A Mentor to the Mentors

How to use experienced Peer Mentors to support newer ones

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Introduction

Upon graduation, some of our peer mentors have earned scholarship awards because of the work they did as peer mentors.
History of the ODLC Peer Mentoring Program

The ODLC Peer Mentoring Program began because a student attending a Learning Communities Conference spoke to peer mentors from another college and asked “Why don’t we have that at Kingsborough?”

Following the conference, we put together a proposal to integrate Peer Mentors into our Learning Community SD-10 classes. Peer Mentors would be responsible for helping students connect to campus services, encouraging them to join clubs and programs, and encouraging community involvement.
History of Senior Peer Mentors

In 2013, we began a “Shakedown Cruise,” where we embedded two Peer Mentors in SD-10 classes to see how the program would work.

Following the success of the Shakedown Cruise, we expanded the program from 2 mentors to 10.

One of the mentors from the Shakedown Cruise, Fernando, became a “Senior Peer Mentor.” Fernando’s job would be to share his experiences from the Shakedown Cruise and assist in training the new Mentors.
History & Design

As the program continued, it became clear that Fernando would eventually graduate.

We would need new Senior Peer Mentors to continue to provide training and guidance to the new mentors.

We developed a “Mentor Life Cycle” to raise new Senior Mentors and allow them to put their own stamp on the program.
Lifecycle of a Peer Mentor

SD-10 Student is encouraged to apply to become a Peer Mentor

Applicant submits one written paragraph explaining why they are interested in being a mentor and a letter of recommendation from their case manager

Applicants interview with the Coordinator of the Peer Mentoring Program, a Case Manager, and a current Peer Mentor.

New Peer Mentors are chosen (typically the students who demonstrated a desire to “give back”)

Peer Mentor Training happens in the Summer/Winter before the semester begins. All Mentors attend.

All Peer Mentors are assigned to a Case Manager to work with through the semester.

After two semesters of experience as a Peer Mentor, if the Mentor is judged to be responsible and is interested, the Peer Mentor is promoted to Senior Peer Mentor

The Senior Peer Mentors work to design the training, answer questions about mentoring, help new mentors solve problems, and Mentor the Mentors

Upon Graduation, Alumni Peer Mentors are still invited to the end of the year Barbecue, to continue their connection to the mentors they mentored.
Design of Peer Mentor Program

Students are invited to apply to become Peer Mentors by either their Peer Mentor or their SD-10 instructor. They submit an application, and have an interview with The Coordinator of the Peer Mentoring Program, a Case Manager, and a current Peer Mentor.

If selected, the Peer Mentors undergo training and are paired with a Case Manager.

After two semesters as a Peer Mentor, the student becomes a Senior Peer Mentor, and assists with training, program design, and mentoring the newer mentors.
Training - What it Consists of

All Mentors are trained for 8 hours prior to the start of each semester. Topics covered include:

- What is a Learning Community
- What is and is not a Peer Mentor’s job
- Visits from various Student Services on Campus
  - Student Life
  - Access-Ability
  - Dean of Students’ Office
  - Career/Transfer Center
- Confidentiality
- Appropriate Social Media Use
- Skills for bonding with mentees
Training - What it Consists of

We have monthly 2-hour “Staff Meetings” which double as training sessions to cover issues that come up throughout the semester. Examples include:

1. A mentor tells us they need information on helping a mentee on the spectrum, so we invite Access-Ability services to the meeting.
2. A mentor asks for resources to support a student who is coming out, so we bring Safe Zone to do a training session at a meeting.

Our last Staff Meeting of the year is the Barbecue, in which we welcome the new mentors and Senior and Graduating Mentors pass on their advice.
Training – What it Consists of

The Staff Meetings always have time for the Mentors to share what’s going on in their classes, and to get advice from the Senior Peer Mentors.

Starting in Spring 2018, all ODLC Peer Mentors also train to become Student Ambassadors through the Office of Student Life.
Improvement and discussion

In Winter 2018 George and 3 Senior Peer Mentors (Crystal, Nefertiti and I), talked about what could be improved in training.

- Keep presentations given by representatives from different offices on campus such as Accessibility office, Student conduct, Student Life
- Update on the social media usage to make it broader than just Facebook
- Creation of a more efficient way to connect among Peer Mentors through the Remind App
- Present potential mentoring scenarios through skits instead of having it discussion based
Survey

Survey was sent to 13 Kingsborough students: 10 current and 3 former Peer Mentors

12 students responded
Outcomes - What Peer Mentors took away from Training

Communication Skills

“How to communicate with my peers effectively.”

