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SHARED LEARNING

Towards a Model of

Academic Support

in the

University Residential Context

A thesis
submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
of the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
at

JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY

by

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2005

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STATEMENT OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF OTHERS

Support for the completion of the thesis was obtained via the following sources.

AHAUCHI Travelling Fellowship

As the inaugural recipient of this travelling fellowship, funded by the Association of Heads of Australian University Colleges and Halls, I was able to travel to America in April/May 2003 to visit and survey students at Middlebury, UMass and Yale.

To my beloved wife, son and daughter
and to

Marie

who first told me that I would *make* a
good teacher

ADOLESCENCE

I was a worshipper of the foolhardy and the melodramatic, a dreamer and a moper, raging at life and loving it, a mind in a chrysalis yet erupting with sudden bursts of maturity. In this labyrinth of distorting mirrors I dallied, my ambition going in spurts.

(Charlie Chaplin, *My Autobiography,*1964)

MENTOR

For am I not your father's friend,
and ready to find you a fast ship
and sail with you myself?

(Homer, *The Odyssey,* Penguin 1946)

ABSTRACT

There has been virtually no research into the academic or collegiate nature of university halls and colleges in Australia despite a 150 year history. It is a history that can be viewed over three periods of development, the denominational, the secular and the independent periods. However, collegiate models that were established in the denominational era were done in the context of secular universities and in a competitive rather than co-operative spirit with other churches. The same model of academic support established in Australian colleges in the earliest period seems to prevail in the current promotional literature of colleges.

This study sets out to explore the nature of academic support in the context of university residential colleges with a view to identifying best practices. Supplementary to this aim was the need to examine the nature of the college as a living and learning environment and the expectations and adjustments of students to university and college.

Six models of academic support in colleges are identified in this study. The one most espoused by colleges is the Academic Intervention Model. This entails the use of postgraduates as academic advisors or consultants by appointment. They may run additional tutorials in subjects or be available for personal consultancy and have other pastoral, social and disciplinary duties. This model is, in fact, espoused more than all five other models combined including the Peer Assistance Model where mutual academic support was seen to occur

naturally with very little administrative demands upon the college. The mentoring literature revealed that learning amongst individuals at an informal, personal and even private level was universal and ubiquitous. The nature of colleges seemed to indicate that they created an ideal environment in which peer tutoring, peer mentoring and peer assistance could thrive. They are living and learning environments where, on average, 200 students with a similar purpose come together, having left home, in search of greater independence, new experiences, new relationships and, most of all, supportive friendships.

Surveys of students across 12 colleges, including three in the United States, demonstrated that not only did residential students access academic support most often from each other, but that they accessed tutors in residence, the most established source of academic support in college, least of all categories including faculty academics. In fact, students sought academic support from each other, especially in college, more than all other categories of support combined. The development of peer assistance models at Weerona College, University of Wollongong, was examined as a specific case study. The peer assistance model is perceived as allowing for a non-intervening approach to propagating a network of academic support in college. It is seen to release many benefits for individual students, the college and the broader university in developing a genuine learning culture that further enhances the academic support impact of the tutor in residence.

In addition, the implications for further research into the much neglected area of learning outside the classroom; that is, the informal learning we all do

amongst our friends, family, workmates, tutors and mentors, are extensive, important and go unrecognized and undervalued.

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Yale University College	New Haven, Connecticut, USA
Campus East	University of Wollongong
Residential Halls	CSU Riverina
Monash Residential Services	Monash University
St Paul's College	Sydney University
Residential Colleges	UWS Hawkesbury
Emmanuel College	University of Queensland
Lincoln College	Adelaide University
St John's College	Sydney University
Weerona College	University of Wollongong

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