

QEP Mentoring Proposal
Or
Making Students Feel at Home!

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First of all, "Mentor" is not really the correct word. If anyone wants to help come up with a better alternative, go for it!

Challenges to be Addressed

The low retention and graduation rates of UH students is extremely worrisome. While current student service and support mechanisms are vigorous and generally "not broken," the size of the campus and bureaucratic complexity can be overwhelming to new students. A three-pronged scheme to (a) provide students with a friendly face to help them throughout their college experience (particularly in the first semesters); (b) enable priority/emergency treatment of a student's problems where appropriate; (c) smooth the students' transition with a course that provides academic, personal and institutional information.

Basic Plan*The Mentor*

- Every in-coming UH student will be assigned a "mentor," selected from a group of volunteer faculty, staff or involved alumni. (*upper-class students as well?*)
- The interaction can begin as early as the student's application process. The "mentor" can make contact with a prospective student offering extra advice about the campus, offer to meet for a visit etc.
- Before or within the first week of the student's first semester on campus, the two should meet. This can be in an office or, preferably, a lunch/coffee informal situation.

The Support System

- As part of the program, full-time staff at each of the following offices will be dedicated to providing priority treatment and support to "mentors" for their students:
 - Financial Aid
 - Registrar
 - University Studies Advising
 - CAPS
- There would also be designated "mentor contacts" in all academic and other student service departments.
- The "mentor" can serve as a screening intermediate to decide whether a student's problems deserve to be addressed under emergency conditions.

The Course

Every new coming student will be required to register in their first semester for a "Introduction to UH" course. This will include the usual how to study/manage time topics as well as detailed descriptions of student services on campus and introductions to important people and areas.

Potential Cost

- The scheme is sufficiently large that a coordinating office should be established with a staff of three to four full-time employees. Four further full-time employees would be needed in the offices listed above.
- Some form of support could be offered as inducement for potential mentors. This could be of the form of support for on-campus meals or other expenses.

Evaluation

The effectiveness of the program could be measured in several ways:

- Changes in overall retention and graduation rates
- Changes in retention rates of students in identified "at-risk" groups
- Changes in average GPA and performance in core classes of students in identified "at-risk" groups
- Interviews with students after one semester, one year and at graduation

The assumption is mainly that students who stay in school will have an increase in learning!

Benefits

Obvious increase in UH retention and graduation rates, leading to improved ratings. This in turn would enhance the institution's ability to improve further!

An increased number of graduated students from disadvantaged socio-economic groups would obviously benefit society as a whole.

External Funding

Doubtful!