

2023

# Student Mentor Program Handbook



*Ready today for tomorrow*

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## MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the JCU Student Mentor Program is to encourage, enable and empower new students by linking them with successful peer role models that foster a welcoming, inclusive, supportive, and cohesive university culture and learning community.

## BACKGROUND

**1991** – Student Mentor Program was established at James Cook University (JCU) as a student buddy program and was the first of its type in Australian Higher Education.

**2004** – Commendation from Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA).

**2013** – *JCU Citation for Outstanding Contribution to Student Learning* and national citation winner in same category from the Australian Office of Learning and Teaching.

**2015** – Inaugural winner of *JCU Award for Excellence in Reconciliation*.

**2021** – 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of program, which remains the longest running university peer mentoring program in Australia (original and the best 😊).

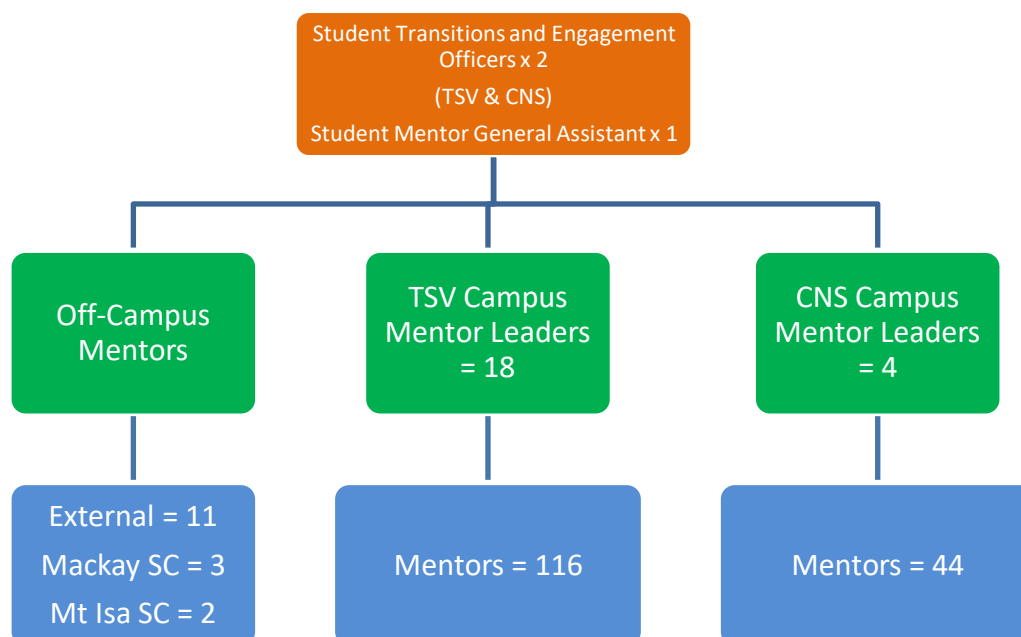
**2021** – Presented with *JCU Award for Excellence* in the category of Client Service.

## STUDENT MENTOR PROGRAM

The JCU Student Mentor Program matches experienced, successful students (Mentors) with commencing undergraduate students (Mentees) from the same course of study during O Week. JCU Mentors are trained as peer volunteers, and agree to share their knowledge and experience with new students to help them transition through their first study period/trimester at university. Mentors model the qualities necessary for academic success and also provide ad hoc support to all students on campus when wearing their mentor shirts. The Student Mentor Program is part of the Learning, Teaching and Student Engagement directorate within the Education Division.



## PROGRAM STRUCTURE (2022)



## ROLE DESCRIPTIONS

**Mentee** is a newly commencing, first-year undergraduate student at JCU who selects a Student Mentor to keep in contact with them across their first study period or trimester.

**Student Mentor** is a current undergraduate student who has completed all of their first-year subjects (min. overall GPA 5.0) and successfully applied to the JCU Student Mentor Program. A Student Mentor is a volunteer who has undertaken the required training and understands the obligations of their role as outlined in this document. Important Note: A 1 Mentor: 8 Mentees ratio means that mentor wait lists may apply.

