Welcoming Honours Students into a Research Community

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This paper will discuss the practical steps we are taking to welcome honours students into the range of research communities that make up the multidisciplinary School of English, Media Studies, and Art History (EMSAH) at the University of Queensland. For a range of reasons, undergraduate students in the arts have a more fragmented university experience than do many of their peers in the sciences and professional courses, who early form stable cohorts as they move together through a structured program. Arts students, on the other hand, might enrol in first-year courses with students they won’t meet again before graduation. The honours experience marks a shift, as strong intellectual friendships are formed in the hot-house environment of what is perhaps the most demanding year in any arts research program. The EMSAH experience, however, has been that while internally an honours cohort may be pleasingly cohesive, it does not see itself as part of the School’s broader research community. This year Megan, as a PhD student who “survived” honours in 2006, and Jude, as director of honours, set up an informal mentoring program between interested postgraduate and honours students in response to this sense of alienation. Anecdotal evidence suggests our experiment served well to ease the transition for at least some of our students, but this year’s project was necessarily a trial run and we are now in the process of assessing our data for 2008. We look forward to sharing what we’ve learned, and to the feedback of other delegates.