

Me and My UniMentor: Transitioning to life at UWA

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Me and My UniMentor: Transitioning to life at UWA

Executive Summary

This research forms a part of an on-going project titled *Intercultural Learning at Home: Promoting Internationalisation on Campus*. The broad goal of this project is to investigate and examine meaningful engagement between local and international students. As part of this research, the *Me and my UniMentor* study set out to investigate the extent to which the peer mentoring program run by UWA is able to meet its broad aims of transition support for international students, particularly regarding local and international interaction, and whether the experience of transitioning to UWA is a better experience for those that do engage with a UniMentor.

As this was the first project within the *Intercultural Learning at Home* study, to examine the role and success of ConnectMe mentor program, no criteria was imposed on the type of international student required as participant. Rather, both those students who had engaged with their UniMentor and those who had chosen not to engage, were recruited in order to create an element of comparison and reveal potential barriers to engagement with their assigned UniMentor. Participants were recruited via my own local student contacts who knew international students. Out of eight potential participants, only four actually participated in the focus group.

The focus group discussion revealed that the most salient difficulty regarding transition and adjustment is that of perceived language competence. Those who engaged with their UniMentor, reported that this activity improved their English language skills, while the one participant who did not engage with his UniMentor, found that language was a barrier to engagement. Those who engaged also reported that the UniMentor was successful in providing social support, while the one participant felt that UWA as a social environment provided enough opportunities for social interaction with local and other international students.

Introduction

Intercultural Learning at Home

This research project was conducted within the framework of an on-going project led by Professor Loretta Baldassar, titled *Intercultural Learning at Home: Promoting Internationalisation on Campus*. The broad goal of this project is to investigate and examine meaningful engagement between local and international students. Almost 20% of UWA student enrolments are onshore international students (Annual Report 2016), most of whom desire to be enriched by an intercultural learning experience, make new friends (Sherry, Thomas & Wing 2010) and increase their global networks, thus increasing their employability in the long-term (Amit 2010). From the perspective of the university, a further rationale for attracting international students includes the internationalisation of the student body and diversification of local students' experiences, thus widening the benefit of internationalisation to include the body of local students (Beyer 2017; Hellsten & Prescott 2004; Ong 2009).

Transition Difficulties

While all students face a period of transition into university culture, it can be said that international students face a greater transition process than local students, and face acculturation issues due to cross-cultural and linguistic adjustments (Andrade 2006b; Wang et al. 2012; Thomson & Esses 2016).

The most salient difficulty regarding transition and adjustment is that of perceived language competence. Lack of competence and/or confidence in English can adversely affect international students' academic performance as well as their interactions with both peers and university staff (Zhang 2016). Connected to this, is the challenge of social interaction and support, such that

weak English skills are a barrier to interaction with local students (Andrade 2006a). Overall, stronger connections between international and local students is deemed desirable (Pearce 2012) and will improve adjustment into the university environment (Thomson & Esses 2016), producing better outcomes of acculturation and language acquisition for international students (Ong 2009; Wang et al. 2012).

UniMentor @ UWA

In response to these transition challenges, UWA has launched a peer-mentoring program, ConnectMe@UWA, which links new students with more senior students in order to support and guide the transition and adjustment process (Pearce 2012; Thomson & Esses 2016). It is assumed that the mentor is a local student, who can aid the international student in such areas as culture and language acquisition, navigating campus and unit selection, and social networking (Pearce 2012).

The broad goal of ConnectMe is to help new students, particularly international students, learn the unwritten rules and expectations of their host culture and thus transition successfully into local university life (Pearce 2012), so that they are able to function comfortably in their new study environment (International Students enrolled at UWA 2017). A UWA UniMentor is available for all new students upon request, but international students are linked to a mentor prior to their arrival in Perth (International Students 2017). International students are also promised access to social activities in order to foster engagement with local UWA students. However, not all of the international students do actually take up contact with their UniMentor. Thus, the goal of the *Me and My UniMentor* project

is to investigate the extent to which the UWA mentoring program is meeting its broad aims of transition support for international students, particularly regarding local and international interaction, and whether the experience of transitioning to UWA is a better experience for those that do engage with a UniMentor.

Methodology

In order to answer this research question, I organised a focus group of international students. As this is the first project within the *Intercultural Learning at Home* study, to evaluate the success of the UWA mentoring program regarding international students, my only criteria was that my participants were international students. I did not impose any other criteria on my participants, such as nationality, gender, undergraduate studies or postgraduate studies, length of stay in Perth, or whether they had engaged with their UniMentor or not. By enrolling both participants who had engaged and those who had not, I hoped to gain insight into the barriers towards engagement with the UniMentor. I posed the question specifically to those who chose not to engage, 'Listening to the stories at this table, do you think that you should have engaged with the UniMentor? What do you think would have been different? Better or worse?'

The participants were all enrolled via my own local student contacts who recruited international students from their contacts. As a result, none of the participants knew each other prior to the focus group. I had eight students who committed to attending, and with whom I kept in contact via a group email. However, only four participants actually arrived on the day. The focus group discussion was recorded for later transcription, at which time each participant was given a pseudonym. The transcript

was then analysed for themes of concern. These themes can be broadly described as language proficiency issues and social support.