“The basics about how to treat and inform the incoming students”

“How to speak with the students”
Outcomes - What Peer Mentors took away from Training

Defining the Role of Peer Mentor

“Peer mentors are there to help students”

“The information that I learned was try to interact with the students more”

“Information on what we could help with and what we couldn’t. What our role as a Peer Mentor was.”
Outcomes - What Peer Mentors took away from Training

Confidentiality

“The most useful information that I learned at the Peer Mentor training is FERPA. I learned that parents can not access their child's academic records without the students consent.”

“To not give information about other students and how to maintain your own personal information.”
Outcomes - How has training grown to respond to your needs and experience?

This is my second semester as a peer mentor. This program has grown because now all the peer mentors are student ambassadors and the program is growing coordinating.

It continues to add on new ways of communicating with all of the peer mentors and tells us about the new things being brought to Kingsborough.

Each semester we learn new things and get refreshed on old things.

The training had covered many aspect to teach us to become a good peer mentor by stories of others and some activities and tips.

The training is pretty basic. The thing about being a good peer mentor is that one needs to be willing to listen and help others. My experience made me open up to a lot of people who I wouldn’t normally talk to because I wouldn’t think we had things in common but when I talked to them I was really surprised to me how much I had in common with these people and the fact that most of them were willing to talk to me in a friendly way. Being a peer mentor also improved my language and social skills in a great way.
Effective Training

Most of the Peer Mentors believe that the training was helpful, a few said that they wanted to add other components such as:

- Information about the food pantry
- Information about the transfer process
- Campus tour
- Assist students outside of the learning community
Peer mentoring is a growing experience: an individual one and a group one.

Some of the newer mentors were concerned about how to reach out to the students and how to make the students feel comfortable to come to them. As Senior peer mentors, we tried to give them some advice:

- Remind the students you are a student to
- “Harass them” not literally but keep after them
- Participate to an event and let the students know you’ll be there
- Encourage them to come see you as a group
- Don’t feel bad if connection isn’t immediate
Before the intensive training, peer mentors weren’t sure what their role was in the classroom and often looked at the faculty member for direction and guidance.

Often the faculty member had to dictate to the peer mentor what their role was in the classroom without a clear definition of what their responsibilities should be.

Are they a Teacher Assistant? Helper? Or student?

“My first semester I didn’t know I had a PM in the class.”
(Danny went on to become a peer mentor)

After implementing the formal training and incorporating the peers input and own experiences into it, the peer mentors started to really change the way they took on their role in the classroom and on campus.

Instead of asking professors what they should be doing, the peer mentors now inform the professors on their new and innovative ways to engage and help lead the students toward successful college careers.

Social networking, one-on-one meetings, remind me apps, on campus activities, and taking initiative to offer outreach to struggling students.
Where do I stand?

In my first semester as a Peer Mentor I was less comfortable in the classroom because I needed to understand what my role was. While looking into it I felt pushed to communicate more with my case manager (Daniel) and create a better rapport.
Where do I stand?

The experience with my Senior Peer Mentor (Danny) helped me to better understand my role as one, and to feel more confident in what I was already doing. What Danny gave me was a different perspective about mentoring compared to the one of my case manager.
How helpful has the Senior Mentor been during your time as a Peer Mentor?

- Helpless: 0
- Somewhat Helpless: 1
- Helpful: 4
- Amazingly Helpful: 4
Where do I stand?

Now as a Senior Peer Mentor I feel more confident in class and with students and staff. I like to be helpful to other Peer Mentors and I always try to remember that I still have a lot to learn.
Survey

It’s good that nobody feels uncomfortable in the role; however, we can see that there is always space for growth.

As a program we continue to grow and change.

How comfortable do you feel in your role as a Peer Mentor?

- Not Comfortable: 0
- A Little Comfortable: 0
- Meh: 0
- Pretty Comfortable: 7
- Very Comfortable: 2
Survey - How have the Senior Mentors helped you define your role as a Peer Mentor?

The senior peer mentors were amazing with guiding me and acknowledging my strengths as a mentor.

They gave their experience on things and how they dealt with it, so that helped me with how I would act as a mentor.

They're easy to reach out to, and are very helpful in guiding me through any questions or doubts I may have.

Gave more insight.

They constantly told me engage with the students. Too take my time and let the students open up to you. That we hold a somewhat leadership position.

They talk about their stories

Personally I feel like I had the most understanding and helpful senior mentors. My experience with them was really nice. It made me want to become a peer mentor myself.

They helped me to get more comfortable with my students
THANK YOU!