

Peer Mentor Practices

Training, Facilitation & Programming

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Covered in the Training Guide

Introduction

- Why Peer Mentors Matter
- The Campus Areas They're Supporting
- Helping with Staffing Shortages
- Providing Students with Critical Support as They Face Today's Challenges
- Recovering from Pandemic Pauses and Losses

Primary Peer Mentor Areas of Focus

- Creating Campus Connection Points
 - Inspiring High-Quality Connections
 - Easing Transitions
 - Helping Students Navigate Social Situations
 - Best Practices
- Fostering a Sense of Belonging
 - Being Inclusive and Accessible
 - Questioning "Find Your Place" Messaging
 - Engaging in Belonging Activities
 - Best Practices
- Supporting Retention and Persistence to Graduation
 - Creating a Positive Institutional Culture
 - Putting Belonging Into Action
 - Best Practices
- Destigmatizing Help-Seeking Behaviors
 - The Language We Use: Is "Peer Mentors" a Title That Keeps Students Away?
 - Other Position Titles to Consider
 - Best Practices
- Modeling the Ways and Whys of Higher Education
 - Discussing the Value of a College Degree
 - Best Practices

Practical Roles and Resources

- Creating a Culture of Care
 - Fostering a Culture of Support
 - Increasing Self- and Other-Awareness
 - Understanding Student Trauma



Covered in the Training Guide *(continued)*

- Helping Students Gain Coping Skills
 - Focusing on Stress Management
 - Providing Mental and Emotional Health Support
 - Encouraging Resilience, Flexibility and Adaptability
- Meeting Student Needs
 - Organizing Meet-ups That Match Students' Availability
 - Addressing Financial, Academic, Work, Social and Other Critical Concerns
- Combining the Role of Coach into Peer Mentor Positions
 - The Pillars of Coaching Success
- Offering Check-ins with a Fellow Student
 - Facing the “Trust Barrier”
 - Developing a True Sense of Trust
- Working Effectively with Marginalized Students
 - Addressing Cultural and Identity-Based Areas (implicit bias, inclusivity, pronoun usage, understanding personal biases, privilege, identity and more)
- Filling in the Gaps
 - Promoting Executive Function and Studentship Skills When They're Lacking
- Identifying Supports and Resources
 - Collaborating with On- and Off-Campus Areas
- Communicating Well with Fellow Students
 - Ideas for Initial Mentor/Mentee Meetings
 - Asking Engaging, Empowering Questions
 - Keeping Good Notes to Track Important Details

Skills Training for Peer Mentors

- Empathy
- Cultural Competence
- Inclusion
- Comfort with Their Own Identity
- Engagement
- Facilitation
- Commitment
- Listening Skills
- Problem-Solving



Covered in the Training Guide *(continued)*

- Decision-Making
- Critical Thinking
- Knowing Their Limits
- Trust and Confidentiality
- Helping Skills
- Organization

Practical Training and Programmatic Considerations

- Looking at Different Peer Mentor Program Models
- Addressing Logistics
- Recruiting in a Tough Employment Market
- Identifying Goals and Expectations
- Having Seasoned Peer Mentors Serve as Leaders
- Embedding Cultural Competence into Selection and Training Practices
- Leveraging Technology
- Measuring Success
- Enhancing Credibility
- Gaining Institutional Support and Buy-in

Looking Out for Peer Mentors

- Showing Appreciation and Recognition
- Supporting Peer Mentors on the Frontlines
- Mitigating Risk
- Recognizing When Peer Mentors are Struggling
- Keeping Their Well-Being Top of Mind

Recruitment Bonus Infographic

- What You Can Gain from Being a Peer Mentor



Practical Roles & Resources

Communicating Well with Fellow Students HANDOUT

Asking Engaging, Empowering Questions

We all know how to ask questions. After all, many of us have been doing it since we were little, asking “Why?” in all its forms!

Yet, in order to have engaging, impactful conversations with fellow students, you need to know how to ask **empowering questions** that can help them think critically about issues important to them. These questions, according to a PaperClip webinar on “Peer Mentoring for First-Generation and Underrepresented Students”...

- Are best if they focus on “what?” and “how?” instead of “why?”
- Tend to be open-ended
- Evoke descriptive answers
- Are simple and direct
- Help move students forward rather than sticking in the past
- Demonstrate you are listening and understanding the student’s perspective

“Visualizing is a tool that when coupled with an empowering question can help students imagine and feel hope about [the] future.”

– “Peer Mentoring for First-Generation and Underrepresented Students” PaperClip Webinar, July 2021

Sample Empowering Questions

For instance, some empowering questions you could use in your Peer Mentor role include...

