

Report of Workshop on Student Mentorship Programme

Held At IIT BOMBAY

(28TH – 29th March 2015)



Contents

1. Introduction
2. Proposed Structure of SMP for VNIT
3. Counselling and SMP
4. Ragging and Discrimination
5. Academic Rehabilitation Program at I.I.T. Bombay
6. Online Portal
7. Mentor Mentee Interaction
8. Review Process
9. Conclusion

Introduction

Student Mentor Programme is a programme within the IIT Bombay Student Community, with the primary objective of enabling constructive and positive interaction, guidance and mentorship of junior students by senior students. The vision of the programme is "to inculcate the right attitude right from the beginning". The SMP aims at developing a smooth transition to campus life for every new entrant to an academic programme at IIT Bombay. Mentoring is a particular form of relationship designed to provide personal and professional support to an individual. The mentor is generally more experienced than the mentee and makes use of that experience in a facilitative way to support the development of the mentee. The mentoring relationship provides a developmental opportunity for both parties and can thus be of mutual benefit. In a nutshell, a student mentor's role may be perceived to be facilitative, supportive and developmental for the student community in general and the first year students in particular.

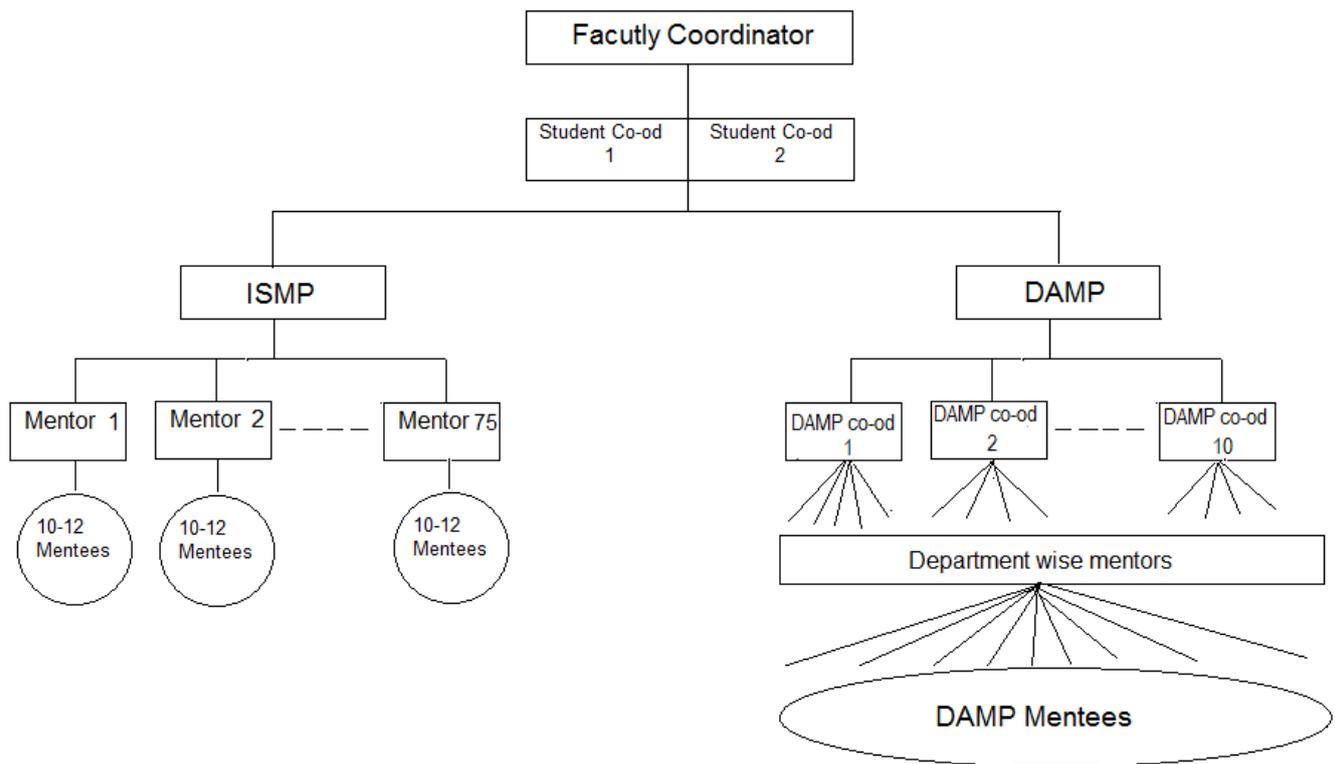
This program started in VNIT in the year 2012 and has successfully completed two years. However being in its primary stage it needs a proper structure and implementation. Right from selection procedure of mentors to building positive relation between mentors and mentees, there needs to be certain positive modifications. As IIT Bombay has been conducting this program since years so inputs from IIT Bombay are necessary to achieve goals that are desired in the student mentor programme.

