(Virtual) mentorship as a tool to improve learner success in Higher Education.

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The concept of mentorship is well-known and information regarding this is readily available by pressing a button. It is widely implemented in the management and education environments. In South Africa (SA), mentoring the designated groups is noted on the transformation agendas. Mentoring has a long tradition in higher education (HE), although it does not necessarily feature in the policies and procedures of South African HE institutions. Our view is that mentorship has the special ability to give participants the opportunity to share knowledge, develop skills, and to grow.

Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) has put into service a mentorship policy. A success story regarding a peer mentorship programme (TAMP), using an online booking system (http://tamp.tut.ac.za), will be shared. This success story will additionally demonstrate how policy, technology, and skills-management can help in implementing educational programmes aimed at improving learners' performance and promote interactive learning.

The Technical Applications Mentorship Programme (TAMP) is a cost-free programme dedicated to assisting registered learners in the Faculty of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) at TUT. TAMP mentors are trained senior learners, who assist junior learners (mentees) with programming languages like COBOL; C++; VB.NET; and JAVA.

The Student Development and Support (SDS) Directorate coaches our mentors every semester on the following modules: mentor guidelines; mentoring with emotional intelligence; career mentoring; academic mentoring & training; and mentoring in a learning community. After a year of service TAMP mentors are awarded an SDS Merit Certificate.

The roles of TAMP mentors have extended over the years; they now include among other things participation in the learnership programme of the ICT Department (i.e.

ITBLP); conferences; teacher training; writing monthly reports; attending monthly meetings, advertising the programme by word of mouth, etc.

In recognition of the importance of policy, TAMP has also adopted a policy which governs the roles and tasks of each participating learner. TAMP Policy further identifies the code of conduct, the processes involved, and the procedures employed in dealing with issues within the programme.

The programme was launched in 2003, and today it has a successful rate of 60%, with twenty mentors (including those who have joined the ICT industry [virtual mentors], and three mentors who have become junior lecturers), and a website (which has over 700 registered learners). The total cost (i.e. remuneration of the mentors) of running this programme is now R 12 000 per annum.

The TAMP website allows learners to book for a mentor online. Moreover they can participate in activities such as mentors evaluation, surveys, competitions, brain teasers, forums, workshops, joining computer societies, or downloading resources like TAMP magazine, articles, and general news.

The use of technology, and hence the development of the TAMP mentorship website, has given the programme the advantage of having a self-service setting with learners being able to diarise mentorship sessions, provide feedback, and also to plan their

activities effectively. The website is also used to analyze topics such as those listed below:

- what is the pass rate per semester?

- Which topic/module/subject is booked most by mentees?

- Which mentor is booked most frequently?

- Which mentor is most highly rated by mentees?

- How many bookings occur per semester?

- What is the overall pass rate of TAMP?

Collectively, these features enable the facilitator to identify grey areas within each programming module.

Virtual mentorship is achieved by having learners come into contact with some of the senior mentors who are currently working in the IT industry through forums and email communications. Virtual mentorship offers advisors to the learners, as well as to their fellow mentors still on campus. More importantly, virtual mentors add their industry [programming] experience to the process of supporting the overall quality objectives of the programme.

Since each mentor is providing assistance in his/her areas of strength, the programme manages to use his/her individual skills to drive the course of quality mentorship.