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Citation	高等教育ジャーナル : 高等教育と生涯学習, 21, 9-16
Issue Date	2014-03
DOI	10.14943/J.HighEdu.21.9
Doc URL	http://hdl.handle.net/2115/56829
Type	bulletin (article)
File Information	No2102.pdf



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The First Group Meeting with ‘Fellows’ at Hokkaido University in 2013 — Results of a Survey on the Nitobe College Students —

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Abstract — With the goal of educating a new generation of global leaders, Hokkaido University established a new program called “the Nitobe College,” which recruited the first batch of 129 students in May 2013. The College is being operated in cooperation with the Hokkaido University Alumni Association, which also nominated a number of alumni called ‘fellows,’ who are in charge of interacting with groups of students, and some of whom will become mentors helping students pursue their career goals. The first meeting of the fellows and the Nitobe College students on Hokkaido University campus in May 2013. To evaluate the effectiveness of this meeting, a web-based cross-sectional survey was conducted among the student participants. This report summarized the results of the survey. The findings suggested that the meeting was successful for helping the students build mutual understanding among themselves and with the fellows; however, further periodical meetings are necessary to maintain what they have already built and subsequently develop more interactions and communications among them so that mentoring by the fellows will be effectively established. The use of communication technology can facilitate this process because it will help overcome the difficulties in setting up regular meetings that all of the students as well as the fellows can attend.

(Revised on 18 January, 2014)

Introduction

Mentoring is a relationship between a young adult (mentee or protégé) and an older, more experienced adult (mentor) that helps the younger individual learn to navigate in the adult world and the world of work through exhibition of an appropriate model and the formation of the mutual trust (Kram, 1985; Watanabe, 2008). Since the first mentoring program, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, was established in the United States at the beginning of the 20th century, many programs have been developed in English-speaking countries, including Australia, Canada and England (Miller, 2002). In the 1970s, higher

education institutions in the United States and the above countries began to offer a variety of mentoring programs, including ones in which faculty and staff members support minority or female students, graduate or undergraduate students act as mentors for first-year students, and people who do not belong to the school (e.g., employees at a partner company, or members of academic organizations or alumni associations) are recruited to provide mentoring sessions for graduate or undergraduate students, helping them pursue their careers (Watanabe, 2008).

Over the past decade increasing numbers of universities in Japan have implemented mentoring

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programs; for example, Nagasaki University (n.d.) provides a program in which older faculty members act as mentors for younger female faculty members and graduate students. In Shimane University's program, seniors and graduate students support first-year students (Shimane University, 2011). At Kanto Gakuin University faculty and staff members, as well as undergraduate students, offer mentoring for first-year students (Harada et al., 2011; Kanto Gakuin University, n.d.), and Showa Women's University (n.d.) recruits mentors from their alumni and women who are willing to meet students individually or in a group. Thus, many mentoring programs recruit mentors from among students or faculty/staff members.

Recently, with the financial support of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) of Japan, an increasing number of universities in Japan have developed mentoring programs for their female researchers and/or students. This type of program was first established by a number of universities in the United States in the late 1980s for the purpose of reducing gender inequalities in educational and career pathways. These programs are still in demand since gender inequality remains pervasive worldwide as shown by the percentages of female researchers: 41.8% in Russia, 34.3% in the U.S., 27.7% in France, 26.0% in the U.K., 21.4% in Germany, 13.1% in South Korea, and 13.0% in Japan (Japanese Cabinet Office, 2010, p.102).

As of December 1, 2005, the percentage of female researchers at Hokkaido University was 11.4 percent (323 of 2,383 researchers at all levels), which is even lower than the above-cited national average of 13.0 percent. In an attempt to overcome gender inequality, the university established the Support Office for Female Researchers in Hokkaido University (FResHU) in 2006, whose mission includes the promotion of the percentage of females up to 20 percent by 2020. With this mission, the office offers a mentoring program in which female faculty members and researchers act as mentors for peer female researchers and students who seek advice about building a successful research career by balancing work and family life (Hokkaido University, 2009).