- What do you like most about... (your classes, your involvements, your living situation, your job, etc.)?
- How do you like to spend your free time?
- What types of clubs/organizations/service are you interested in getting involved in?
- What are some of the main things you’re looking for in a job after graduation?
- How do you like to stay connected to people who are important to you?
- What are your main goals for this semester/term?
- What are you looking forward to this month?
- What makes you feel brave?
- What motivates you to do your best?
- How do you show people that you care?
- What makes you feel like a contributing member of society?



Practical Roles & Resources

Communicating Well with Fellow Students HANDOUT

(continued)

Your Turn!

What are 3 other empowering questions you could use in your Peer Mentor role?

1.

2.

3.

Pretty soon, you'll be going beyond small talk to have engaging, impactful conversations with fellow students that really make a difference!

Source: "Peer Mentoring for First-Generation and Underrepresented Students" PaperClip Webinar, July 2021



Practical Roles & Resources

Offering Check-ins with A Fellow Student HANDOUT

Developing a True Sense of Trust Beyond the “Trust Barrier”

As a Peer Mentor, you have a distinct advantage over faculty and staff members: students are more likely to trust you because you’re sharing a similar college experience.

That’s one of the big reasons that many campuses use Peer Mentors to foster a sense of belonging and mattering among students. “Oftentimes, students face a trust barrier when working with faculty and professional staff members, sometimes as a result of a history of fraught relationships with authority figures,” wrote Michelle DiMenna for EAB. “Peers, however, overcome this barrier because students are eager to connect with and learn from one another. While students may be nervous or ashamed to reach out to a faculty or staff member, students tend to find peers more approachable and easier to connect with, which can be especially beneficial to women and students of color.”

Putting Trust and Respect in Action

So, that’s a big benefit in your favor. However, developing a true sense of trust and respect between mentors and mentees takes intentional effort. To do so, you can...

- Be consistent
- Be clear about expectations
- Be inclusive and welcoming
- Keep each other informed
- Maintain a positive attitude
- Keep your promises
- Follow up when you say you will
- Not talk about students and their issues behind their backs (unless you’re talking with a supervisor to determine how best to help them)
- Listen well
- Show an interest in people and their stories
- Try to look at things from others’ perspective rather than just your own
- Hold each other accountable
- Discuss problems in private, not in public
- Encourage questions

“There are three relevant advantages of utilizing a peer mentoring approach:

- Cost
- Availability of a relatively large number of potential mentors, and
- Increased likelihood of mentees following mentors’ advice due to sharing a common perspective.”

Source: Collier, Peter J. (2017). Why peer mentoring is an effective approach for promoting college student success. *Metropolitan Universities*, Vol. 28 No. 3, Summer 2017.



Practical Roles & Resources

Offering Check-ins with A Fellow Student HANDOUT

(continued)

- Not pass judgment on mistakes and help others learn from them instead
- Admit your own mistakes readily
- Recognize that there's no one "right" way to do things
- Be open to feedback, ideas and suggestions
- Give feedback along the way so nothing is a surprise
- Share *why* you do things instead of just doing them

Keep adding to this list, as you likely have trust and respect actions of your own that help guide you.

Source: "Why – and how – to build a sense of belonging on campus," EAB, 4/24/19

SAMPLE



Skills-Based Training for Peer Mentors

Critical Thinking Skills HANDOUT

Becoming a More Effective Critical Thinker

Let's talk about critical thinking, shall we?

“Critical thinking is that mode of thinking — about any subject, content, or problem — in which the thinker improves the quality of his or her thinking by skillfully analyzing, assessing, and reconstructing it,” according to The Foundation for Critical Thinking. It's a lifelong skill that must be practiced and cultivated, and one that can improve your sense of well-being as you continue learning to navigate the world successfully.

Critical thinking is a skill that serves you very well as a Peer Mentor, in your workplace, in being a student and in life. And it's at a premium with 60 percent of employers identifying it as a skill in which college graduates across the country are deficient, according to research by PayScale and Future Workplace. So, it's an important one to work on, for sure!

5 Tips to Improve Your Critical Thinking

How can you improve your critical thinking skills? Here are five simple ways that Samantha Agoos shared during her TEDEd Talk...

- 1. Formulate Your Question.** First, know what you're looking for.
- 2. Gather Your Information.** Have a clear idea of your question to help you determine what's relevant.
- 3. Apply the Information.** Ask yourself critical questions when facing a decision:
 - a. What concepts are at work?
 - b. What assumptions exist?
 - c. Is my interpretation of the information logically sound?
- 4. Consider the Implications.** Look at the different angles of an issue.
- 5. Explore Other Points of View.** Explore alternatives, evaluate your own choices and make more informed decisions.