Results

| Name | Country of Origin | Gender | Age | Course | Arrived | Engaged with UniMentor? |
|--------|-------------------|--------|-----|--------------|-----------|-------------------------|
| Yasmin | Malaysia | Female | 21 | Commerce | Feb, 2016 | Yes |
| Sami | Philippines | Female | 24 | Architecture | Feb, 2016 | Yes |
| Jun | China | Male | 24 | Architecture | 2012 | No |
| Penny | China | Female | 19 | Engineering | Nov, 2016 | Yes |

Table 1: Summary of participants

UniMentor aims

The participants who engaged with the UniMentor assigned to them, were very positive about the program. They had a good understanding of what the program was meant to achieve and were happy with the results. In fact, two participants, Yasmin and Sami, went on to become UniMentors themselves.

Penny: He give me a lot of information and suggestion.. how to survive uni such as that and we still keep in touch every month and he checking when I'm still fine.

Sami: I think it's a guide for my transition here in uni and also in Perth. So I signed up for UniMentor, as start for me to like learn things cos, I was like lost at first cos I'm just new.

Yasmin: What I expected from it was just um a student who was currently in uni and it'd be easier to ask for guidance and like questions directly rather than just the askUWA... for personal questions, about studies or like what you should do.. general life sort of thing.

Language proficiency issues

Consistent with current literature, language proficiency was seen to be a significant challenge to all of the participants, although it was Jun, the participant who did not engage with UniMentor who gave most voice to the struggle, frustration and embarrassment regarding a lack of language proficiency.

Jun: for me I think the most important thing is to pass the .. language barrier so you're able to communicate with the ah.. the locals.. then ah.. and people are friendly then you should have no problems. Everything else.. if you can't even speak English [...] I have my first class I went to the wrong class [...] sit there for 2 hours didn't really know what I was doing. I uh.. yeah that's definitely the most important thing [...] yeah and I introduced myself to the .. coordinator as well so yeah a bit embarrassing.

While Jun maintains that his personal process of transition went well 'so I don't really have the need to join any [mentoring program]', he also spoke of English as a 'barrier', using the word twice even though I had not introduced the term. He expressed it as a barrier not just to feeling comfortable at university, but even to engaging with the UniMentor program.

Jun: I think when I came here even there were someone trying to be my mentor I don't think I'd be able to understand them. So I guess maybe someone saying would you like a mentor and I'd.. I probably assume you're ask me something else. Yeah I think I skipped the entire process. Go through the hell with my first couple of years.. its all good.

Nor did he have much confidence that the UniMentor would be able to help:

Jun: I think at the time I didn't really have the need to [have a mentor].. at that time ... and I don't think they will help me in my .. language area as well.

In contrast, Sami, who did engage with her UniMentor, found that it helped her to gain confidence in English proficiency.

Sami: cos I'm not really good with English .. [inaudible] struggling with what to say.. but still I think I just tried hard you have to talk a lot with my UniMentor.

But for Penny, little English proficiency was gained because 'we talk in Chinese [together]'

Social support

In line with the broad aims of diversification of the student body and internationalisation of the university environment, the participants who had engaged with their UniMentor found it successful in providing social support. Although, it should be noted that at this stage of the focus group discussion, Yasmin had begun to use the collective 'we' when speaking of UniMentors, and so had moved from her personal experience of being a mentee, and had begun to use similar rhetoric that can be found on the UniMentor webpage.

Sami: get to meet others, start studying the same course as you.

Yasmin: so doing the orientation program, there are some events which we they .. get UniMentors to help out and like bring.. we can bring our groups and stuff like that. And also there was this quiz night for like.. UniMentor events and so.. basically a few activities to like engage everyone together from UniMentors and different groups together and like.. yeah.

However, for Jun, UWA as a social environment offers many opportunities for social interaction and places to meet others.

Jun: I guess a UniMentor could be nice but.. I think they probably should um.. just participate more in the social events at UWA. [...] I read a UWA page, like free yoga, free all kinds of social events.. just join them. I'm pretty sure you can find some of them you're interested in.

Future Directions

This focus group discussion indicates that the UWA UniMentor goes a long way to achieving its aim of providing comprehensive transition support for new international students. It gives those students a contact to ask questions regarding life in Perth, life at university, and how to navigate campus or other administrative tasks required in the course of their study. For those who engaged with their assigned UniMentor, the experience was invaluable and also helped to gain proficiency in the English language. It also opened the way for

them to meet other students, both local and international. While this project could not determine the percentage of international students who do engage with their UniMentor, the literature suggests that such a program is underutilised (Pearce 2012).

However, this focus group was not able to answer the question of why some international students choose not to engage with their assigned UniMentor. Further differentiation in focus group participants could be helpful in finding an answer to this question. For example, is it significant that the participant who chose not to engage with the UniMentor is male? Such a finding would be consistent with other research regarding the utilisation of counselling services at university (Raunic & Xenos 2008).

Is it significant that this same participant's country of origin is China? This would be consistent with other findings that Asian students prefer to seek advice from 'compatriot friends' (Pearce 2012, p. 31).

A final area of investigation is the nationality of the UniMentors. Two of my participants moved on from being a mentee to becoming UniMentors themselves. However, in discussing the success of peer mentoring programs, the literature assumes a 'host national peer mentor' (Pearce 2012, p. 32), in order to achieve such aims as increased interaction between local and international students (Wang et al. 2012; Ong 2009; International Students 2017). The question therefore needs to be asked, to what extent is that aim compromised when the mentors are also international students?

