing a unique insight into the professional world from the perspective of someone who has been right here in the students’ shoes. In 2014, the 94 mentors represented 30 professional fields, allowing the program to provide career guidance and experiences across a wide range of potential career future pathways.

Profession/industry:

In 2014, mentors represented 30 professional areas allowing the Program to provide career guidance and experiences across a wide range of potential career future pathways. Mentors were assigned one or more professional labels, as outlined in Figure 4, to facilitate matching with student mentees.

![Figure 4: Areas of Mentor Professional Experience. Note: Some mentors represent more than one professional area](image)
**Location:**

University of Tasmania alumni are spread across the state and all over the world, as demonstrated by the diversity of registered mentors outlined in Table 7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>2014 Matched Mentors</th>
<th>All Registered Mentors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North Tasmania</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Tasmania</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwest Tasmania</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainland Australia</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are 60 mentors registered for the Career Mentor Program who live and work outside Tasmania. In 2014, students were matched with mentors as far afield as Singapore, Spain and the United States of America.

**Mentor Evaluation**

At the completion of the Program, mentors were invited to complete a short online evaluation regarding their experience of CMP. A total of 42 mentors (46%) responded.

**Personal and Professional Development**

A mentoring relationship can bring personal and professional growth for both mentor and mentee, as demonstrated by 69% mentors identifying growth areas through participation in the Career Mentor Program.

Mentors reported enhanced communication and time management skills, and the opportunity to demonstrate leadership potential within their own organisation. The Program provided mentors with an update on current degree structures in their field through direct student engagement. Finally, mentors reported a sense of personal satisfaction in giving something back by supporting the career development of a University of Tasmania student.

**Difficulties in Program participation**

Most of the mentoring relationships progressed well, with 71% of mentors reporting there were no difficulties in engaging with the Program. The most commonly reported difficulty was identifying a suitable time to meet around busy work and study schedules, whether face to face or by distance methods. Other reported difficulties included lack of contact from mentees (2), personal circumstances of individual mentors and mentees (2) and difficulties of distance mentoring (1). Each of these issues will be addressed in preparing for the 2015 Program.
Looking Forward: 2015

Improvements suggested in mentee and mentor evaluations

- More regular contact between CMP Coordinator and participants, both as a prompt to remain active in the relationship and a mechanism for providing new activities and talking points for relationships that have stalled
- Increased opportunities to meet face to face, including mentor panel discussions and demystifying common issues faced by students
- Expanded reach throughout student population to increase engagement with program
- Reinforce clarification of mentee role as driver of mentoring relationship
- Provide students with additional guidance on possible discussion themes and benefits from participation

Recommendations

1. Engage more students across the University of Tasmania
   - Establish social media presence to promote CMP throughout the entire University of Tasmania student population. LinkedIn has had limited success with the student group.
   - Further develop relationships with key internal stakeholders to enhance student awareness of program
   - Investigate strategies to further enhance Sydney and Distance cohorts
   - Better support engagement with technology within mentoring relationship

2. Clarify expectations
   - Redesign website layout and content
   - Build on student understanding of roles and responsibilities within the Program

3. Build on engagement with mentors
   - Coordinate events with the Advancement team in recognition of UTAS 125
   - Consider additional, optional, support and training for mentors
   - Draw on knowledge of mentors to develop additional events throughout the year, such as discipline-based discussion groups.

4. Investigate feasibility of developing additional mentoring streams
   - Elite Athlete Mentoring
   - Higher Degree Research Student Mentoring
Student testimonials

B. Arts (Politics & Policy)

“Direct industry experience was invaluable, and considering the changing nature of the job market in Tasmania, it was also useful to see what was really required to get into the culture of the positions, rather than just the neutral or vague job description”

B. Engineering

“I got in depth details about working in the construction industry from my mentor. Being an international student, this really helped. I had someone whom could explain these to me. Work life and experience varies in different countries.”

B. Nursing

“This was a beneficial program. My mentor assisted me and proof read my job application, selection criteria and resume, we discussed interviews and selection processes. I have a successful outcome of obtaining a job!”

Master of Business

“Generic and specific skills can be learned from this program, no matter what field you are in or are interested in. People who are already in the workforce are able to give students their personal insights which I feel is more valuable than anything Google might tell you about how to approach your career.”

B. Engineering

“The career mentor program allowed me to make an industry connection with a professional engineer. This resulted in going on a trip to the central highlands to see maintenance work on one of the hydro schemes, which was highly beneficially for me as an aspiring civil engineer.”

GradCert Management

“The program went really well. [My mentor] was very helpful and engaging in all of our meetings. I learnt a lot more about the role Treasury plays and the work they do. I was also able to meet and speak to someone that works in Treasury that [my mentor] set up the meeting for. She also helped me with going through selection criteria and how to answer it well”

B. Arts (Politics and Policy)

“I found it an invaluable experience talking to someone who was very experienced and could fill in the 'in between the lines' bits, and who had a realistic appraisal of the potential market for positions I was interested in - including alternatives I may not have considered, or alternative pathways to the same places”

B. Business

“I gained the confidence to speak directly with a professional that I respected. Before the program I lacked confidence speaking with people like this as I felt intimidated by their knowledge. The supportive environment left me feeling as if I have something worthwhile to offer - even at this very early stage of my career.”
B Marine Science

“This program was fantastic. The valuable information and knowledge [my mentor] shared has been incredibly useful. Not only for my university subjects, but for my future career - what to expect, how to get my name out there etc. I highly recommend this program and hope to continue to talk to [my mentor] even after this has finished. What a fantastic initiative by UTAS.”

B. Business

“I think it’s important that students get a realistic idea of what it will be like when they enter the workforce - and this program is a good way to introduce yourself to networking activities and to witness how people interact with one another professionally, how they dress, what the social expectations are etc. Some students may not have worked with people from other generations before either - especially if their work experience is limited to places like fast food outlets, woolworths etc - therefore the program can help them become comfortable ‘working’ with people from other generations other than their own.”

B. Engineering

“In an industry based around networking I think engineering students would be crazy not to participate in the program.”

B. Education

“I feel I have a better understanding of what employers are looking for and how I should apply and prepare for interviews that I think will help me greatly when I do start applying for jobs and going on interviews.”

Master Business

“I got a lot of support and important hints on how to address selection criteria, tailor my CV and cover letter to the job I am applying for. I also got help to prepare setting up my profile on LinkedIn. I also was supported in how to find jobs, and in networking (referred to people to talk to in order to find the area I want to work in). The program fully met my expectations.”

B. Behavioural Science

“Was very supportive. Final semester before graduating was very stressful and this program helped keep me accountable to planning beyond graduation. True to how the program was marketed, my mentor was able to offer emotional/tangible support and guidance as well as academic and workplace guidance for this transition.”

Master of Business

“My mentor was extremely supportive and well-matched to me according to my subjects and interests. We not only discussed possible career paths, but extensively went over the job interviewing process together - the most valuable lesson I have learned as a result of the program. Regardless of whether I was interested in HR or not (which I was), being matched with an HR officer has been invaluable as far as generic skills are concerned as well as specifics. The program has been enjoyable and educational simultaneously.”

Dr Julie Preston
Career Mentor Program Coordinator
December 2014
Further Information

Please contact the Career Mentor Program Coordinator:

Ph: 03 6226 1568

Email: career.mentorporgram@utas.edu.au

www.utas.edu.au/students/careers/students/career-mentor-program