By clarifying your own thinking and being more intentional about *how* you think, you'll become a stronger, more effective critical thinker.

“Through critical thinking, as I understand it, we acquire a means of assessing and upgrading our ability to judge well. It enables us to go into virtually any situation and to figure out the logic of whatever is happening in that situation. It provides a way for us to learn from new experiences through the process of continual self-assessment. Critical thinking, then, enables us to form sound beliefs and judgments, and in doing so, provides us with a basis for a ‘rational and reasonable’ emotional life.”

— *Inquiry: Critical Thinking Across the Disciplines* by Linda Elder, Winter, 1996. Vol. XVI, No. 2.

Sources: TEDEd Talk by Samantha Agoos, 3/15/16; The Foundation for Critical Thinking, criticalthinking.org



Skills-Based Training for Peer Mentors

Critical Thinking Skills ACTIVITY

Determining Where I Stand: Enhanced Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is a key asset when it comes to becoming a critical thinker. Being aware of where you stand on various issues can help you practice critical thinking skills. These can then enable you to form sound beliefs and judgments about a variety of issues during your time as a Peer Mentor – and beyond.

There are often three levels involved when looking at issues, problems and ideas...

1. What you know as fact
2. What you assume to be true, without evidence
3. What gaps there are in your knowledge

Where Do You Stand?

Now, using the prompts on the following page, consider three key issues and where you stand on each one...

For Example:

Issue: Food insecurity among students on our campus

1. What you know as fact:
I know that there is a campus food pantry, so there must be a bigger problem than I'm aware of.
2. What you assume to be true, without evidence:
I assume that students struggling to get enough to eat must be low-income and struggling in other areas of their life, too.
3. What gaps there are in your knowledge:
I'm unaware of what services, beyond the food pantry, are available to food insecure students. And I don't know how many students this issue impacts.
4. How you can learn more:
I can learn more by taking the director of the food pantry out for coffee to discuss the larger campus concern and how I might be more helpful.



Skills-Based Training for Peer Mentors

Critical Thinking Skills ACTIVITY *(continued)*

Issue #1: _____

1. What you know as fact:
2. What you assume to be true, without evidence:
3. What gaps there are in your knowledge:
4. How you can learn more:

Issue #2: _____

1. What you know as fact:
2. What you assume to be true, without evidence:
3. What gaps there are in your knowledge:
4. How you can learn more:

Issue #3: _____

1. What you know as fact:
2. What you assume to be true, without evidence:
3. What gaps there are in your knowledge:
4. How you can learn more:

Look at answer #4 for all of your stated issues. Choose at least one where you'll take action in the coming month to learn more.



Primary Peer Mentor Areas of Focus

Destigmatizing Help-Seeking Behaviors

BEST PRACTICES

Student Resiliency Advocates at SUNY New Paltz

Students at the State University of New York at New Paltz who are struggling with stress related to the pandemic and other challenges can turn to the Student Psychological Resilience Project, which uses a peer-to-peer outreach and education model. Ten trained Student Resiliency Advocates provide psychological first aid education and stress management tools to help students gain coping skills that can help them now and carry them into the future.

“College students are currently living through multiple losses due to the pandemic,” Amy Nitza, director of the Institute for Disaster Mental Health (IDMH) and associate professor of psychology, told the *New Paltz News*. “They also continue to grapple with issues such as institutionalized racism, financial challenges and an unrelenting news stream, much of it not positive. This is different from acute trauma. It’s a fluid situation that requires them to be flexible and adaptive on a day-to-day basis.”

“Mental health issues, including sub-clinical stress and anxiety, have reached record levels among college students,” according to the project’s website. Experts from SUNY New Paltz’s Institute for Disaster Mental Health guide the Student Resiliency Advocates as they help prepare students with “the coping skills necessary to build a stable foundation for their personal, academic and professional success,” reported *New Paltz News*.

The Student Psychological Resilience Project was developed thanks to funding from alumnus Ira Schreck ‘74 and Barbara Ginsberg, who joined in partnership with SUNY New Paltz to foster student mental health, well-being and success.

“Mental health is an important issue that needs to be spoken about in the climate of a campus environment,” Student Resiliency Advocate Alyssa Dudinyak told the *News*. “I’m excited to be an advocate for mental health among my peers and to let them know that their concerns are not isolated. We’re all in this together and I want to help them through this.”

Sources: Student Resiliency Advocates, Institute for Disaster Mental Health, newpaltz.edu/idmh; *New Paltz News*, 8/28/20 and 5/13/22

“I was able to meet this group of people who are all connected to that shared passion of wanting to normalize mental health and make it easier for people who are struggling.”

– Zoe Perles, a SUNY New Paltz Student Resiliency Advocate