Conclusion

The *Me and My UniMentor* project found that a peer mentoring program such as UniMentor is able to provide 'comprehensive transition support' to international students, even prior to their arrival in Perth. Focus group discussion revealed that engaging with the UniMentor helped students gain English language proficiency. The UniMentors helped students become comfortable in their new study environment, by providing social and practical support as the international students learned to navigate campus and administrative tasks such as choosing units.

However, this is only applicable for those who choose to engage with the UniMentor assigned to them. It remains unclear as to why some international students choose not to engage with the mentor. While participants shared that their language skills improved through engagement with their UniMentor, one participant also revealed that a lack of language skills may also be a barrier to engagement, not just with the mentor, but also with other local students.

As this was the first project within the *Intercultural Learning at Home* project, to evaluate the success of the UniMentor program, the *Me and My UniMentor* study did not impose any criteria on the international students who participated.

Further questions therefore remain, regarding gender and nationality, as well as a further question regarding the significance of the nationality of the UniMentor.

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PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Project title: *Me and my UniMentor: transitioning to life at UWA*

Project reference number: RA/4/1/8649

I am Professor Loretta Baldassar from the Discipline of Anthropology and Sociology at The University of Western Australia. I wish to invite you to participate in my research project, entitled *Intercultural learning at home*. This project aims to bring local and international students together through the development of formal and informal curricula. One way that this will be achieved is through the Anthropology and Sociology unit *Advanced Qualitative Methods: Interviews and Focus Groups*, in which social science honours students will conduct interviews, focus groups, and other qualitative research focused on international and domestic student relations. I wish to invite you to participate in the research of Dorinda 't Hart.

For many of the honours students, this will be their first experience of conducting an interview or focus group. This project is designed to provide them with valuable experience in learning the craft of qualitative research. We thank you in advance for your participation.

The aim of this project is to evaluate the aims and outcomes of the ConnectMe program, especially with regard to the promise of transition support for international students, in order to help them adjust to life at UWA. Because not all international students engage with the UniMentor assigned to them, this project aims to investigate the professed benefits of engaging with the UniMentor, as well as those reasons for not engaging.

For this reason, Dorinda will meet with a mixed group of 5-7 international students, some of whom have engaged with ConnectMe and some of whom have not, all of whom can share their stories of transitioning to Perth and UWA. Special attention will be given to the engagement (or not) with the UniMentor. The focus group will meet for approximately one hour, at which time you will also be given a short survey. With your permission, the discussion will be audio recorded and your survey responses will also be recorded and analysed.

All information provided by you will be treated as confidential and stored securely in either a locked cabinet or password protected computer. All notes, surveys, and recordings resulting from data collection will be used for private research purposes by the student, in consultation with myself. They will be destroyed following the completion and assessment of the student's project. No names or other information identifying you,

or anyone you talk about, will be divulged publicly, and the data provided will be presented under a pseudonym where it appears in conference presentations and publications. Moreover, any information capable of identifying you will be permanently removed from the student's records and destroyed immediately following the data collection period.

Your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the research at any time without prejudice in any way. You need give no reason or justification for withdrawing. In such cases, records of you, the participant, will be destroyed unless you agree that the researcher may retain and use the information obtained prior to your withdrawal. If you have any questions about this research please do not hesitate to contact either myself or Dorinda by email or telephone.

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Appendix B

Focus Group Schedule

FOCUS GROUP SCHEDULE

Project title: *Me and my UniMentor: transitioning to life at UWA*

Project reference number: *RA/4/1/8649*

Checklist:

- ✓ Participation Information Forms
- ✓ Consent forms
- ✓ Survey forms
- ✓ Recording equipment
- ✓ Notebook

Introduction:

Thank you all for participating in this research project.

Check that all the forms have been filled out and signed.

I just want to remind you that your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. Should you have any questions at a later date, feel free to email me or Loretta. I may take brief notes during our discussion and I will be recording this discussion, but these are confidential and your names will not be used in the report.

Check that everyone has read the PIF and have a copy. Remind them that this is a mixed group of students, some of whom have participated in the mentor program and some who have not, but that I am interested in both experiences and perspectives.

I'll just do a test run with the recording equipment. You can all remain seated where you are, and if you can just say a word or two, maybe your name and I'll check that the recording is working.

Ok. I'll turn on the recorder now and we can begin.

Questions:

1. Maybe we can just introduce ourselves a bit, share some information about ourselves, what you're studying, where we come from, how long you've been in Australia. etc. I can start if you like.
2. What do you know about the UniMentor program? How does the program work? What would you expect from this program?
3. What kinds of support would students be looking for from the UniMentor program?
4. What do you think would be some reasons why students do or do not engage with the UniMentor?
5. For those of you who did not have contact with your UniMentor, what were your reasons for not taking up contact?
6. For those of you who did participate, what did your UniMentor do for you? How did it help?
7. Have you maintained any kind of contact with your UniMentor?
8. (For those that chose not to engage with the UniMentor): Listening to the stories at this table, do you think that you should have engaged with the UniMentor? What do you think would have been different? Better/Worse?
9. Is there anything else any of you would like to share?

Thank you again, for your time and your participation. I wish you well in your studies and I hope you enjoy your time here in Perth. Thank you.

Appendix C

Short Survey of Participants

SURVEY

Project title: *Me and my UniMentor: transitioning to life at UWA*

Project reference number: *RA/4/1/8649*

Name: _____

Country of Origin: _____

Age: _____

Gender: _____

When did you arrive? _____

How long will you be studying at UWA? _____

Did you have contact with your UniMentor? _____

How often? _____

Appendix D

Transcript

FOCUS GROUP TRANSCRIPT

Project title: *Me and my UniMentor: transitioning to life at UWA*

Project reference number: RA/4/1/8649

DH: So I just thought, to start, maybe if we just go around again, just say our name, where we're from, how long we've been here, anything interesting with, you know, what you're studying maybe. Um.. I can.. I can start if you like.