Furthermore, a different type of mentoring program began at Hokkaido University upon the establishment of the Nitobe College in May 2013 in cooperation with the University's Alumni Association. A total of 129 of the 2,597 first-year students of the entire university

have been admitted and assigned into 10 groups, each of which has a 'fellow,' an alumnus nominated mainly by the association to support the students in the group. Through interactions in their group the students are expected to develop mutual understanding and trust among themselves and with the fellow. In addition, some of the fellows will provide mentoring sessions for a number of the sophomores or seniors of the Nitobe College who seek for advice on their careers. The mutual understanding and trust to be developed through the first two years in each group should play a crucial role towards the creation of successful mentoring relationships.

The students and fellows met in a group for the first time on May 15, 2013, following the opening ceremony for the college. In the meeting, the students in each group were further divided into two subgroups and intensively discussed what 'global human resources' are and what requirements are necessary to become one of them. For each student to take an active role in the discussion, we limited the role of each fellow to that of an advisor or a commentator rather than a facilitator or director.

Observation suggested that most of the students actively participated in the discussions by exchanging their ideas and thoughts enthusiastically. To validate this observation we further conducted a survey on how satisfied they felt about the meeting and the interactions with others and how actively they felt they could participate in the discussion. This report summarizes the results of the survey.

Methods

A web-based anonymous cross-sectional survey of the 129 Nitobe College students was carried out between 20 and 31 May 2013 using the Hokkaido University Education and Learning Management System (ELMS). The students were informed about the survey via the ELMS. The questionnaire was constructed and placed on an Internet server that could be accessed through the ELMS. It consisted of items related to their impressions of the discussion in a small group, such as how they felt about the meeting, how satisfied they were with their participation in the discussion and interactions with their peers and the fellow. SPSS version 21 (IBM Corporation) was used for analysis of the data.

Results

Of the total of 129 Hokkaido University Nitobe College students, 68 (52.7%) responded to the questionnaire.

Satisfaction with the Meeting

A 4-point scale was used to measure the level of satisfaction with the meeting. Response options ranged from ‘satisfied’ to ‘not at all satisfied.’ Over 91% (n = 62) of the respondents reported that they were more or less satisfied with the meeting, which shows that a majority of the students valued their experience of participating in the meeting (Table 1).

The students who answered they felt more or less satisfied with the meeting listed the following reasons: they could interact with their peers and the fellow, and they had good discussions (Table 2).

Many of the respondents who indicated they felt satisfied with the meeting because of the interactions with their peers valued some elements that they shared with other students (e.g., enrollment in the Nitobe College, assignment into the same group, and holding high aspirations) (Table 3). They also appreciated that the meeting allowed them to find what other students looked like and understand the following: problems that other students had, the reasons for their enrollment in the

Nitobe College, and their future goals. Moreover, some of the respondents felt satisfied with the meeting because they could interact with other students who had unique experiences (e.g. studying abroad) and opinions.

For many of the students who felt satisfied with the meeting because they could interact with the fellow, the opportunity to meet and talk with the fellow was valuable because they knew they had little chance to meet a person like him or her in their daily life. Many of them also reported that they enjoyed listening to their fellow’s experiences and were highly motivated.

The students who were satisfied with the meeting mainly because of the discussions considered the following experiences to be valuable: discussing an issue that they seldom considered or talked about with their friends and others in their daily life, sharing thoughts and ideas with other students studying in different disciplines through the discussion regarding traits that the global human resources have to have and actions required to be taken in order to become global leaders.

Although they comprised less than 10% of the respondents (Table 1), some expressed dissatisfaction with the meeting, listing the following reasons: (1) other students did not prepare well or actively participate in the discussion, (2) they were given little chance to interact with or hear from the fellow, (3) the topic was too abstract for them to carry out meaningful discussions, and (4) they could not determine the purpose of the meeting (Table 4).

Table 1. Satisfaction with participation in the group meeting

Satisfaction level	n	%
Satisfied	43	63.2
Relatively satisfied	19	27.9
Relatively not satisfied	5	7.4
Not at all satisfied	1	1.5
Total	68	100.0

Table 2. Reasons for satisfaction with the group meeting participation

Reasons	n	%
Interaction with other students	37	44.6
Discussion	21	25.3
Interaction with fellows	15	18.1
Others	10	12.0
Total	83	100.0

