MENTORING AND COUNCIL

All you need to know about the VU Council Mentoring Scheme
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The role of a Victoria University Council member is a complex and demanding one. As such Council aims to give maximum support to new Council members through a variety of induction activities.

One of these activities is the Council Mentoring Scheme.

The mentoring scheme pairs a newly appointed Council member with an experienced Councillor, with a view to furthering an awareness of the Council and its operations and assisting new Council members in their introduction to a new institution, and our role in its superintendence.

The mentoring scheme has been operating for two years. This booklet provides some background and details about the scheme with a view to increasing its effectiveness. It also acknowledges existing members of Council who have participated in the mentoring scheme as a means of helping to foster the good governance of the University.
A mentor is an experienced and trusted advisor. In the setting of the VU Council a mentor helps to ease and support the introduction of a new Council member to the complex dynamics of a university Council. The mentor provides encouragement to participate fully in the breadth of the role and provides confidential advice to the new Council member to assist him/her to understand, and add value to the business and operation of Council.

Mentoring can be both formal and informal in its approach. In its most formal setting a mentor can assist the mentored to reach specific goals. This approach requires a dedicated plan and focus over an extended period of time. Alternatively, on a more informal level, a mentor can coach, listen and provide feedback in a less structured and goal-oriented manner.

WHAT IS A MENTOR?
For the mentor, the activity allows the individual to:

• extend their networks;

• share their knowledge, skills, expertise and insights;

• experience personal satisfaction through the knowledge that they are assisting and enriching another by sharing their ideas and experience; and

• be exposed to new ideas and ways of thinking from the person being mentored.

The mentored has the opportunity to:

• work with someone who has already been through the experience;

• have someone with whom to share and bounce off their ideas and reactions;

• receive advice and guidance from someone within the VU Council;

• explore areas of uncertainty as they arise regarding any aspect of Council process, content, dynamic or expectation; and

• increase their confidence and ability to fully participate, and enjoy their role as a member of Council.
Mr Ben Foskett – a VU Council Mentor in 2009.

• At the beginning of each year the Council Secretary communicates with existing members of Council, inviting them to submit expressions of interest to become mentors for newly appointed members of Council.

• The newly-appointed members could be external Council members, elected staff, or student representatives on Council. Effort is made to pair individuals with similar Council categories and common ground — for example, pairing existing external Council members with new external Council members.

• The participation of Council members (mentor and mentored) is voluntary.

• A new Council member is paired with a VU Council member who has previous experience on the VU Council.

• The Council Secretary facilitates an exchange of contact details and then the mentor and mentored arrange an initial informal, face-to-face meeting, at their own convenience.

• Follow-up contact may be periodic (as required and mutually agreed) via telephone, prior to Council meetings or ‘over coffee’. It is anticipated that formal mentoring arrangements will cease after about six months.

• Both individuals may elect to work on activities or arrange to attend meetings, conferences and other events together.

• At the end of the mentoring process, program participants will be encouraged to meet to review and share reflections on the program with a view to continuous improvement.

• The Pro Vice-Chancellor Students will provide an additional and specific mentoring scheme for student members of Council.
While the Governance and Policy Branch operates a successful induction program for new Council members, and the guide *Counselling Council* offers comprehensive information regarding the University, the Council and all aspects of governance, a mentoring scheme provides new Council members with a personal introduction to being a Council member. It is anticipated that the program will be particularly useful for those new members who have little or no direct experience of the governance role or membership of boards or councils.

Mentors may wish to use the following list as a starting point when considering what matters are appropriate for discussion and sharing of insights with their mentoring partner:

- general information about Council, its meetings, format, dynamics, standing committees and associated procedures, terminology, expectations, protocols and annual cycle of processes;
- an overview of Victoria University and its operations from the Council perspective;
- an understanding of how VU operates within the higher education sector, with particular reference to its dual sector status;
- opportunities for adding value to Council functioning and role;
- opportunities for professional development, both formal and informal;
- opportunities to contribute one’s own professional expertise for the benefit of Council and the University;
- opportunities for professional and personal networking;
- suggested schedule (mutually suitable location, frequency, time) for mentoring meetings;
- ways to offer informal moral support and a ‘friendly face’ especially for the first couple of meetings; and
- what the mentoring partner hopes to gain from the program.
• Both the mentor and mentored should have realistic goals about what they hope to achieve from the mentoring process and communicate these to each other.

• Throughout the period of mentoring, both parties should talk about their expectations of themselves, each other, and the mentoring process. It may evolve that both individuals see value in continuing the process over a longer period.

• To maximise their time, both parties should also clarify how often they wish to meet, when and where. If required, the University will organise an appropriate meeting space.