**Off-Campus Student Mentor** is a Student Mentor who has agreed to support external or Study Centre students. External mentors will be assigned mentees by the Student Transitions and Engagement Officer. Study Centre students will select a Mentor during their O Week activities.

**Mentor Leader** is a Student Mentor who has been appointed to voluntarily supervise a group of Student Mentors in a course of study for a maximum period of one year (or six months for 'SP1 intake only' courses). Mentor Leaders provide support and advice to new Student Mentors, take a lead role during O Week activities, and mentor students. Mentor Leaders are first point of contact to help assign additional Mentees to Mentors **after** O Week and maintain communication with the Student Transitions and Engagement Officer.

**Student Transitions and Engagement Officer (STEO)** supports the coordination of the administrative functions for the Student Mentor Program, including the recruitment, coordination and training of the large group of volunteer mentors. The position works collaboratively with academic and support staff from across the University to ensure an institution-wide peer support service is embedded in the 'transition in' phase of the student life cycle, under the direction of the Manager of Student Transitions and Wellbeing.

The STEO duties include organising mentor functions, training, undertaking recognition and evaluations activities, promoting and managing communication for program, and liaising with academic and support staff. The STEO are point of contact for Mentors and Mentor Leaders and provide support and advice about challenges relating to the program. Contact emails are:

Cairns (Jodie Hogan): [cns-studentmentors@jcu.edu.au](mailto:cns-studentmentors@jcu.edu.au)

External & Study Centres (Jodie Hogan): [offcampus-studentmentors@jcu.edu.au](mailto:offcampus-studentmentors@jcu.edu.au)

Townsville (Maria Pappalardp): [tsv-studentmentors@jcu.edu.au](mailto:tsv-studentmentors@jcu.edu.au)

## CORE OBJECTIVES

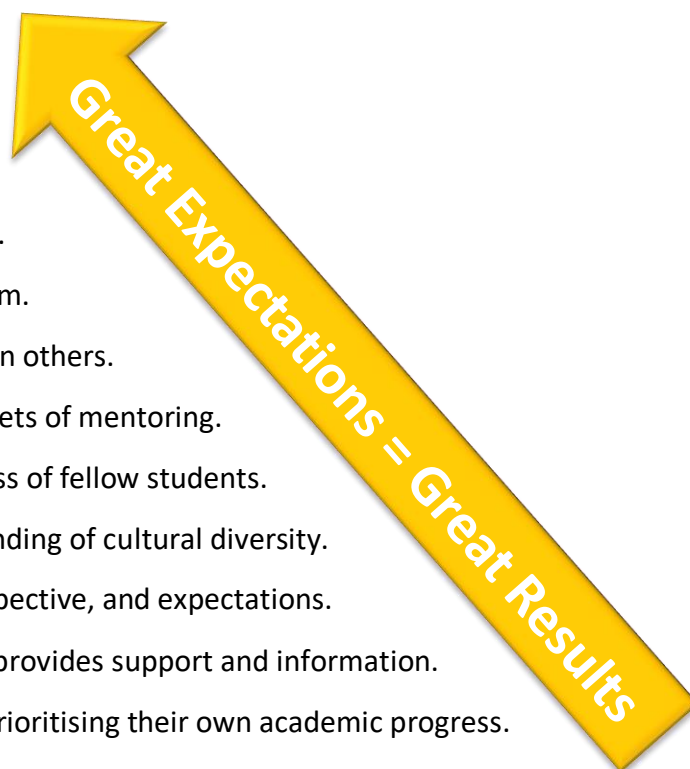
- ✓ Provide a welcoming and supportive environment for new students and link them with successful role models with proven study strategies.
- ✓ Provide a framework for positive interaction between new students, student mentors and staff.
- ✓ Orientate new students to the campus, culture, services and systems.
- ✓ Explain the challenges associated with university study and associated proactive strategies to enhance opportunities for academic success.
- ✓ Improve retention and success rates of first-year students.
- ✓ Provide an early sense of belonging within the university culture and foster learning communities.
- ✓ Counter any initial feelings of isolation and/or anxiety, particularly for students in under-represented equity groups.
- ✓ Develop leadership and interpersonal competency skills in mentors.
- ✓ Maintain the continual improvement of recruitment, training and support processes via evaluation and feedback in order to sustain the principles and practices of the program.