Um.. I am actually a.. I guess I would be a local student I did grow up here, in um WA, but I have lived overseas for about 16 years and I came back here about 8 years ago so.. now I've been studying here for about 4.. I suppose. So yeah.. not really an international student but.. [laugh] have had international experience.

P: Um.. I'm P I come from China. I just arrive here say, last November. And I come.. contact with my UniMentor. He's very sweet guy. He give me a lot of information and suggestion.. how to survive uni such as that and we still keep in touch every month [hmm] and he checking when I'm still fine

DH: [laugh] ok. Yep. We'll get back to that later alright.

J: Well um.. I'm J. I.. Er I came from China as well but, uh.. I been here for like 5 years already, doing my uh.. architecture degree. Er.. I haven't been really joining any UniMentor program or anything sort of. But we do have.. er.. we do have some other system in the er.. architecture faculty that um.. pretty much they provide technical support for students [hm] so I don't really have the need to join any [hmm] yeah [yeah alright] things like that.

DH: yeah. We'll be exploring those things in um.. in detail later so.. yeah

Y: So, I'm Y. Um.. I'm been here for past one and half years. I came last February last year. Um.. And we.. for us.. during our time we were automatically signed up for the UniMentor program. Um.. I got a UniMentor and.. we just briefly kept in contact.. um.. thru emails and.. [yep] I'm currently, I myself am a UniMentor now [hmm ok yep].

S: I'm S. I'm from the Philippines. I arrive here same... one and half years ago last February. I'm doing architecture as well.. uh.. I got.. I didn't actually got a UniMentor so I just signed up for one. [ok] and..

DH: So you did not get one automatically?

S: yeah [ok] yeah last year. So I just talked to the mentor and then [yep] said sign up. [ok]

DH: That's interesting cos I was of the understanding that any international student automatically gets a UniMentor.

S: Ah.. maybe that's because I'm doing masters..

Y: I don't know..

S: I don't know. Some of my peers automatically get their mentors assigned to them. [ok] I'm not sure why..[hmm]

DH: Maybe you just didn't.

S: I still got it, cos I just signed up.

DH: [laughs] yeah. So.. ok so that means that not all of you have used it. Like.. J in particular.. Not the UniMentor that we're talking about then, you've got your own system. But um.. could you tell me what you know about the program and what you would expect from the program. Like, in general now. Not like what your personal experience is, but, if you think of a UniMentor program, what do you know about it and what would you expect from it?

... [3 sec]

anyone can start. We don't have to go around in circles.[laughing] unless you want to.

J: I would assuming it'd be something like a tutorial outside of class, so they probably run in the weekend or something like that but it doesn't really count as part of your class so. It's kinda like a.. I'm pretty sure some of my tutors are masters student, in a way, so I think they would be qualified for it, being mentor [yep], but they're doing the tutorial just for the class. I.. I assuming the UniMentor be just like tutorial but on the weekend. [hm] When guys deciding to meet up and you know, have a quick session of what you are studying. You know [hmm].

DH: Ok. Anyone else?

S: For me, I think it's a guide for my transition here in uni and also in Perth. So I signed up for UniMentor, as start for me to like learn things cos, I wa.. I was like lost at first cos I'm just new. [yep] yeah [yeah]

Y: for me what I expected from it was just um a student who was doing, who was currently in uni and it'd be easier to ask for guidance and like questions directly rather than just the askUWA, which.. they can't do that.. it's more technical, more administrative [hmm] while through them its like someone whose doing.. who's studying uni and its easier to ask for information around and um yeah, its basically more helpful .. for personal questions, about studies or like how you.. about what you should do.. general life sort of thing.

5:27

DH: Would you see it more as a.. more personal relationship then, rather than like you said the askUWA [yeah definitely] is more [yeah] like more administrative ?

Y: yeah. Definitely. I mean like there is a person answering your questions, not like talking to a robot technically [laughing] [yeah]

DH: yeah.. they do get back to you. [laugh]

Y: [laughing] yeah well they do. But your emails are like, you know there's a person who's like going through maybe what you did, and like you know.. their experiences are, how to prepare for that. [yeah] yeah

DH: what about you P?

P: For me, it's pretty much the same as that, like, a body that you can have fun with, who can give you some.. um.. where to.. where to get a cup of coffee [indecipherable]

DH: Cup of coffee's always good. [yep] [laughs]

So did you meet up with only your UniMentor then, or also with a group?

P: also with a group. [ok]

DH: More like a tutorial that J is talking about, that style, I mean. [group: uhmm] or not really?

P: Not really a tutorial style. It's more of a interval thing

S: get to meet others, start studying the same course as you, and of course UniMentor is higher year than you. [hmm yeah ok].

DH: So.. you've spoken a bit about what you got out of the program, right.. like the benefits for you .. what kind of.. what kind of support do you think students would be looking for like when they come here .. and you know, what you can get through the UniMentor then? What.. yeah.. what do you think?

...[1.5 sec]

S: Hmm Maybe for me, I think its more .. social support [noise of agreement] not just like the academic kind of thing, the uni life. Cos.. uh.. for my experience, I'm international student when I get .. got here so its kinda like I don't know where to like.. go to [hmm] who to talk with in regards about.. especially the uh.. not just the academic itself but the course I'm struggling cos things are very different [yeah] to back home so just yeah.. basically someone to talk with about things [yeah] and then how to tutor..

