

Under the 'Umbrella' Project: A Volunteer-Mentoring Approach for Socially Disadvantaged University Students

Authors : Evridiki Zachopoulou, Vasilis Grammatikopoulos, Michail Vitoulis, Athanasios Gregoriadis

Abstract : In the last ten years, the recent economic crisis in Greece has decreased the financial ability and strength of several families when it comes to supporting their children's studies. As a result, the number of students who are significantly delaying or even dropping out of their university studies is constantly increasing. The students who are at greater risk for academic failure are those who are facing various problems and social disadvantages, like health problems, special needs, family poverty or unemployment, single-parent students, immigrant students, etc. The 'Umbrella' project is a volunteer-based initiative to tackle this problem at International Hellenic University. The main purpose of the project is to provide support to disadvantaged students at a socio-emotional, academic, and practical level in order to help them complete their undergraduate studies. More specifically, the 'Umbrella' project has the following goals: (a) to develop a consulting-supporting network based on volunteering senior students, called 'i-mentors'. (b) to train the volunteering i-mentors and create a systematic and consistent support procedure for students at-risk, (c), to develop a service that, parallel to the i-mentor network will be ensuring opportunities for at-risk students to find a job, (d) to support students who are coping with accessibility difficulties, (e) to secure the sustainability of the 'Umbrella' project after the completion of the funding of the project. The innovation of the Umbrella project is in its holistic-person-centered approach that will be providing individualized support -via the i-mentors network- to any disadvantaged student that will come 'under the Umbrella.'

Keywords : peer mentoring, student support, socially disadvantaged students, volunteerism in higher education

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