## HIGH TOUCH: HIGH IMPACT



### MENTOR QUALITIES

- ✓ Listens well to others.
- ✓ Possesses a positive attitude.
- ✓ Is mature, responsible, and trustworthy.
- ✓ Offers support, patience, and enthusiasm.
- ✓ Recognises and encourages excellence in others.
- ✓ Applies social justice principles in all facets of mentoring.
- ✓ Displays a genuine interest in the success of fellow students.
- ✓ Demonstrates respect and an understanding of cultural diversity.
- ✓ Exposes the Mentee to new ideas, perspective, and expectations.
- ✓ Serves as a role model to students and provides support and information.
- ✓ Sensitive to the needs of others while prioritising their own academic progress.
- ✓ Demonstrates an ability to share knowledge, skills and experiences with peers.







## TYPES OF MENTOR SUPPORT

70% of JCU students are the ‘first-in-family’ to come to university, so they may need a diverse range of support to help transition into university. The role of the Student Mentor is to be a referral point (hub) to other services on campus to connect students with the professional and academic staff with specific expertise to assist the student with their concern/s. For this reason, we focus on understanding support services at JCU during our mentor training sessions.

Around 40% (2022 data) of students contact their Mentor for support, but most of these queries will involve a single email response, so the role isn’t designed to be onerous for volunteers.

## Common Mentor Queries

- Study tips
- Time management
- Lack of motivation
- Course and career decisions
- Part-time employment
- Fees and forms
- Exam concerns
- Academic progression
- AccessAbility issues
- General university queries



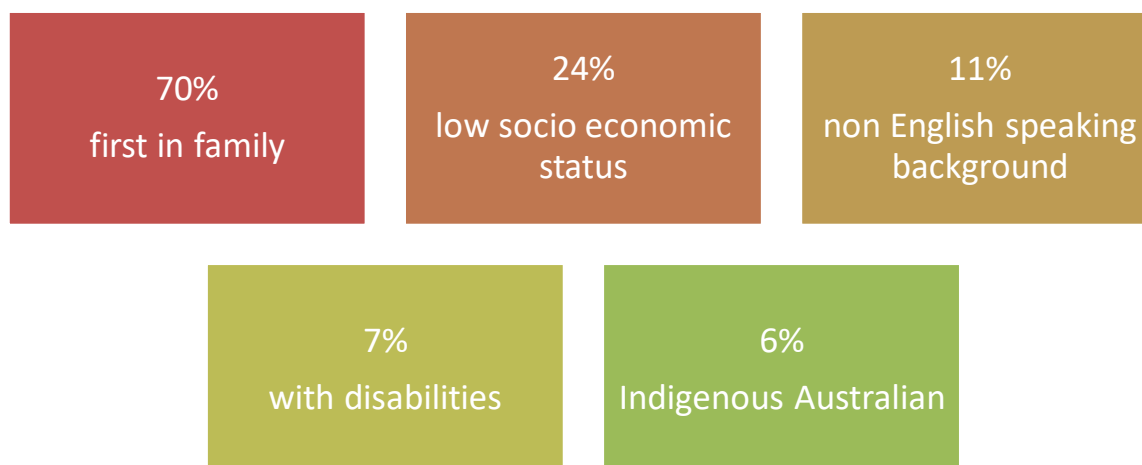
- Financial hardship
- Homelessness
- Homesickness
- Loneliness
- Anxiety and depression
- Connecting with peers
- Relationship issues
- Academic expectations
- Lack of confidence

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Mentors support a large percentage of non-traditional students to succeed at JCU who may have compounding (multiple) disadvantages.

