



Indigenous School Student Mentoring Program

The University of Western Sydney Schools Engagement Program provides primary and high school students with opportunities to not only improve their academic performance, but also to expand their horizons.

The Indigenous School Student Mentoring Program is making a difference to the way young Indigenous students think about themselves and their futures. From year 10, students can take part in a variety of activities which help to build their academic and study skills and awareness of further education and career options. Each school student is assigned a UWS student as a mentor, and the program incorporates Indigenous cultural knowledge, including learning sessions conducted by Indigenous elders, academics and community members.

Participants are encouraged to continue at school until the end of year 12 and to consider going on to university or other post-school education. The program helps students to explore these possibilities and make better-informed decisions

about their future paths. Regardless of the choices students make, the program is designed to help them learn more about themselves and increase their skills and confidence. This will lead to better opportunities and the ability to take full advantage of these.

The mentors also benefit from personal and professional development and from gaining more awareness of Indigenous Australian culture and the barriers faced by Indigenous students in education. They are trained in mentoring, Indigenous cultural awareness and working-with-children before meeting their mentees.

After joining the program students and their families meet with mentors and take part in a ceremony where they are formally welcomed to the program.





This is followed by:

- On-campus workshops. Subjects include Indigenous cultural awareness and knowledge, the sciences, caring for the environment, creative writing and mathematics, with others to be added in 2010. Workshops are 'hands-on' – the students do interesting things and have fun while learning.
- One-on-one mentoring. The mentors visit the students at school to discuss educational goals and exchange news and views.
- Group project. The students at each school devise and implement a project of benefit to their school or community. The mentors facilitate group sessions where the project is designed and developed.

Feedback on all aspects of the program and from all involved – school students, mentors, school staff and UWS staff – has been very positive.

One of the Deputy Principals stated:

“Through the program students felt valued ... they started to believe that there were possibilities that they hadn't considered for themselves ... that suddenly they could achieve ... they could aspire to and realise their potential and more importantly that they were worthy of success ...”

The program began as a pilot in 2009 and will be expanded to more schools in 2010, with the potential to help many more Indigenous students set and achieve their educational goals.

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