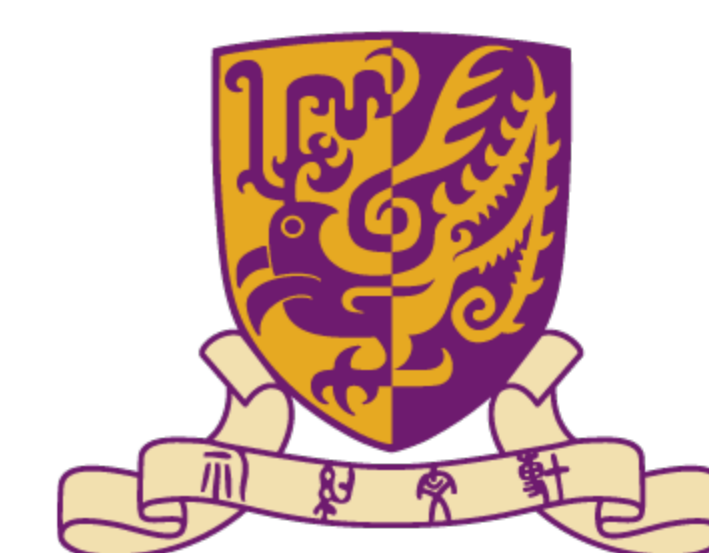


FIRST YEAR'S PRACTICE AND OUTCOMES OF THE PEER MENTORING SCHEME IN EARTH SYSTEM SCIENCE PROGRAMME



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Scheme Arrangement Flowchart

Peer Mentor Recruitment

Senior students with accumulative GPA greater than 3.0 are the targeted mentors

When: Late August / Early January

Peer Mentor Training

Mentoring practice is introduced during the training and, meanwhile, a mentor community starts to be established

When: Early September / Mid-January

Mentor Mentee Gathering

Icebreaking and mingling; mentors are introduced during the gathering for grouping

When: Mid-September / Late January

Mentor Mentee Matching

Mentor-mentee groups are finalised shortly after the gathering by self-matching

When: Mid-September / Late January

Mentor Mentee Meeting

Regular meetings are organised by the mentor in each group every one to two weeks

When: Mid-September to Early December / Late January to April

Scheme Feedbacks

Feedbacks are collected from both mentors and mentees by written report and questionnaire respectively

When: December / April

Certificate & Book Coupon Granted

Certificate and HKD500 book coupon is granted to each peer mentor to recognise their contribution

When: ESSC annual ceremony

1. Scheme Background

The Peer Mentoring Scheme was initiated on September 2017 in the Earth System Science Programme. This scheme is aimed for an early engagement of our majors in ESSC and expediting their transition from high school to university. Even though our students may have excelled in DSE, this transition can be challenging because they have been drilled in a curriculum that is compartmentalised and driven by narrowly focused syllabi.

Most high school students have had very limited exposure to critical thinking and the interdisciplinary approach, which are skill sets crucial for success in an interdisciplinary curriculum of the university. Students in an interdisciplinary area such as ESSC face additional challenges, in that key concepts often build upon the integration of theories and techniques across multiple disciplines. Many students would initially be intimidated by such an approach, constantly in fear of not having acquired the pigeon-holed backgrounds they feel necessary before they can meaningfully engage in an interdisciplinary subject.

Therefore the role of the peer mentor is to provide targeted advices to the junior peers how to study and excel in the new setting of a university, based on his or her past experience as an interdisciplinary major who has gone through the learning curve.

2. Scheme Arrangement

The scheme was kicked off by recruiting peer mentors from ESSC majors of year-3 and -4, who obtained accumulative GPAs greater than 3.0. Invitation letters were sent to the targeted students by the project executive, encouraging their response. In the first year, we recruited 12 mentors to service 36 freshmen, which led to a fairly satisfactory mentor-mentee ratio of 1:3. After the recruitment, the peer mentors were then assembled to have a training session, in which they were introduced the practice requirement and meanwhile a mentor community started to be built up.

Two methods were applied for the mentor-mentee matching in the past year. The first one is centralised matching solely considering freshmen's academic background in high-school, and the second one is self-matching during the icebreaking gathering (supplemented by self-introductions provided by mentors). Although the quantitative effectiveness assessment on these two methods was not conducted, the empirical evidence argue for a more active participation from both parties using the second method.