## Student Demographics – Undergraduate / Australian Tropical Campuses



### **BENEFITS OF BEING A MENTOR**

Mentoring is a two-way street, and the Mentee is not the only one who benefits from a mentoring relationship. The program is highly beneficial to peer volunteers as it helps develop and recognise many of the top 20 important [skills employers want](#):

✓ Teamwork	✓ Leadership
✓ Interpersonal Skills	✓ Time management
✓ Problem solving	✓ Oral communication skills
✓ Written communication	✓ Integrity and trust
✓ Planning and organisation	✓ Customer service
✓ Emotional intelligence	✓ Self-management
✓ Accountability	✓ Influencing
✓ Negotiation	✓ IT skills

Mentoring also provides opportunities for part-time employment on campus in paid peer leader positions, as well as formal recognition by JCU and the Vice-Chancellor of your role through a Certificate of Appreciation.



## WHAT MENTORS DON'T DO

- × **Don't provide free or paid tutoring** to their Mentees.
- × **Don't proof-read or provide feedback on assignments.** Students should be directed to the [Learning Centre Services](#).
- × **Don't provide counselling to students.** Mentors listen to student concerns/challenges and supportively provide the appropriate referrals to JCU support services. Students expressing wellbeing issues (physical or mental) should be referred to the [Student Equity and Wellbeing](#) service (middle floor of Library) – *even if you are studying a health or wellbeing degree at JCU.*
- × **Don't provide enrolment advice.** Course structures change regularly and Enrolment Officers at the [Student Centre](#) are the only staff qualified to provide current advice about course structures, subject selection, fees.
- × **Don't initiate intimate relationships, borrow/lend monies, or request favours from Mentees.** Mentors are in position of leadership and trust and the Mentor: Mentee relationship must remain professional and respectful of the program boundaries.
- × **Don't wear their JCU Student Mentor shirt off campus** or engage in any activities that violate university policy while undertaking mentor duties and wearing a uniform. Mentor shirts remain the property of JCU and must not be worn after leaving the program.
- × **Don't know the answer to everything** 😊 - the university is a large, complex, evolving institution, which is why we refer students to specific staff with expertise. Please seek advice from the Student Centre if you are unsure of a referral point to help a Mentee, or use the [Ask Us](#) portal or the [Student Support Services Directory](#).

**Student Mentors must be aware of, and adhere to, university expectations of students – see the [JCU Student Code of Conduct Policy](#) and [Student Charter](#).**

## PROCEDURES TO BECOME A MENTOR

1. In August, the 2023 mentor numbers for each course will be confirmed.
2. In September, the STEO will assess mentor recruitment requirements for the following year and commence recruitment activities via the New Student Mentor Application Form.
3. The STEO will vet applications, confirm GPAs (min. 5.0 overall) and course progression (finished all first-year subjects) requirements of prospective mentors, and notify candidates of their successful short listing or unsuitability.
4. Short-listed applicants will undertake a group interview with the STEO to demonstrate their interpersonal skills.
5. Suitable candidates will be notified of their success and informed of upcoming training days for the program. If the Mentor: Mentee ratio has been reached for that course, the

prospective/s mentor will be placed on a waiting list – candidates who applied first will be given preference for new places in the program.

6. Mentors will be required to complete an online 'profile' which assists commencing students to select a mentor.

## RECRUITMENT AND RETURNING MENTORS

There is one main recruitment drive each year in preparation for the next year. In late August, the STEO will contact current Student Mentors and encourage them to return to the program for the next calendar year by completing an online form (two-week reply period).

Most mentors will remain in the program over the course of their degree until graduation, which is optimal and highly encouraged. However, it is important that you respond to the STEO by the specified timeframe (even if you are not returning) as your responses determine how many new student mentors are required to be recruited. If you do not respond by the required two-week timeframe, the STEO will assume you are not returning and commence recruitment to fill your position for 2023. So, please (please) reply to the Returning Mentor Registration Form when you receive it.

In September, the STEO will assess recruitment needs for each course and commence recruitment activities. The positions will be openly advertised via an all-UG students email, Student Bulletins, CareerHub etc, and the STEO may also call for referrals from Student Mentors.



## Returning Mentor & 2023 Training Registration Form

This registration form is for mentors to confirm their return to the JCU Student Mentor Program in 2023, and also acknowledge their availability for mentor training and for O Week (session times to be advised). This form should also be completed by mentors who do not intend to return to the program, so we can recruit additional peer leaders.