The workshop on the theme "Enhancement of the Student Mentor Program and identifying good academic-administrative practices", conducted by CDEEP, IIT Bombay under the aegis of 'Knowledge Incubation under TEQIP' on 28th-29th of March 2015 helped us understand the structure of Student Mentorship Program (SMP) at IIT Bombay. It also helped us understand the selection process and gave us insight on how we can develop the SMP in VNIT. In this report we have included some agendas which should help in evolving Student Mentorship at VNIT. These agendas were discussed in the workshop in a group activity.

Proposed Structure of SMP for VNIT

In this report firstly the structure of IITB is explained briefly, followed by the current structure of VNIT. Next a modified structure is proposed which makes subtle changes to current structure yet improving the effect greatly.

Structure of SMP at IITB



ISMP: Institute student mentorship program

DAMP: Department Academic mentorship program

The faculty coordinator selects 2 or 3 student coordinators who handle the whole mentorship program. These are final year students. They handle both parts of program ISMP and DAMP.

ISMP is for all 1st year students and mentors are selected by the student co-ordinators through a rigours process with interviews and peer reviews. The whole process is confidential and student co-ordinators take full responsibility of it.

DAMP is to ensure that weak students clear their backlogs and get their academic careers back on track. The DAMP coordinators are 1 or 2 senior mentors from each department who lead a team of responsible mentors. DAMP is only for academically weak senior students.

Structure of SMP at VNIT

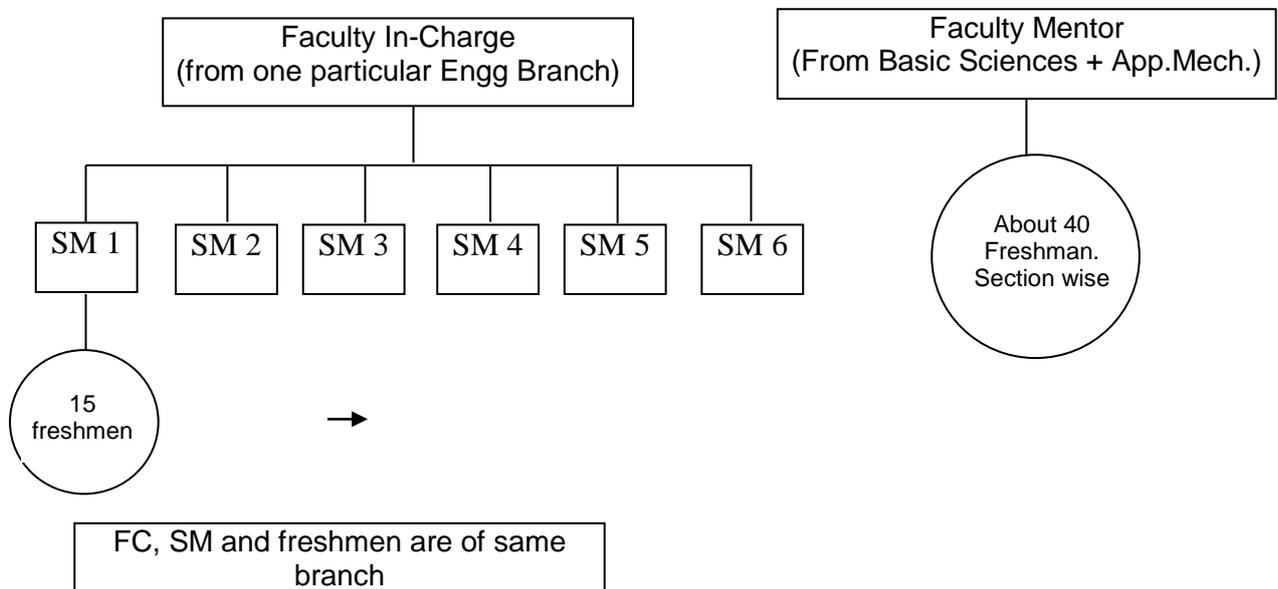
Two way system is devised to help freshman to be at ease with new environment of VNIT.