• To build trust, both the mentor and mentored need to be honest and open at all times and, most importantly, respect any confidences that may be shared.
Dr Richard Gould is a current Council Mentor to a newly elected member of Council.

“Will you kindly mentor one of the new student members of Council?” the Council Secretary asked.

Putting the phone down, I realised I had many questions about how to be a mentor, what was involved, and what was expected.

When planning our first meeting, I wondered, do I ask my mentee what’s important to him, or do I assume that I know what’s important? Do I try to tell him the things that I think are important now, from my viewpoint as a long-term, non-executive director, or should I cover what seemed important to me years ago when I joined my first board?

In both contexts, how biased are my views? For example, I believe good board performance involves having detailed knowledge about governance matters plus a set of inter-personal skills. I know that I’ll be hard-pressed to avoid bringing pre-conceived ideas to my mentoring relationship.

Should I initially ask what he wants to know before I head into talking about how I see the Council at VU? I also want to learn a little about him before beginning our first meeting so that I understand something of his fears, strengths, the reasons he’s joining Council, etc. Where and when should we meet? Over coffee? Beer? Lunch? How often should we meet?

I have now been a mentor to the new Council member for three months. During these months I’ve met with my mentee on several occasions, and our relationship continues. I’ve found that I’m fortunate because my mentee is hard working, intelligent and interpersonally capable, amongst other good things. We’ve talked about both people issues and governance matters, and he is booked in to attend a one-day course for new directors. He’s also pro-active about contacting me so I neither need to chase him for a chat nor wonder whether he’s silently in trouble. I’m enjoying being a mentor and the knowledge that I’m facilitating the professional and personal development of my mentee. It’s a most satisfying and rewarding experience.
Mr Yuan Fang – a new Council member in 2009.

REFLECTIONS OF THE MENTORED BY MR YUAN FANG

Mr Yuan Fang is a newly elected student member of Council.

“To date, I have met with my mentor three times. I have found that he is experienced and extremely knowledgeable. Being a new member of Council and one of two student representatives on Council, having a mentor has been extremely beneficial to me. I have found my mentor to be very forthcoming with sharing his experience and knowledge with me.

At our first meeting, he shared some of his experiences of being a Council member and we also had a chat about our backgrounds. I asked him questions about the responsibility of being a Council member and the importance of this role.

In subsequent meetings we have discussed the importance of interpersonal skills and governance knowledge, and how these contribute to being a successful member of Council.”
As Pro Vice-Chancellor Students I provide a form of mentoring to the two student members of Council in addition to the mentoring they receive from a senior member of Council. This ‘student focussed’ mentoring is designed with two aspects in mind. Firstly, it aims to complement the Student Leadership Program in place within the University and recognise that not only are the students members of Council, but they are also part of the wider student leadership community. Secondly, the mentoring endeavours to provide a strong sense of how Council decisions and Council interactions impact on the wider student experience, and support the students as being able to champion the perspective they bring to Council as students.

For the three years that I have offered the additional mentoring service to the student members of Council, the various students who have participated have all gladly taken up the service. It involves me meeting together with the two student members of Council for an hour before the Council meeting and going through the agenda and papers, and explaining the focus as well as allowing the students an opportunity to ask questions they may otherwise not have asked in the full Council meeting. Similarly it provides an opportunity for the students to appreciate the standing orders or meeting protocols of the Council, so as to ensure they are able to raise an issue or seek clarity on a particular paper in a way that respects the operation of the Council. In these sessions I always ensure the students are making their own decisions and while I provide advice, I ensure the students retain their own informed decision making perspective.

The other key aspect of the additional mentoring to the student members of Council is to develop a relationship between the two student members themselves, so that they feel they have a close and trusted colleague on the Council. Through the development of this relationship between the student members of Council, they can, in turn, provide their own mentoring support to each other. Throughout the additional mentoring relationship, the students are assured that the service is confidential and that they are able to use my role in effect as a ‘sounding board’. No question is ever too silly and no stance is ever too confrontational. This aspect requires the early development of trust, and this is gained from early interaction, and a strong emphasis on ensuring that the students are made to feel as valued members of a critical decision making body within the University.
Mr Ben Foskett
Dr Ian Gilmour
Dr Richard Gould
Associate Professor Bernadine Van Gramberg
Ms Prue Willsford
If you would like further information on mentoring you may wish to consult one of the following websites:

**Australian Women’s Mentoring Network**
www.womensmentoring.com.au

**Business Mentors R US**
www.businessmentorsrus.com/

**Mentoring Works**
www.mentoring-works.com/index.html

**The Mentor Directory**
www.mentors.ca/mentor.html

**The Mentoring Group**
www.mentoringgroup.com
Further details regarding the VU Council mentoring scheme can be obtained from the following members of the Governance and Policy Branch:

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