## WHY MENTOR?

Pay It Forward – inspire the next generation of mentors



*“I had completely forgotten how to study. However, I got through because the people and resources at JCU are so good. I had a wonderful mentor who inspired me to become a mentor as it helped me adjust so well. I always thought that JCU believed in my capabilities before I knew what I was capable of achieving.”*

**Laura Fewtrell**

BACHELOR OF SPORT AND EXERCISE SCIENCE

## TRAINING

Student Mentors are required to participate in compulsory training before O Week in Study Period 1 / Trimester 1 to receive important information pertaining to the program and their role.

The training comprises of two parts 1/ online component and 2/ face to face training (which occurs the week before O Week). The training is compulsory in order to maintain the integrity and quality of the program. This ensures that the correct referrals, processes and procedures are followed to maximise the effectiveness of the program. Training resources are also posted on the LearnJCU to support the knowledge and skills needed to be a Student Mentor.





## JCU STUDENT MENTOR PROGRAM AGREEMENT



### As a JCU Student Mentor, I agree to the following:

1. Comply with the [JCU Student Code of Conduct Policy](#) and the [JCU Student Charter](#).
2. Comply with guidelines within the JCU Student Mentor Program Handbook.
3. Attend Mentor Training and Planning Day, or equivalent for Off-Campus Mentors.
4. Review program materials provided on LearnJCU and complete JCU Respect Modules.
5. Attend the Orientation Course Welcome Day for my course and assist with activities as per Orientation Course Welcome Presenter Guidelines document.
6. Add the JCU Student Mentor Program Support Officer to your mentee email list for your six scheduled email communications (SP1: Week 1, 3, 6, 9, 12 or TP1: Week 1, 3, 5, 7, 9).
7. Organise a week 2 and week 7 catchup with your mentees at a mutually convenient time.
8. Respond to any Mentee enquiries in a professional and timely manner.
9. Respond to communications from the Student Mentor Program Support Officer in a timely manner. Similarly, mentor leaders and mentors in their course group will respond to each other in a timely manner.
10. Wear the JCU Student Mentor uniform during official duties and at least once/week.
11. Be a role model for commencing students by attending classes, maintaining academic success, and mentoring in a positive and inclusive manner.
12. Work collegially with academic and support staff and make appropriate referrals when required.
13. Provide feedback on the JCU Student Mentor Program when requested.
14. Exclusion from the JCU Student Mentor Program, if any items above are breached.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date        /        /



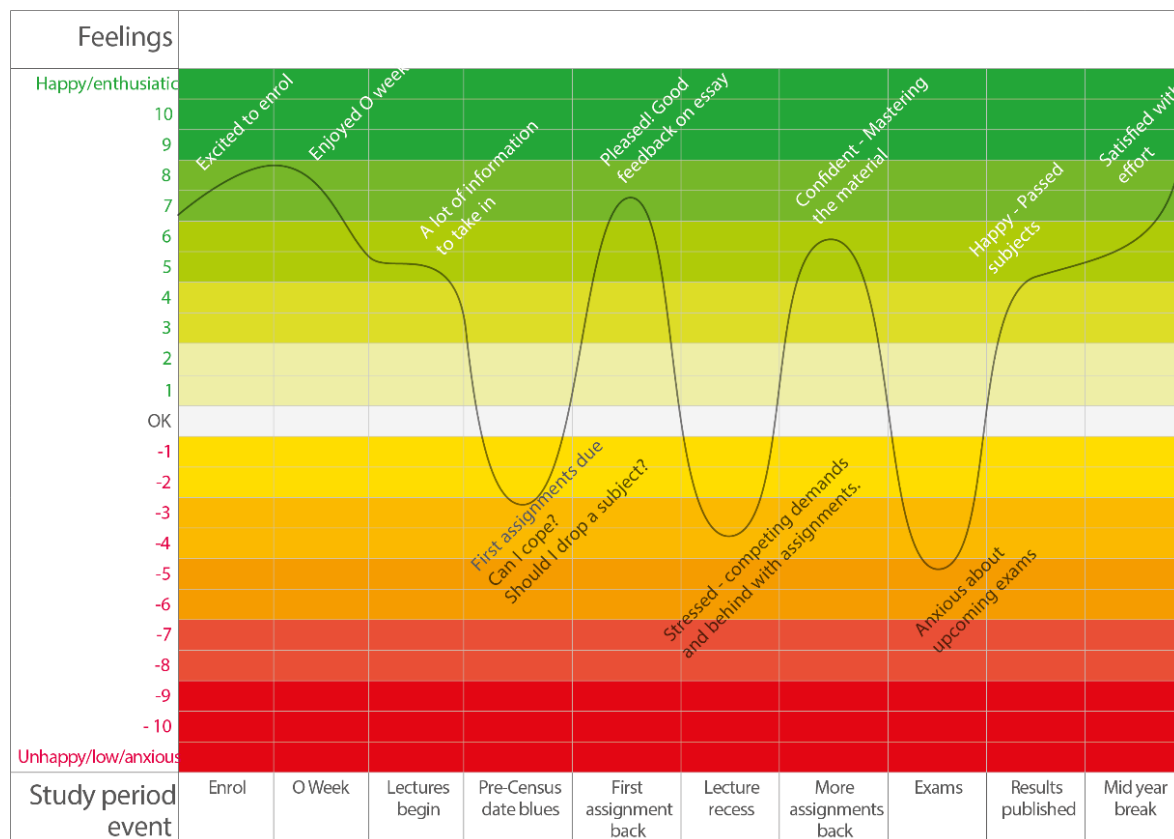
Comparative data shows that there is **higher retention rates (23%) and GPAs (1.0)** for mentees versus non-participants in the program.