This is explained schematically below:

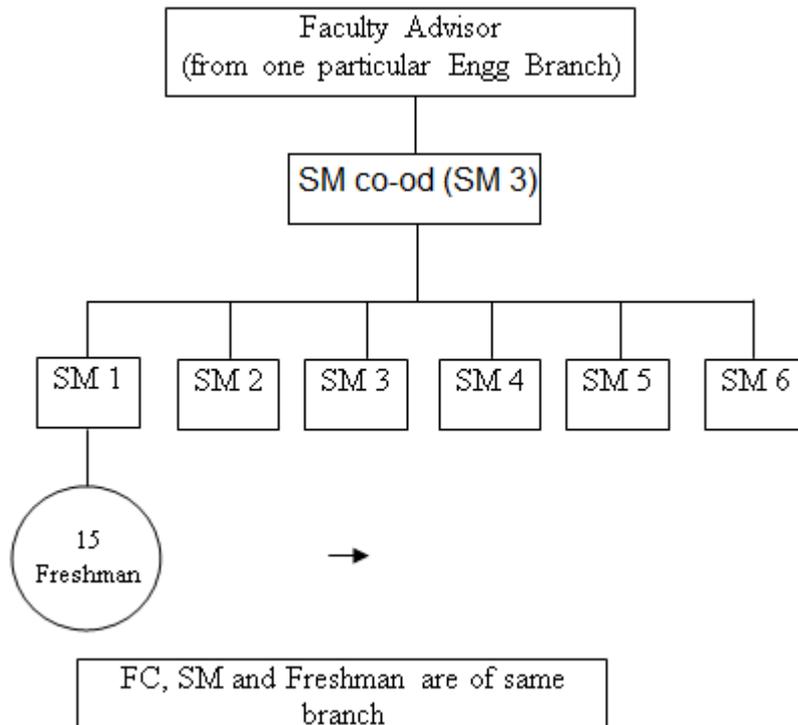
Faculty Mentor (FM)

Faculty Advisor (FA)

Student Mentor (SM)



Proposed structure of SMP for VNIT



SM co-ordinator: Selected from 4th year B.Tech (5th year B.Arch) and one of the 6 SMs

The above specified structure has following differences from the current VNIT system:

- One of the senior mentors is selected as a SM coordinator who will have the additional responsibility of being a link between faculty coordinator and other SMs
- The SM coordinator in consultation with the faculty coordinator will select a SM co-ordinator from the junior batch in the even semester
- One Head SM coordinator will be selected among the SM coordinators of all branches
- Head SM coordinator will be under Dean(Academic) who will conduct meetings of all SM coordinators for exchange of ideas and cases

Selection Procedure:

- 3rd year and 4th year SM coordinators will together screen the applications of students
- Selected applicants will be interviewed by the coordinators
- Peer reviews will also be conducted for the selected applicants by the coordinators
- The peer reviews will be confidential and only known to coordinators
- Shortlisted students will then be interviewed by faculty coordinator and 6 mentors will be selected

Counselling & SMP

Who is a Counsellor?