DH: when you came here, did you know anyone else here?

S: no, I [laugh]

DH: Is that for everyone? Like when you came here, completely on your own, you don't know anyone?

Y: yeah

J: I have a friend, he's doing PhD in social science [yea] so he was.. uh.. he was helping me [yeah] in first year.

DH: and you knew him [I knew him before I came] before he came? Ok. Yeah.

J: he's a.. yeah..

P: My cousin actually [unclear].. so

DH: And so your cousin was here already? [yeah] before you came?

P: yeah. [ok]

Y: No.. I came here, I didn't know anyone. [yeah]

DH: yeah. Yeah. So.. Anyone else, any ideas.. ideas on that – what kinds of support do you think people would be looking for? International students then

Y: Me.. It's basically like the same, its personal support in a sense.. its like what should you bring, what you gonna expect.. you're like weather wise.. uh.. mm.. not sure if I say that, but I'm from Malaysia, so its like tropical country we don't deal with seasons much. So like uh.. [laugh]

DH: And suddenly its like its going to be cold [yeah laughing]

Y: and like.. how cold is cold you know [laughing] yeah..[laughing]

DH: like what's your definition of cold? [agreement; laugh]

But even then, they say it's going to be 7, and you go well, what's does 7 feel like.[yeah] and you still don't really know [not really no]. [laughing]

S: I don't really bother that much as well [yeah] [Y – yeah] its always the same weather

Y: and it seems like ok um.. it's not that cold. And oh its not that cold? And come here like and its actually cold [yeah, Y & S laughing]

And yeah like.. and.. cos yeah for person who doesn't deal with weather like cold weather ok.. like yup this is cold. [yeah laughing] um.. and also like.. yeah for me it was also like wha.. how to like your panicking about your studies, like how do you get your units in order, like I just couldn't wrap my head around like units and... I did like .. I went through several of those you know those videos to help you to find out for a class, [hmm] like how to choose your major. And I'm like why is all this.. why do I have to make so many decisions? [laughing] yeah by.. like.. by like talking to her it's like ok, its this or that, what you should take, or what decision you should make. [yeah] that helped a lot. [yeah] in that sense [yeah]

10:04

P: [unclear] give some suggestion about transportation. How to take bus and .. you need to press a button before [unclear] ..

DH: Press a button before.. sorry?

P: before you tag off.

DH: oh ok. Yeah.

P: yeah..

DH: Do you live here then? [indicating unihall]

P: No.. [unclear] [not close by?]

DH: right. Yeah. .. so you gotta to take public transport.

P: yeah.. [yeah] [laughing] no I (drive? Try?)

And yeah the public transport is like suck. [ok] hm .. kind of..

DH: so.. then did the UniMentor help you with that?

P: No. [no] [hm] no.. [ok]

J: Well, ah.. for me I think the most important thing is to pass.. the .. language barrier [hmhm] so you're able to communicate with the ah.. the locals.. then ah.. and people are friendly then you should have no problems. Everything else.. if you can't even speak English [yeha] I assume you will be extremely hard especially if you go to uni [yeah].. uh.. I have my first class I went to the wrong class so.. [soft laughter] I went to the master of architecture [yeah] sit there for 2 hours didn't really know what I was doing. [everyone laughing] I uh.. yeah that's definitely the most important thing. [yeah]

DH: maybe because you were in the wrong class that you didn't know what you were doing like.. [laughing]

J: yeah and I introduced myself to the .. coordinator as well [right] so yeah a bit embarrassing. I hope he didn't remember me. [everyone laughing]

DH: probably not. [yeah] I don't.. yeah

DH: do they help you.. um navigate campus? Cos you also have the lost on campus um..

P: I used the app to find this room [oh yeah, yeah]

J: well considering I still get lost today [yeah laughing] to come here [.. unclear..]

DH: but.. I gotta tell you though, that the social science building is notorious. Everybody knows that the social science building is where you get lost. [soft laughter]. So there you go.. even with the people who come to social science.. [laughter] we still go.. yep that's the building you get lost. [chuckling] so there you go, it's not just you. Hmm.. yeah

Y: I think .. on the first few days of like.. orientation.. like when we meet.. we had like a guide of the general areas .. of uni.. um so .. like so they bring us round to show us that this is like what .. this is what .. sort of thing.. but not specifically like within the buildings [right] but like general areas.. of uni.. [yeah]

DH: like arts is here, social science [yeah yeah] engineering across there [yeah] and.. [yeah that sort..] and that's helpful, suppose..

Y: um well, when I came I was sort of like prepared just to explore my own. I was like I already came to ca.. came to check out the campus before I went for that thing.. so it was sort of like yeah.. sort of like navigated a bit on my own. [yeah] I didn't really mind much if.. like having a mentor explain much of that specific buildings what's in there so.. yeah

DH: And then even after you been here a long time, then suddenly you gotta go to a new area [yeah] like.. [laughter] today..

I had it a little while ago.. uh.. I had to go get something from.. the education library and its all the way down across the street.. its all the way down there [yeah] [laughing] I'd never been there before so.. [laughing] [yeah yeah]

DH: Uh.. J.. you in particular.. you did not engage with the UniMentor [not at all]. So yeah.. you did say a little bit of your reasons.. do you think you could just um..