(2019 JCU Retention Data)

## MENTOR 'JUST-IN TIME & JUST-FOR-ME' SUPPORT

The first study period/trimester for a new student can be a roller coaster of highs and lows that tend to peak around assessment submission and feedback periods.

Emotional highs and lows for a new student in their first teaching period - an example



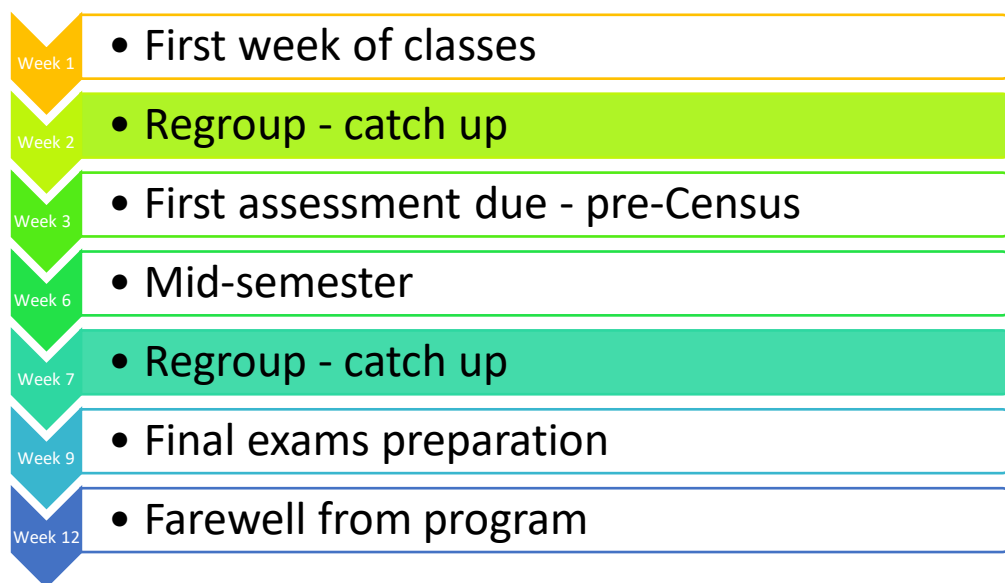
Mentors communicate regularly with their mentees via email across the study period/trimester. The contact points have been strategically chosen to maximise the effectiveness of the support – based on university research into transition experience.



