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Online peer study programme launched to support students amid pandemic

The University of Cape Town's (UCT) Residence Life Division has launched its pilot Study Buddy online student peer programme to support residence students who are now learning and studying off-site as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The programme is one of several UCT initiatives implemented to assist residence students in adjusting to "the new normal" and keep up with their academic schedule. The idea is that students pair up with a peer within the residence system for daily or weekly checks on each other's learning goals and to encourage each other – and hold each other accountable.

The shift to online learning has created specific challenges for residence students, said Sean Abrahams, Residence Life Division senior coordinator for learning and innovation. "We've recognised that we need innovative ways to reinforce and support self-directed and remote learning."

Abrahams said students are in the process of pairing up randomly. "They are introduced to their study buddy via email and prompts have been provided to identify key points study buddies can discuss, such as what they are studying, how often they'd like to interact, identifying their goals and obstacles and sharing their weekly learning."

"It doesn't matter if students are not in the same faculty, as the programme differs from mentoring or tutoring. The aim is that students share and engage on their weekly learning or academic goals."

All participants (425 residence students have joined thus far) are being added to a new Study Buddy Vula tab, which will provide regular prompts and resources.

The pilot won't duplicate the residence mentoring and tutoring programmes or faculty interventions already in place, said Abrahams. "Not all residence students want a mentor or tutor and not all courses are catered for by the residence tutors' network.

There are also limited numbers of residence tutors and mentors. Some students find value in connecting with a peer simply to reach a learning goal.”

The Study Buddy pilot uses the [wish, outcome, obstacle, plan \(WOOP\)](#) framework already in place in residences, which has been adopted by a high number of students.

Abrahams explained: “The application of WOOP within the Study Buddy programme asks each peer study buddy to identify an academic goal for the day or week, the outcome, obstacles and plans to overcome that obstacle. Study buddies will share and reflect on their WOOPs and encourage one another to reach their goals.”

Initial feedback from the 425 participants will help to tailor the programme’s guidelines. Preliminary feedback indicates that students prefer to communicate via text-based social media platforms and not via emails or video calls. The programme will be evaluated at the end of term two.

With the COVID-19 pandemic having changed the parameters of student support and residence life, Abrahams believes that student support should encourage individuals to explore their possibilities beyond their academic goals.

ENDS

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