A counsellor provides a safe, supportive and confidential space in which you look at problems you are facing in a non-judgemental way. The counsellor helps you understand and resolve your problems by helping you formulate strategies and evaluate options. A counsellor generates positive vibes empowering you to overcome your problems and get over your fears yourself.

What are fears and misconceptions associated with counselling?

Unfortunately students associate a social stigma with counselling. A student must realize that seeking counselling is not a sign of weakness but that of strength. It reflects the student's willingness to overcome his problems or reform himself.

Students are very often and understandably concerned about the confidentiality of these sessions. One must remember that the confidentiality clause will not be broken unless there is a threat to life.

Role of Counsellor at IIT-B

IIT-B has a dedicated Counselling Care Centre to address the need of students. IIT-B employs two full time counsellors.

Activities undertaken by Counselling Care Centre:

- Sessions are held to familiarize students with the concept of counselling.
- The counsellors manage a Facebook Page (ICareIITB) where motivational articles helping students deal with different problems are published.
- A number of initiatives are undertaken and drives are organized with the notion of eliminating misconceptions about counselling (#HappinessIsAChoice).

Working with the SMP

- Student Mentors undergo a formal training program organized by TISS (Tata Institute of Social Sciences) before they begin their tenure as mentors.
- The counselling centre works in close association with SMP.
- Mentors finding serious cases of depression or substance abuse among their mentees refer them to the counsellors.

Introducing Counsellor + SMP at VNIT

VNIT employs two counsellors who can be approached at the Health Centre. Involving counsellors and making them one of the facets of the SMP is of utmost importance.

Activities undertaken by the Counsellor at VNIT

- Counsellors at VNIT address 1st year students in course of their medical examination.
- Problems of students who approach the counsellor are handled confidentially.
- Cases have been reported where counselled students have referred other students to the counsellor which we believe is a good sign.

Collaboration with SMP

- Mentors could be put through a formal training program which will help them view the problems of their mentees in a non-judgemental manner.
- VNIT could start off by having the campus counsellors train the mentors for the next batch. External organizations could be involved in the process in the coming years.
- Mentors will promote counselling and encourage students to approach counsellors.
- Counsellors must try to familiarize students with what counselling is; this helps to remove any misconceptions. We believe that doing this when the student becomes a part of the institute would be very effective. The students would feel more comfortable when they approach the counsellor.
- Counsellors in conjunction with student mentors can organize drives and create a Facebook page where motivational articles or other tips could be given out.
- Mentors must watch over the mentees entrusted to them and refer them to the counsellors as and when they find it necessary.
- Identifying cases of depression is a very difficult task indeed and the problem is only aggravated by the fact that these students aren't forthcoming. We propose the creation of a portal where a student can put forth his/her problems anonymously before the counsellor.
- The questionnaire prepared for the aspirants we feel is akin to judging a book by its cover. We believe involving the counsellor in the selection process is essential. We could employ the expertise of the counsellor to create a good questionnaire for aspirants which will help us get to know them better. If possible we could also involve the counsellor in the interview process. It will also help establish a rapport between the counsellor and the mentor.

Ragging and Discrimination

What is Ragging?

The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India perhaps has given a more comprehensive meaning of ragging as under:

"Ragging is any disorderly conduct, whether by words spoken or written, or by an act which has the effect of teasing, treating or handling with rudeness any student, indulging in rowdy or undisciplined activities which cause or are likely to cause annoyance, hardship or psychological harm or to raise fear or apprehension thereof in a fresher or a junior student and which has the effect of causing or generating a sense of shame or embarrassment so as to adversely affect the psyche of a fresher or a junior student."

Discrimination

Discrimination on the basis of region, gender, and language is prevalent more or less in many colleges.

Environment at IITB

The Student Mentor Program started at IITB more than a decade ago was indeed to eliminate the events of ragging taking place in the college. And one of the remarkable successes of this program there is that now there are no events of ragging of any freshman by a senior. There is a very friendly relationship between a junior and a senior. The seniors help their juniors, guide them, take care of them and in turn get respect from the juniors. The juniors address their seniors with respect in any way they like. Discrimination by a student or by authority on any ground is not seen at IITB.