J: I think when I came here even there were someone trying to be my mentor I don't think I'd be able to understand them. [right] so I guess maybe someone saying would you like a mentor and I'd.. I probably assume you're ask me something else. Yeah I think I skipped the entire process. [laugh] go through the hell with my first couple of years [yeah] its all good. [yeah].

DH: but then you did have a cousin.. you said.. no?

J: I have a .. not a cousin.. like a friend [yep] he's ah .. he's a .. he's doing PhD and he's .. he's like 3rd year um.. he used to study in the US and.. Yeah he bring me around .. and uh.. like a lot of things .. so I don't .. I don't.. I also uh.. have.. I live in a student college.. I think you probably already know.. but um.. I made like.. a lot of friend in my first year. They're showing me things around and so.. yeah its not really that bad [yeah] at all. [yeah]

DH: so then.. your basic reason would have been that you didn't really know what the UniMentor was for? And that's why you did not engage with it you think?

J: I probably didn't think about it.. but I .. I think at the time I didn't really have the need to [yeah] yeah.. at that time [yeah] ... and I don't think they will help me in my .. language [hmm right].. area as well .. but [yeah]

DH: is that one of the areas you really struggled with?

J: yeah [language] yeah very much [others laugh]

15:01

..[2 sec]

DH: So then.. in general, have you heard other people's reasons for not using the UniMentor.. is this something that is discussed? Um.. among the international students?

[unclear murmurs]

J: I assume part of it is because language barrier as well, assuming that UniMentor probably speak English right?

DH: I would assume so.. yeah

J: yeah.. so mostly you will be speaking English and.. my a lot of my friends [murmur .. Chinese] yeah.. if you can find someone who can speak Chinese.. that's awesome.. but.. at least as far as I know.. a lot of my Chinese friend .. they finish their 5 year degree ..but they still probably wouldn't really prefer to speak English [hmm] unless they have to.. [hmm] if you speak English properly you would prefer to speak to someone who speaks same language as well [yeah]

DH: So you said yours is was Chinese.. or is? Your UniMentor?

P: yeah we talk in Chinese [yeah]

DH: So then.. would that be helpful.. to say.. ok you come from China, we try to link you up with a Chinese speaking mentor.. you come from Philippines.. I don't know.. I'm guessing.. English would be suitable? [yeah] do you think that kind of a thing would help?

J: when you can't speak English.. definitely [laugh]

DH: if you can't speak English definitely yeah. [hmm]

Y: From my knowledge now.. currently as a UniMentor.. a lot of us .. from like my batch.. when we did.. a lot of us .. do speak Mandarin. Um.. so.. um.. from what I know.. like the mentees and stuff.. like we do engage in like.. if any help in Mandarin [right] yeah.. um.. yeah so a lot of them also Chinese students who also engage.. I think they kinda match those up with those from the home country. [yeah]. So they do try to do that now. [yeah] yeah. But prior I'm not really sure. But currently.. they.. for this semester they did.. [yeah]

DH: so they do try to link them up. [cough] that sounds like it's a good .. uh a good plan

S: but for me.. I'm not really sure.. because I'm a UniMentor as well [hmm] myself.. and for my experience being a mentee its just.. almost always me that shows up at a meeting and stuff with my mentors.. and therefore this semester most of the mentees I got respond this.. are from .. [unclear] so I think .. most of them are Chinese or from other countries, but I think they're not really engaging much with the UniMentor I don't know why.

J: I'm pretty sure if they can speak with them they would be willing to..[laugh] you know communicate. I think sometimes it's a little bit awkward if you can't even finish your sentence [yes] yeah.

S: Ah. I think yeah .. that's the same for me.. cos I'm not really good with English .. if.. uh.. specially [unclear] struggling with what to say.. but still I think I just tried hard you have to talk a lot with my UniMentor .. always have coffee with her.. talk about things and she's always asking me how I'm doing so far..

18:16

Dh: So you, have a UniMentor still now then?

S: Nah.. it's just last year [ok] so.. during the start of my semester [yep].

DH: And so did you keep up contact the whole semester?

S: Kind of like the whole semester. Towards the end, its not really very much cos its getting busy [laughs] [yep] yah [hmm]

DH: good time to do coffee together.. [laugh] [laugh] yeah yeah

OK so then.. maybe just going back to the UniMentor .. program.. what are some real definite benefits that you really felt.. helped you, made you feel more confident.. about being at UWA, whatever that might be?

Y: hmm.. for me that would be.. for me that.. like I.. um.. presented before, being able to talk to a person, really [laughs] rather than just yeah admin like.. I .. I .. don't think can help me much but being able to talk to a person with like regards to um.. like how.. how should I you know start life here in.. in Perth or at uni, what.. what do I need that sort of thing. Being able to talk to that.. its just generally helpful [hm] rather than yeah.. being able to ask admin, which is kind of awkward. [laugh]. [yeah] yeah yeah.

S: I'm the same as well. Also cos I got UniMentor .. so I kind of like have an overview of what to expect on my units [yep yes ok] from a student's perspective, course, so that's really most helpful I think for me so far. What do I need to do for the start like do this .. as early as you can so you not bother doing it last minute [yeah] something like that. Also like, similar thing where you can get food, or where to buy this stuff cos like in architecture we buy a lot of materials for models [right] so kind of ask where [yeah] to buy yah [yeah].