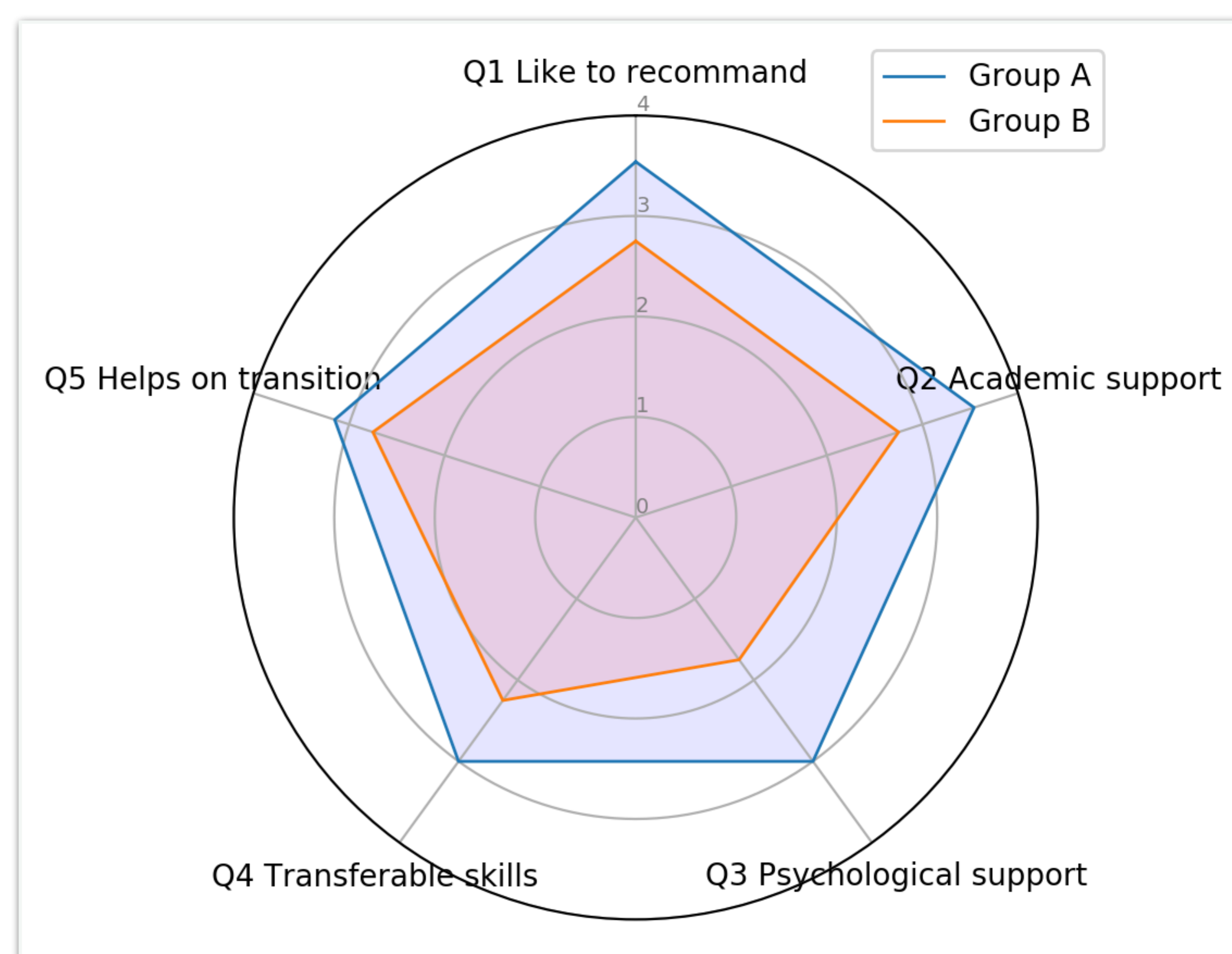
After the formation of mentor mentee groups, regular meetings were organised by the peer mentor in each group with the meeting frequency of minimum twice per month. Peer mentors were required to submit a report to summarise their practice at the end of the mentoring period. Certificates and book coupons were then granted to mentors to recognise and appreciate their contribution. (Please also see the flowchart for other information.)

3. Scheme Feedbacks

After the first year's practice, a brief survey was conducted on participants to evaluate the effectiveness of this scheme. Survey questions are designed to measure mentee's satisfaction from four aspects, which include the **academic support**, the **support on the transition** from high school study to university study, the **psychosocial support** and opportunities for developing other career-related/**transferable skills**. The survey also aims to identify opportunities for improvement. Survey result is shown in the following figure.

Information for the figure:

Surveys were distributed to 20 ESSC majors and 17 were returned. They were classified into two groups: **Group A** is for those who joined 3 or more regular meetings and **Group B** is 2 or fewer. Attitude of surveyed participants were assessed by five grades: Strongly disagree (0 point), Slightly disagree (1 point), Neutral (2 points), Moderately agree (3 points) and Strongly agree (4 points). For Group A, average points for Q1~Q5 are 3.54, 3.54, 3.00, 3.00 and 3.15 respectively. For Group B, points are 2.75, 2.75, 1.75, 2.25 and 2.75. Obviously, Group A shows significantly more positive attitude than Group B.



Survey questions: Q1 I will recommend the peer mentoring scheme to my peer students. Q2 The peer mentoring scheme provides me with academic support. Q3 The peer mentoring scheme provides me with psychological support. Q4 The peer mentoring scheme creates opportunities to polish my transferable skills, such as communication, self-management and team spirit. Q5 The peer mentoring scheme helps me on the transition from high school to university study.

4. Preliminary Results

Our result also shows that greater than 80% surveyed participants agree on the academic support and the support on the transition from high school study to university study, which indicates that our peer mentoring scheme is relatively effective on enhancing our students' conception and ability on critical thinking as well as helping them to adapt to the diversified curriculum and the interdisciplinary subject of the Earth system science.

Although comparatively less satisfaction was obtained from the other aspects, still, greater than 65% surveyed participants agree on the psychosocial support and opportunities for developing soft skills. This result purveys new insights on the potential functions of our peer mentoring practice.

Finally, from the comparison between students of Group A and Group B, it is probably true that a better involvement in the peer mentoring activities may bring more benefits to freshmen.