There is no hostel in-time, neither for girls nor for boys of any year of engineering. Due to these things an unhealthy environment prevail there at IITB.

Present Environment at VNIT

The basic reason for starting the SMP at VNIT was same as that of IITB. But, as the SMP here is only 2 years old, at present ragging is still prevailing at VNIT in various forms. For e.g.

1. Mostly the seniors rag the freshmen at the time when they are newly admitted to the college.
2. They ask irrelevant questions like asking them to introduce themselves in *Shudhh Hindi*.
3. Forcing the juniors to address the seniors with "Sir" and "Ma'am".
4. They ask them to follow a particular dress-code for some time (before the Fresher's Party).
5. Restricting them to go through a particular path and asking them to go to the class following a *special path* (called *Funda Route*) as indicated by them.
6. Restricting the entry of first years at some public spots like College Canteen and Nescafe.

As we know that all fingers are not the same and so all seniors are not involved in these activities. Also these things are now reducing in number but still there is some fear in the freshmen regarding ragging.

As for discrimination there are very few cases by the students. But unequal freedom is given to the girls as they have an hostel in-time (9.00 pm) while the boys (2nd year onwards) do not. The first year boys too have an in-time of 8.00pm but the first year girls have that of 7.30pm.

Proposals

- Ragging is a problem of the students and by the students, and therefore, the solution to it also lies with the students.
- The negative current flowing in the college because of ragging should be neutralized by a positive current of love, care and respect between a senior and a junior.
- The seniors instead of ***begging for respect should try to Earn Respect.***
- Try changing the mentality from “*Mere saathhua to unkesaathbhikareng.*”, to, “*Mere saathhua to unkesaathni hone denge.*”.
- The freshmen will be informed that they are **not** obliged to **call** any senior as “**Sir**” or “**Ma’am**” and the mentors will be asked to tell their mentees **not** to call them as **Sir** or **Ma’am**.
- No restriction to public spots.
- For any instance if a mentee gets ragged, he or she should immediately complain to his or her mentor. The mentor shall take action according to the situation and inform the student coordinator of his/her department.
- Collaboration of the **Anti-Ragging Cell** with the Student Mentor Program.
- There should be **no** hostel **in-time** for the first year students on the ground of protecting them against ragging as it would be contradictory to having a Student Mentor Program to eradicate ragging.
- If not so (as this cannot be implemented suddenly or if they are protected as they are new to this environment), the **in-time** of **first year girls** should be **8.00pm** rather than 7.30pm to impart equality amongst both of them.
- And in any case there should be **no** hostel **in-time** for **girls (2nd year onwards)** for having equal rights to both communities of students as otherwise it will be the case of restricting the freedom of a free citizen of India.
- Support groups like **Women’s Cell** should be there (as in IITB), where one can go and seek for confidential help.

Academic Rehabilitation Program at I.I.T. Bombay

Introduction

Academic Rehabilitation Program (ARP) at I.I.T. Bombay aims at rehabilitating students who have performed poorly in academics. The students have to go through four courses of 24 credits. In order to get the basics clear, an ARP student may take up the courses which he/she has already cleared in his previous semesters. But during the ARP, the student has to follow regular routines. The student is continuously mentored and monitored.

The courses are the means through which the rehabilitation is carried out and the student's performance in them displays the effect of the rehabilitation. If they pass in all four courses they are put back into the regular UG program. Usually those who pass, also pass well in regular UG course. This increases their self confidence and they are better able to cope when they return to the system. In very few cases, if the student fails to perform in ARP, he/she is recommended to take termination from the institute.

Eligibility for ARP at IITB

Under present rules at IIT Bombay, a student who obtains a fail grade in courses worth 30 credits or more up to end of second year, fail grade in courses worth 42 credits for subsequent years, enters the ARP under the supervision of a special 'ARP committee' set up by the Senate. For students who enter the ARP in their first year, there is a preliminary program called the ARP Remedial which could contain special courses designed for the student. If the student is under the ARP Remedial and completes it successfully, then he/she enters the ARP in the next semester, where he/she has to take courses from the undergraduate (UG) program.