Table 3. Reasons for satisfaction with the participation

	n
Interaction with peers	
Understood other students	11
Expanded their friendships	3
Motivated	3
Received new information through the interaction with others	1
Interaction with the fellow	
Interested in the fellow's remarks	9
Enjoyed the interaction with fellows	1
Motivated by the fellow's remarks	1
Discussion	
Widened the horizon of view	5
Interested in the theme of global human resources	3
Positive participation of the members in the discussion	2
Discussed very interesting topics	2
Perceived what was missing from oneself (e.g., a narrow view, low ability to summarize discussion)	2
Characterized the image of global human resources	2
Impressed by high level of discussion	1
Received good experiences not usually occurring in ordinary life.	1

Table 4. Reasons for dissatisfaction with the participation

Reason	n
Not a good example of the theme selected and/or the contents of discussion	2
Limited involvement of the fellow	2
Could not find common ground for discussion	2
Insufficient preparation of other members or very few students who actively participated	2
Different from what I expected	1
Could not determine the purpose of the meeting	1
Some questions about the validity of the recruitment system (placement test) for the Nitobe College students	1

Table 5. Active participation in the discussion

Characteristics	n	%
Active	33	48.5
Relatively active	25	36.8
Relatively inactive	10	14.7
Inactive	0	0.0
Total	68	100.0

Table 6. Satisfaction with the interaction with the fellow

Level of satisfaction	n	%
Satisfied	24	35.3
Relatively satisfied	26	38.2
Relatively dissatisfied	12	17.6
Not satisfied	6	8.8
Total	68	100.0

Degree of Commitment to the Discussion

A total of 58 students (about 85% of the respondents) responded that they could more or less actively commit to the discussion (Table 5). Many of them credited their own efforts, stating that they actively expressed their opinions, effectively leading the discussion, getting prepared well for the meeting and so on. A few of them credited factors other than their own efforts, such as a friendly atmosphere and an effective leader.

The rest of the respondents (n = 10) who reported they could not actively commit to the discussion listed a number of factors that prevented their active participation, including: (1) the topic that was not appropriate for the discussion, (2) other members (e.g., members who had not prepared and actively participated in the discussion), (3) the way in which the discussion was carried out (e.g., the speed was too fast, the discussion was led in a poor way) and (4) their own fault (e.g. lacking preparation or experiences for the discussion, getting discouraged talking in front of others who were highly knowledgeable or had higher aspirations).

Satisfaction with the Interaction with the Fellow

About 74% of the respondents (n = 50) stated that they felt more or less satisfied with the interactions with the fellow, explaining that they could hear interesting

information from the fellow, which provided them with new perspectives (Table 6).

Aiming to establish student-centered discussion, the program administrators asked the fellows to stay in advisory roles rather than leading the discussion. Some students valued the fellow’s help, indicating that they could obtain a new perspective. Some also appreciated advice from fellows who were in a nonacademic setting, which they could scarcely have obtained in their daily life.

On the other hand, some students (n = 18) reported that they did not enjoy interacting with the fellows (Table 6). In doing so many of them complained that the program administrators limited the fellow’s participation, which provided them with little chance to talk to or hear from him or her. A small number of the respondents stated that they could not enjoy interacting with the fellows because they could not find a trait within the fellow that they could respect or feel connected to (Table 7).

Willingness to Discuss n the Same Topic Again in a Group

Although the number of the respondents who indicated that they would like to discuss the topic of global human resources again was higher (n = 40) than its opposite (n = 28), the difference was not overwhelming enough to conclude that the importance of discussing this topic was shared among the students (Table 8).

Table 7. Dissatisfaction with the interaction with the fellow

Reasons	n
Insufficient interactions	22
Could not find common ground	3
Too nervous to speak with	1
did not understand the merits of the interaction but something expected to develop eventually	1

Table 8. Do you want to discuss the topic of global human resources again ?

Characteristics	n	%
Yes	19	27.9
Relatively yes	21	30.9
Relatively no	20	29.4
No	8	11.8
Total	68	100.0

Requests for the Program

About 67% of the respondents (n = 45) wanted to meet in their group again before the next scheduled date, September, 16, 2013 (Table 9).

In addition to the meeting, many students wanted the college administrators to arrange more events exclusively targeting the students of the college such as opportunities to hear from the fellows, interact with foreign students, and learn to improve skills for discussions. Furthermore, some requested more information on the college, including the conditions required for obtaining academic credits for their time abroad.