DH: so then for you, and for J as well, it'd be very helpful having like an architecture student who is your mentor [yeah] because like if you were to ask me [yep] where do I buy this and this for a project, [laugh] I'd go [I know] I don't know [right]

J: they do teach you that in a class [ok] they tell you everything you need to know in a class [ok], so..

S: but for me, no.. cos I started masters not from undergrad so its kind of like into middle already [yeah] yah.. [laughs] so kinda got lost cos my classmates know already this stuff [hm] but me [yeah] I'm kind still lost [hmm] hmm. Really hard

to talk with others.. students as well cos most of the classes are like different classes for me[yep] so yah [laughs].

DH: So then you don't have your friends that move from unit to unit you mean [yeah] yeah right

What about you P?

P: Umm.. I mean cos the assignment guy was from the same faculty as me [unclear] and he give me his textbooks as well. [ok]

DH: with answers in? [laughs] with notes and answers in [laughing]?

P: its blank

DH: blank ones [laughing] but not quite that much help then [laugh]

P: oh but still a textbook [yeah]

DH: cos they're expensive too, aren't they? Yeah

Yeah so.. um.. do you think that you would encourage um.. future international students .. do you would you say, yeah definitely should do a UniMentor or .. or you know .. what do you think?

P: definitely

DH: definitely you should engage

Y: definitely give it a shot. And if you feel like you do not need that kind of support system you just withdraw its like no.. no extra charge, no extra commitment sort of thing, its .. yeah definitely give it a shot. Try and if you're like, pretty ok, pretty well balanced already then you can always let them know [hm]. I don't think you lose

DH: Yeah true. [yeah] right that's one way to look at it.

Y: Yeah definitely like all of us, like I don't know as mentors, we volunteer to help also so like yeah.. they, you don't

S: I really recommend to get a UniMentor as well. It's kind of like a start to get [hmm] to know the uni and course and the student yep. [hm]

DH: and J, what do you think?

J: sure why not. [yeah sure try it, laughing].

DH: you were talking earlier about um.. you know the real difficulties of integrating I suppose.. getting into the system here.. um.. so now you've heard them talk about um.. you know the UniMentor and what they've done, do you think that if you had engaged with the UniMentor, even though at that time you didn't really know what it was all about and everything, do you think it would have made a difference to you experience coming here?

23:15

J: um.. probably. Probably, I don't know. I didn't join, but, I'm pretty sure there are other ways to you know get to uni and to get to know other people as well um.. I'm I'm.. I was really lucky to have a lot of friend who is being really supporting [yep] in terms of my awkward English situation [yeah] so I always find for me.. I'm pretty sure if someone didn't have no one to talk to or something they probably find the UniMentor pretty useful. For me, I .. I think I was doing fine without it [yeah] so yeah [yeah]

DH: But then for.. say following students, if you know someone who is thinking about coming here, what would you encourage them to do?

J: Um.. I guess a UniMentor could be nice but.. I think they probably should um.. just participate more in the social events at UWA. It runs a lot of, I think.. I read a UWA page, like free yoga, free all kinds of social events.. just join them. I'm pretty sure you can find some of them you're interested in. It would be useful to improve your overall awareness of the situation at uni [yeah]. So.. [its true yeah].

DH: did you guys do some of that with your mentor at the time?

S: me.. na [laughs]

DH: no.. just having coffee [laughs]

S: just class.. and then going to the library together.

Y: I didn't really get much of that [someone laughing] to be honest um.. yah she just.. she just really connected like contacted me through emails. So [right] but also at that point of time I was really lucky I stay at um.. um.. stay on campus.. so at that time.. like yeah I created my own different support systems so.. [yeah] in the end it was just general questions and after that like yeah.. I could definitely um.. yeah.. um.. like benefit myself from the program anymore so I found yeah.. like yup [yeah] like develop my own support system. [yeah]

DH: what about you?

P: um.. yes.. we went out for lunch a couple of times [yeah].

DH: Cos I saw on the website that they did also do like social groups with .. you know how you have a UniMentor and then they would have like.. be responsible for a group.. and that as a group you did things together as well? Did that happen a lot?

S: Um no.. [no ok]

J: What type of thing are you talking about?

DH: I think it was social events um.. that's the way it was promoted on the website.

J: what.. what is it related?

DH: as part of the UniMentor.. that the mentor would have say 5 people and that as a group that they would then.. I don't know.. maybe say let's go to Perth

together or [ok social events] yeah social events, it's like what you were talking about like even here you could join in um.. [yeah]

Y: so doing the orientation program, there are some events which we they .. get UniMentors to help out and like bring.. we can bring our groups and stuff like that. And also there was this quiz night for like.. UniMentor events and so.. basically a few activities to like engage everyone together from UniMentors and different groups together and like.. yeah.. just .. create that kind of activities [hmm]. And I think for the students.. if I'm not wrong.. there are also events that like.. they'd go on short trips to Albany and like.. yeah in the future .. I'm aware of that [yeah]

DH: so like excursions out around..

Y: yeah.. excursions out [hmm] like.. yeah [hmm]

DH: did you do any of them?

P: ah.. no. [No] I didn't turn out like social events.

DH: so not um.. separate ones either.. the ones that J was talking about. That like you know.. you can .. [unclear] cos these you get through the Facebook page don't you? The events at UWA?

J: yeah can subscribe to UWA sports, UWA yoga and to UWA [yeah yeah]

DH: [laughing] take your pick]

J: yeah find something you like. Take your pick definitely. Um.. [yeah] yeah they run once in a week. And I'm pretty sure some even offer free lunch or something [murmur of agreement] if you just want to grab a [yeah] sandwich or a..