In all the above cases, the faculty mentors advise the student as to which four courses to choose and the students attend classes and give exams like regular students. Presently the ARP is designed for B.Tech students as well as for M.Sc. students.

Structure at IITB

At present regular meetings with the faculty mentor is an undertaking the student and a parent/guardian are expected to sign in the mentor's presence as part of the formalities of registration in ARP.

A rigid work routine is enforced on the students. They are expected to have 100% attendance at classes. They have to maintain a diary of daily activities. They have to meet the faculty mentors twice a week (who monitors their activities using their diary). Each department has two faculty mentors. They are assisted by student mentors of the Departmental Academic Mentorship Program.

Motive

The program is presently a kind of therapy where things are done in order to improve the student's morale, micromanage his/her daily routine so as to inculcate steady work habits and force regular (close to 100%) attendance in classes. The courses are intended to mimic the conditions of a regular semester and to make the student realize the value of the changed habits.

Suggestions for Implementing ARP at VNIT

The following steps could be undertaken:

- Appoint one or two faculty mentors in each department who will be in charge of ARP apart from monitoring student mentor program.
- Identify number of credits for each year (from 1st to 4th year) which if remain under backlog, the student is chosen for ARP.
- The student and faculty mentor will together decide which four courses to be chosen for the semester.
- The student must then be treated as a regular student. He/she must have 100% attendance and maintain a diary recording his/her routine study time table and activities.
- The student must then report to faculty coordinator about twice a week to discuss his/her progress in the academics.
- Once in fortnight student must visit counselor to seek motivation and discuss his achievements in regularizing his daily schedule.
- If the students perform well in his ARP time, he/she must be transferred back to the normal curriculum load.

Difficulties that may arise:

Many of the students are badly scarred by repeated failures and tend to get disheartened easily. They are scared to meet any authority figure, including the mentor. If a reverse occurs, they often become incommunicado (room locked, cell phone switched off etc.) .It can require a lot of effort to trace such students and to renew contact and change their behaviour. They also tend to lie easily, probably to tell the mentor and the family whatever they want to hear. Perhaps the only way of mentoring a large number (say more than 10) of ARP students is to make the meeting with the mentor mandatory and terminate the ARP for the student for that particular semester if he/she does not meet the mentor regularly. ARP can be successful only in the case of students who are regular and do not lie.

Prevention is better than Cure:

Better methods are required for not letting the student do badly in the first place. Most of such effort should be concentrated on the 1st year 1 semester since that is the period where maximum damage occurs. Remedial classes for students who score less marks in sessional exams can be one of the methods to help students academically which are successfully run at V.N.I.T. UG students of 2nd and 3rd year teach 1st year students basic subjects. The need is to make these Remedial classes more structured. There needs to be a selection procedure for UG students who teach in these remedial classes. Technical assistants can be appointed who may conduct extra classes for 1st years. These can be students who are currently pursuing M.Tech or PhD at VNIT.

Online portal “Freshmen Helpdesk”

The idea is to have an online portal by which the freshers getting admission in the institute can have their queries cleared by Student mentors.

Existing options

Social networking sites such as Facebook, twitter etc. have official as well as unofficial pages for institutes which the freshers follow and get their queries cleared. But the biggest disadvantage in this platform is that it is a public forum and any and every person has a say. So the reliability is very less in this case.

Scenarios inside the campus change as the years pass by. Seniors answering the queries in such forums can't be up to date and are not reliable. This can mislead the freshers and can give a false image of the institution.

Proposal

Creating an official online student mentor helpline portal helps the students get genuine information on the institute by authorized personnel. The help of computer science students could be taken to develop the portal.

Student mentors could have a unique ID and password to answer the queries. A handbook of student mentors could be given to each fresher which would have the link to the portal.

FAQs

A list of FAQs from initial queries could be added to the portal few months later. These FAQs could be organized into different categories which would save time from asking and waiting time till the reply for the freshers as well as the student mentors answering the queries.