Discussion

The main purpose of this survey was to evaluate effectiveness of the first meeting, which was held for an hour and a half in the evening of May 15, 2013, following the opening ceremony of the Nitobe College, in helping the students build inclusivism (i.e. feelings of being connected) among themselves and the fellow in their group. The response rate of the survey, which was conducted in the two weeks following the meeting, was moderate (52.7%) but the distribution by gender of the respondents (39 males [57.4%] and 29 females [42.6%]) was very similar to that of the Nitobe College students enrolled in 2013 (76 males [58.9%] and 53 females [41.1%]). Therefore, we believe that the representativeness of the data is more or less ensured.

Over 90% of the respondents valued their experience in the meeting, citing their acquaintance with other students in the Nitobe College and the fellow, their obtaining valuable information from him or her, and an intensive discussion on a topic that they would seldom talk about in their daily life. These findings

suggested that the goal of the meeting, to help students build relationships among themselves and the fellow in their group, was at least partially accomplished. Their comments that they could exchange thoughts and ideas through the intensive discussions supported our prediction that the majority of them would reach the starting point of our long-term goal: to build a community in which the students actively and collaboratively work toward their own goals, sharing pride and confidence as students of the Hokkaido University Nitobe College.

To attain the goal, additional meetings are necessary to help students strengthen the relationships that they created in the initial meeting. The next meeting has been scheduled for mid-September, four months after the first meeting, as a part of a two-day camp with the students and the fellows. When the students were asked if this schedule would work for them, 67% of the respondents wanted to have another meeting before the camp. Since the Nitobe College has accepted students from all of the disciplines that the university offers, it is difficult to arrange meetings during the semester that will work for all. Additional meetings should be held outside of class times, such as at lunchtime or in an additional class hour (6:15 p.m. to 7:45 p.m.).

Although about 74% of the respondents enjoyed interacting with the fellows, and many of them commented that they wanted to discuss more, inclusion of the fellows in the additional meetings will be nearly impossible since most of them do not live in Hokkaido and work in executive positions. Addressing this difficulty, we are planning to introduce a virtual community with a use of electronic online bulletin boards to enhance communications among the members of each group (consisting of the students and the fellow) beyond the barriers of space and time.

Based on a review of previous studies that have investigated the usefulness of technology as a tool

Table 9. Do you want to meet in your group before the next scheduled date (September, 16, 2013)?

Characteristics	n	%
Yes	31	46.3
Relatively yes	14	20.9
Relatively no	15	22.4
No	7	10.4
Total	67	100.0

substituting for face-to-face mentoring sessions, Muller (2009) listed a number of advantages associated with the use of technology including : (1) communication can take place at a time and place of one's convenience, (2) previous messages can be recorded and reviewed, (3) through an effort to write short and clear messages a mentee can learn more than when talking face to face, and (4) a mentee is less likely to feel stressed when contacting a mentor who is older and has a higher status via e-mail than by meeting him or her face-to-face. These benefits are not limited to online one-to-one sessions; the technology can be used for creating and maintaining a virtual community in which mentors interact with many mentees (Kalisch et al., 2005), which can be applied to each group of the Nitobe College.

In conclusion, the first meeting appeared to be successful for helping the students build mutual understanding among themselves and developing respect for the fellows; however, further meetings are necessary before the scheduled time. The use of communication technology could facilitate the interactions among the students themselves and the fellows. In the meantime, it is also important for the staff members, especially the teaching staff, at the Nitobe College to establish a strong sense of inclusion between them and the students. This mechanism has yet to be established.

Finally, the findings of this survey should be interpreted with caution since the data represent only half of the target population (the response rate was 52.7%). This could be attributed to the following two factors: failure to sufficiently notify the students of the survey and the inappropriate timing of the administration. Although the staff mentioned the survey when explaining the schedule of the meeting, this was not sufficient for the students understand the importance of their participation in the improvement of the program. Moreover, if the paper-based questionnaire had been provided immediately after the meeting, asking the students to complete it before going home, more of the students would have chosen to respond. However, since the meeting was held for over an hour and half late in the evening, we were afraid that the students would be too tired to carefully complete the questionnaires, and decided to use web-based questionnaires that would allow the students to work at their convenience. In the next survey, we will notify the students of the survey sufficiently so that they understand the criticality of their

participation. We will also carefully arrange the timing of the survey so that more of the students will respond to the questionnaire.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the students who participated in the survey despite their busy schedules. We are also indebted to other staff members in Nitobe College Office and the Office of International Affairs at Hokkaido University for assisting us in carrying out this survey.

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