

Provision of Study Skills

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Background:

QMUL has a significant percentage of students no longer in HE after leaving the institution during their first year of studies (almost 10% for 2010 entrants, with the national average at 7.3%). (HESA website via Times Higher Education, 1 Sept 2014). This is significantly higher than other Russell Group universities. QMUL also has a significant percentage of students from the lowest socioeconomic groups at the institution, over 32%, which is higher than the national average of 31.5% and also significantly higher than other Russell Group

A review of the 128 students listed on the Law DMS website as having withdrawn from the university in their first year of studies (from 2010-present) indicated that these factors are present in the Law Department. Students issed as having withdrawn from the university in their first year of studies appeared to meet some or all of the following requirements: having attended a state school or college, coming from specified socio-economic classes, and coming from low-participation neighbourhoods.

Aims:

The main project aim was to reduce the number of students withdrawing from the Law Department in their first year. This would improve the QM student experience in a number of respects. First, students who would otherwise have not benefitted from the complete student experience would be able to complete the first year and, it is anticipated, the degree as a whole. Second, students at QM who remain at the university would benefit from the presence of students from diverse backgrounds and socioeconomic groups throughout their time at QM.



Evaluation:

A comment from one student who had worked with mentor B said, "I decided to stop my mentoring sessions due to time constraints. I am a mature student and am currently in employment (freelance) and ultimately felt that I had to maximise my times to catching up on studying my modules My tutor [B] was very helpful in the time I participated. She prepared and researched topics we wanted more information on, and provided us with handouts." The students who had worked with tutor A also commented very positively, prising the tutor and commenting positively about the effects of the mentoring sessions on their skills and confidence levels.

PG Mentoring:

This project attempted to [i] identify those students entering the 3 year Laws LLB programme who meet these requirements; and (ii) provide them with the extra help and study skills that will assist them to succeed at QMUL.

Skills Provided:

The extra help and study skills provided were as follows: two hours each week of extra instruction; assignment of graduate student advisers who will keep in close contact with the students and intervene if the students fall behind; and the provision of 2nd and 3nd year students to work with the selected students one-to-one, as peer mentors.



Future of the Project:

The project will be continued in the future through the work of the Engagement, Retention and Success (ERS) team, which has agreed to fund the project in 2016-17. The ERS group has agreed to fund the project in one HSS and one S&E department. These will be the Law Department and EECS.

The programme was designed for bursary recipients in the School of Law, of whom there were 53 in the first year. The programme was offered, at various times, to all 53 students who were informed that they had been randomly selected for the programme. Ultimately, 16 students agreed to participate in the programme. Eight students worked with one postgraduate mentor (A) and the other 8 students worked with the other postgraduate mentor (B). Thirteen of the 16 students completed a questionnaire at the end of the mentoring sessions.



Aims Met:

In 2015-16, only 6 first year students withdrew from the Law Department. This is a significant reduction from 2014-15, in which 11 first year students withdrew from the Law Department.

Challenges

The main challenge faced with the project was the varying skill level of the mentors. Both mentors were QMUL postgraduate students. However, all of the students assigned to mentor A completed the mentoring sessions, and 7 of 8 of the students assigned to mentor B withdrew from the programme prior to the end of the second term. However, even those students who withdrew had positive comments in the evaluation forms.



Evaluation:

The students commented positively on their evaluation forms. 100% of students, including several of the students who had worked with mentor 8, strongly agreed or agreed that the sessions helped them with analytic skills (legal reasoning), problem solving skills, intellectual curiosity, time management skills, reflective and self-analytic skills, academic performance in course work and exams, and confidence. 92.3% of students strongly agreed or agreed that the sessions helped them with oral communication skills and research skills, and 84.6% of students strongly agreed or agreed that the sessions helped them with written communication skills.