Other features of the portal

The portal shall not be limited to questions and answers but as the site develops additional features shall be added on such as the details of the mentors and their respective mentees, Mentee details for his /her mentors reach.

Private queries

When the freshers are allotted their mentors, this platform can also be used for private queries in case if the mentor is not reachable or if the query is not so urgent.

Mentor-mentee Interaction:

- At **IITB**, the interaction of mentors with their mentees takes place in the Hostel generally and it's more or less informal interaction. They also do not have any specific slot for the interaction. The point to be noted here is in IITB all the freshmen entering the institute are in **Hostel** only.
- In **VNIT Nagpur**, we have a good percentage of **day-scholar** freshmen (15-20%) as well. So, we can have a slot if possible for the interaction between mentors and mentees as it will help the mentors to meet both his hostel and day-scholar mentees.
- One suggestion which came as a option i.e. to have separate mentors for day-scholars does not turn up to be a good alternative as it will further decrease the interaction between hostel and day-scholar freshmen. So, the current allotment is appropriate in this case.
- The most important thing to be noted is that mentor should have **one-on-one interaction** with the mentee as it is the only case where mentee can disclose his things freely. A mentee is generally not so free to open-up and discuss his problems with the mentor in front of other mentees.
- Special **powers** must be provided to the mentors so that they can **enter the first year hostel** anytime so as to meet his mentees. This will improve the interaction efficiency.
- Issuing **Visiting cards/ I-cards** will definitely help in improving the interaction and visiting cards can be provided to the parents of mentees so that parents are also somewhat relieved and free to take help from mentor if necessary.

Review Process

About:

- The success of Student Mentor Programme (SMP) will depend on:
 - How well we are able to assess its effectiveness,
 - Address any weaknesses and
 - Demonstrate that it is meeting established goals and objectives.
- A structured review system will help us to rate the performance of the mentors, mentees and SMP.

The reviews should be taken from

- Mentees
 - Co-mentors
 - Self review
 - Friends, hostel/ department mate
 - Any club/ activity the mentor is involved in
- } (Those who aren't part of the SMP).

Who will collect the review?

- Student Co-ordinators should collect the reviews and must keep them confidential.

Note:

- Compulsory review about the progress of the mentee must be taken before and after the sessionals and end-semester.
- The mentors with noticeable performance can be rewarded to encourage further batches to participate in the programme.

Following are few questions to be discussed with your mentees for getting valuable feedback:

- How is the SMP working?
- What, if anything, is working not as well as you had expected?
- What additional support might the mentee welcome?
- What external constraints or difficulties are affecting the progress of the SMP? How might these be resolved?
- What changes might be helpful to make the program more effective?

Conclusion

Student Mentorship Programme in VNIT is two years old. It is in its evolving stage where it has to learn a lot from IIT Bombay in changing its structure. VNIT does not lack in resources it is only that we are not organizing them and putting them to good use. The change cannot be all of a sudden. There will be a gradual change and we hope that in the following 2-3 years this Student Mentor Program will be more fruitful. We hope for a supportive and healthy environment with love, care and respect from both ends and with both seniors and juniors interacting together to take the college to renowned heights. An excellent Mentor-Mentee-Counsellor relationship and understanding we believe is essential for this program to succeed.

Following are some of the outcomes that have come after the interaction with Student Mentors at IIT Bombay that can be inculcated at VNIT

- Student Coordinator post can be created at departmental level who will work under the Faculty Coordinator of his/her department.
- Involvement of Student Coordinator and Faculty Coordinator in the selection process of Student Mentor.
- Head Student Coordinator will be elected amongst all the Student Coordinator who will work under the Dean Academics at institute level.
- Collaboration of SMP and Counselling Centre for improvement in personal life of the freshman.
- Eradication of Ragging and Discrimination with the help of SMP.
- Creating an online portal where a freshman can clear his/her queries.
- Introduction of Training Programme for the Student Mentors.
- Introduction of a more structured Academic Rehabilitation Program at VNIT for academically weak students.
- Improvement in the feedback system which will be helpful in evolving the system