

**2nd Regional Conference on Tutoring & Mentoring
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***The Peer Tutorial Programme at
The University of the South Pacific
Suva, Fiji***

by

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This paper gives the background of the University of the South Pacific (USP), the challenges that face new students from the various islands in the South Pacific and a short report on the Peer Tutorial Programme to date.

Background

The University of the South Pacific was established in 1968 to provide for the training needs of the twelve island nations in the South Pacific – Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Solomon Islands, Samoa, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

This unique regional university has five schools - three, the School of Humanities, the School of Pure and Applied Sciences and the School of Social and Economic Development are situated at the Laucala Campus in Suva, Fiji, the School of Agriculture at the Alafua Campus, Apia, Samoa and the School of Law at Emalus Campus, Vanuatu.

It operates a dual-mode system of instruction, either face-to-face teaching on campus or through the distance mode under the umbrella of the University Extension.

Students, due to their differences in education preparation, language, culture, religion, family orientation and place of abode, face a lot of difficulties in trying to adjust to a new environment, social expectations and demanding academic standards with little or no family support. This has resulted, in part, in a large number of students failing to pass all their first-year courses.

Peer Tutorial Programme (Students Helping Students)

Prior to 1997, extra tutorials were offered to residential students only and were taken by staff members in the different halls on campus. However, in 1996 when extra funds became available, the Community Services Department decided to streamline this programme and transferred this responsibility to the University Counselling Centre. This was due to the number of proactive programmes offered by the Centre and its general accessibility to both on and off campus students.

Identification of Tutees

Those in need of extra tutoring were identified and referred to the Counselling Centre by their sponsors, lecturers, Residential Assistants, Academic Office (Probation List), friends /self. An application form was filled out by each student listing their problem course(s). A list was then prepared and an advertisement placed calling for Peer Tutors in the various courses.

Selection of Peer Tutors

Each potential tutor was interviewed and on the basis of their good grades, character reference, proven ability to communicate subject matter and work well with their peer, they were selected.

Training of Peer Tutors

The tutors were taken through a list of helpful suggestions prepared by the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning & Teaching and Counselling Centre.

Reponsibilities

The Peer Tutors were responsible for contacting their list of students, booking tutorial rooms, holding tutorial sessions at least twice a week, consulting with lecturers and the Peer Tutor Programme Coordinator on a regular basis, and submission of the time-sheet/report at the end of each month.

Summary of reports for 1997 and 1998

1997 - Total Number of Tutees in Semesters I & II	-	300
" " " Tutors " " "	-	84
" " " Courses " " "	-	63

Some students sought short-term help but the majority of students stayed in the group for the whole semester. The pass rate was excellent in that over 90% of the students passed the courses in which peer tutoring assistance was given.

1998 - Total Number of Tutees in Semesters I & II	-	350
" " " Tutors " " "	-	71
" " " Courses " " "	-	60

Due to the availability of extra tutorial rooms during the day, it was possible to cater for the needs of both on and off-campus students, thus reducing the number of sessions and tutors. The pass rate again was very good. Some of the students passed only the courses in which peer tutoring assistance was given.

Feedback from tutees - Most felt they would not have passed without the extra tutorial assistance they received.

Benefit to Peer Tutors - Feedback from Peer Tutors

1. Employment opportunities - All those who served as Peer Tutors in 1997 and 1998 have been employed in their home countries as teachers or at USP as course tutors.
2. Self-esteem - it has given them confidence in themselves and a greater interest in their field of study/research.
3. Communication skills - having to prepare and share with students of other cultures, they have come to understand and respect others for who they are.
4. It certainly helped them in their academic work. All, but one, of the graduates who received medals/prizes for academic achievement had served as Peer Tutors.

Benefit to the sponsors - As was pointed out in STAR's report, the savings to government, private sponsors and parents by helping students succeed in their first year is tremendous. A few sponsors have acknowledged the programme and expressed their appreciation and support for the future.

Conclusion

The Peer Tutorial programme has certainly proved to be effective and beneficial to both the tutor and tutee. The present allocation of funds will ensure that the programme continues over the next few years. However, it is hoped that this programme can be extended to assisting our future students - those presently in high schools around the region.