DH: did you um.. did you do some of them?

J: yeah. I joined a lot of them in my first year.. but mostly I joined the UWA basketball club [yeah right] I'm big basketball person so [ok].. this sort is sufficient for me. [yeah]

DH: and P?

P: um.. I see you yesterday..

J: yeah I was wondering. I think I saw you yesterday.

DH: at basketball

J: yeah [ok] let's just go there this afternoon.

DH: do you play as well?

P: Yeah but not much go ahead. I play netball. [oh ok soft laughter yeah that's good]

DH: yeah um.. yeah that was really all for my questions. Anything else that any of you would like to share or.. reiterate you know say this was really really good or this was really not good or any last thoughts that any of you would have?

... [3 sec]

S: hmm [actually]

.. [2 sec]

J: I suggesting the operation should probably have someone who would tell you.. cos I'm pretty sure they already have the Hub in the.. on the ground floor. [unclear agreement?] Yeah yeah they teach you technical stuff of the program but um.. they're a little bit limited because they only have a few people there and.. Like sometimes with some complexity .. I think it would be better if you have some let's say two or three UniMentor that actually teach you the program and the.. you know software.

DH: Is this for architecture then?

S: yeah

J: yeah I'm not sure about the other major [yeah] cos I'm.. but I'm pretty sure a lot of student even just you know in my class the last few days a lot of people have problem with the program [hmm] and sometimes they you know they need a little bit of technical support. You can find if from youtube but sometimes .. because the.. they have these specific demands in your assignment [yep] and if you have a UniMentor they probably already know the requirements for those things.

DH: because they've done it before [laugh].

J: yeah they've done those units [yeah] so maybe they will give you some more reliable advice like that.

S: I want to say something about that because all the staff in all the Hub is selected by the ah.. the faculty I think those are good performing students or the staff also. It's like different community members whereas like UniMentor is like voluntary. That is like paid by the uni to do tutorials and stuff [right] about the technical side of stuff.

J: I actually don't mind to pay them. I was just assuming the idea of UniMentor [S laugh] could just be more.. flexible as in the.. if I need the .. say advice in Saturday or something I can't find anyone [right] from the Hub right? [yeah]

S: [oh yeah Saturdays]

DH: cos its closed then is it?

J: I'm pretty sure all assignments are due in the weekend [agreement; laughter]

30:27

Y: yeah definitely like the pro.. like cos we know about the program so that out of [unclear] so we can basically provide support system but [yeah] we.. as we are not obligated to give any tutorials [hmm] we can do that if we choose to personally but..

S: yeah but mostly just guide but not like how to do this and how to do that.

Y: [yah guide] [yeah yeah] it's sort of like a conflict of interests from our part.
Yeah [yeah]

S: Alva Hub is more of academic kind of thing but for us its more like meeting in the uni [yeah]

DH: more social [yeah] and getting [yeah] finding your way around UWA [yeah] whereas that's very specific support [support]

S: so for me, because I'm a UniMentor from architecture I just told my mentees about Alva Hub that there is the students.. that are running this tutorials for a specific program so you can just drop by for any assignment help [hmm] .. so just.. yeah point it out to Alva Hub before .. [unclear] not UniMentor stuff [yeah].

Y: and ah.. for me.. like especially that language barrier, its like .. we do try .. I completely understand having not underst.. not being proficient in another language um.. um.. yeah but it does help if try to engage yourself, like we try to engage in something.. I'm really lucky. My mentees are very engaging. They do try even though they don't .. they don't um.. they're not really proficient, they do try and I.. I also do try the same time um.. and.. they're really nice too, like we very engaging in the program and.. if they did ask me any questions of help on the forms and stuff like that I .. generally do provide that kind of.. I do just generally do that on my own time yeah all those things.. [hmm]

DH: so basically really just becoming proficient in English [laughter] would be like.. pity you can't just buy that off the shelf hey.. [laughter] slip it in.[yeah yeah] I sometimes think that.. that that would be lovely [laughter] Did you..

P: just because um.. I'm doing a bachelor degree so they teach us everything [ok] so I think its much easier for .. than doing master.. then you know everything [right]. [yeah]

DH: are you doing architecture, no? [no] no you're doing engineering you said [ya]. Ok. So you, you didn't do your undergrad here did you?

J: I did [oh you did as well ok].

DH: so yeah. .. so that was the last thing.. if anyone else had anything to say before I turn it off. Any you know last gems? [laugh]

S: maybe for me its .. ah.. a big group that UniMentor.. that UniMentor has because in architecture its mostly like 8-10 mentees per group because there's very few that's joining the UniMentor program as a mentor. [ok] so.. it's kinda hard for us to like engage and be support especially if there .. not.. no offense but uh.. like more like they group together basically like cultural.. [right] but I understand that ..its just that for you to .. specially the English problems .. for you

to break with that.. I think its better to get engaged with other people as well.. specially with mentor

DH: so you feel that the groups are a bit big [laugh] so that you have too many mentees to manage and to be able to really engage.. is that what you're saying?

S: yeah but I think its different for [ya] other courses cos I think maybe for us.. I don't know .. mentor for us.. its very few. There's 3 of us in the whole architecture and visual arts [wow] [laugh]

DH: yeah that's not very many. Yeah. Yeah and then that does stretch you doesn't it [yeah] too many people. Good. Yeah.. any last things? No.

Well.. I do really appreciate that you guys came and spent this time with me.