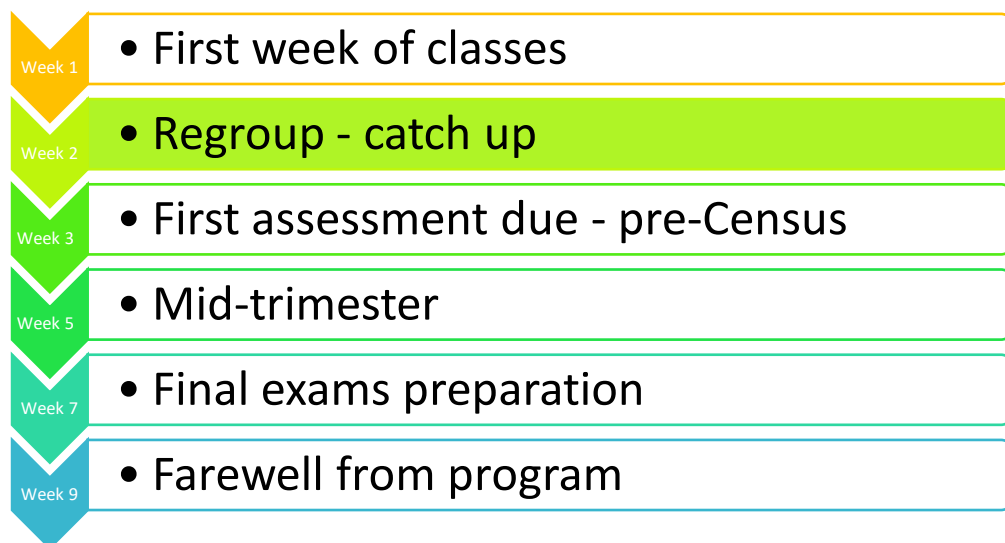
Mentees are encouraged to contact their mentor **at any time** (not only on the weeks listed on the next page) if they have a challenge or concern, so you can provide ‘just-in-time and just-for-me’ support. Mentors are also encouraged to catch up with their mentees on campus (or online) regularly to maintain the peer connection.

***If you are unable to send your scheduled mentee emails for any reason, please contact the STEO immediately and they can send them on your behalf.***

## Study Period Program – Communication Timelines



## Trimester Period Program – Communication Timelines



In the 2022 Mentee Satisfaction Survey, we asked participants in the program about their communications with their Mentor. 86% of mentees reported that they received and read **regular** email communications from their mentors which is a fantastic result. However, 12% of mentees reported that they only received **some** of their scheduled emails and 2% reported that they **did not receive any** emails, which is cause for concern as engagement with a mentor has significant impact on their retention and academic success. For this reason, it is important for the Student Transitions and Engagement Officer to be included in your distribution list for scheduled bulk emails for the purposes of quality assurance to ensure students aren't disadvantaged.

## SUPPORT FOR MENTORS

Mentors are first and foremost students, and the Student Mentor Program is committed to **your** wellbeing and academic success. You may also experience personal and academic challenges while mentoring, and we encourage you to access all the relevant services so they can provide you with support as a valued member of our mentor and university community.

If you experience challenging situations in relation to your mentor duties, please contact your Mentor Leader and/or the STEO for support, such as complicated mentees, unusual mentee requests, referrals or program clarifications etc.

## SUPPORT SERVICES @ JCU

JCU offers a wide range of free, confidential support services to students, including:

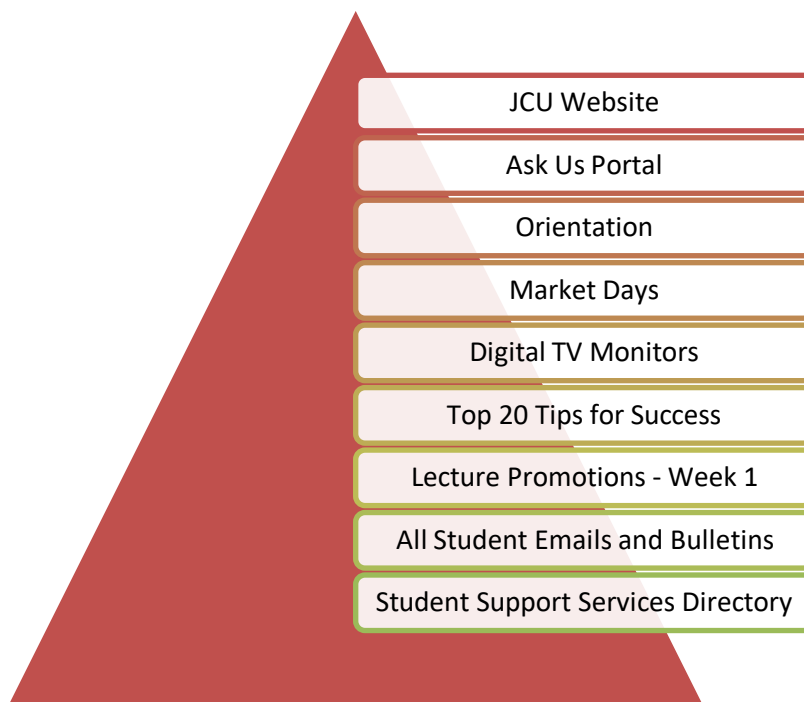
- AccessAbility Services
- Accommodation Services
- Careers and Employability
- College Student Support Officers
- Counselling and Wellbeing
- First Year Experience Coordinators
- Global Experience
- Indigenous Education and Research Centre
- International Student Support
- Library & IT Help Desk
- Student Association
- Student Centre
- The Learning Centre



It is important that mentors understand these services in order to provide effective referrals for students, when required. **Remember that all support services are available to on-campus and off-campus students via phone or Zoom.** One of the biggest frustrations for students is being incorrectly referred (ping-ponged) all over the university trying to get the help they need, and this can often turn a slightly uncertain student into an anxious, 'at risk' student.

## PROGRAM PROMOTION

The program is promoted to Mentees and Mentor candidates in a range of different ways, as listed below, but the primary promotion point is the website and we encourage you to drive interested parties to [www.jcu.edu.au/mentors](http://www.jcu.edu.au/mentors).



## SAFETY AND WELLBEING

All members of the JCU community have a right to feel welcome, respected and safe. At JCU, we are committed to ensuring that our learning environment is free from discrimination and harassment. Therefore, student mentors are required to complete JCU Respect Modules as part of their induction to the program.

## DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVITY

The Student Mentor Program encourages cultural diversity and tolerance through inclusiveness and equity and actively works towards affirmative action. Harassment of any kind is also unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

Diversity can be a source of non-productive conflict and can arise for a variety of reasons. Conflict can stem from misunderstandings due to cultural or individual communication differences. Inappropriate sexual and religious statements/jokes, personal biases and prejudices, and an unwillingness to accept people who are different, can also be potential causes of conflict.

Mentors support a broad range of mentees and need to be culturally aware and communicate with sensitivity to reduce any potential for negative connotations and complaints. If the relationship between the Mentor and the Mentee breaks down for any reason, a mentee can be allocated to a new Student Mentor via the STEO.

## RECONCILIATION AND STUDENT MENTOR PROGRAM

It is important to note that JCU has a [Reconciliation Action Plan](#). The JCU Student Mentor Program is deeply committed to supporting authentic reconciliation through building positive and respectful relationships with Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and we participate in events/ activities on campus throughout the year to support reconciliation.

## GRIEVANCES PROCEDURE

It is of critical importance that the STEO be notified of any incident or pattern of events that may result in a complaint. Confidentiality of principal parties will be maintained at all times and access to information regarding any incidents and subsequent action will be limited to those directly involved in such processes. However, information regarding the processes followed will be shared without compromising the principal parties' confidentiality. With consent, the STEO may organise mediation for the Mentor and Mentee.

## WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY PROCEDURES

Student Mentors have a statutory obligation to follow JCU [Workplace Health and Safety Policies](#) and guidelines to ensure the safety of themselves and students in their care.

## TERMINATION FROM STUDENT MENTOR PROGRAM

Mentors and mentees will be excluded from the program based on unacceptable, violent, abusive behaviour or harassment, or the contravening of the signed Student Mentor Program Agreement. The STEO will assess the validity of the complaint and notify all parties.



# NOTES SECTION