PEER MENTORING FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

Powered by Publics Eastern Cluster

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ASSOCIATION OF
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SCALING STUDENT SUCCESS

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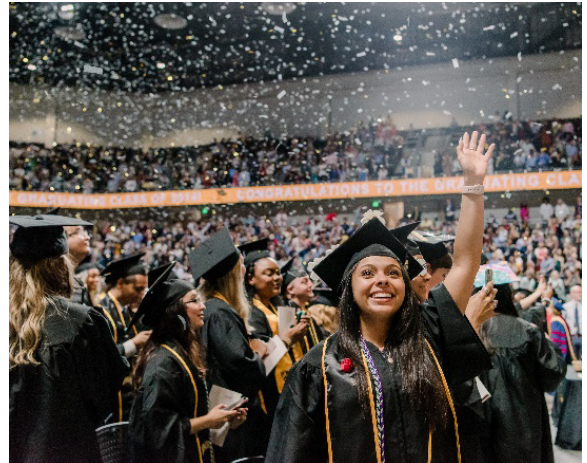Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies
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The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and the participants in the Eastern Cluster and do not necessarily represent those of APLU, the Cluster institutions, or any of their staff.

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Introduction:

Powered by Publics was a transformative collaboration involving 127 institutions, grouped into 16 transformation clusters, each dedicated to addressing unique student success challenges. Among these clusters, the Eastern Cluster comprised nine universities working together to close equity gaps through innovative peer mentoring strategies. The Cluster's mission focused on fostering student success by building a supportive community, enhancing academic equity, and promoting student well-being. This document shares valuable insights from peer mentorship programs at the cluster institutions and serves as a comprehensive resource for other institutions aiming to develop or enhance similar initiatives. By showcasing best practices, case examples, and practical recommendations, this report aims to empower universities to implement effective, evidence-based peer mentoring programs that significantly contribute to student success and equitable outcomes.

Eastern Cluster Institutions

University at Buffalo
University of Connecticut
University of Delaware
University of Maryland-Baltimore County
University of Missouri-Columbia
University of South Florida
Stony Brook University
Temple University
University of Vermont

Key Takeaways:

- **Enhanced Student Success:** Peer mentoring can boost academic performance and achievement by fostering belonging, providing support, and offering personalized guidance. This can help mentees develop study habits, access resources, and build confidence, potentially leading to higher GPAs and retention rates.
- **Program Components:** The programs studied focus on making social connections, familiarizing students with campus resources, and setting goals.
- **Best Practices:** Incorporate student voices, provide mentors with training, prioritize lived experiences, offer social interaction, and recognize outstanding mentors.
- **Tailored Approaches:** Institutions can customize these strategies to fit their unique contexts, considering factors like institution size, student demographics, and available resources.

Methodology:

The Cluster sought to answer three key research questions when examining institutions' peer mentoring activities:

1. How are peer mentoring programs structured and implemented at each institution?
2. What factors or set of practices contribute to the success of peer mentoring programs?
3. What outcomes have institutions attributed to their peer mentoring programs?

The cluster met monthly over nearly three years, discussing peer mentoring in group settings. These discussions informed a survey of program administrators, yielding qualitative data on program goals, design, implementation, and outcomes. Data were coded into themes to frame the analysis.

Findings:

Programs primarily focused on building social connections and acclimating students to campus resources. Key strategies include:

- Involve students, including potential mentors and mentees, in program design and promotion.
- Provide comprehensive training and ongoing support for mentors.
- Choose mentors with varied backgrounds, prioritizing lived experiences and understanding of college life.
- Offer a range of social interaction opportunities tailored to student identities.
- If possible, compensate peer mentors and recognize outstanding mentors.

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The Eastern Cluster institutions are among many embracing peer mentoring as a student success strategy. Given the various definitions of the term, the Cluster devised one focused on student success. Peer mentoring provides holistic and developmental support for students—particularly marginalized students—enhancing their persistence and completion by building a sense of agency, developing community, promoting academic equity, and preparing them for post-graduation lives. Peer mentoring occurs between undergraduate students with differing levels of experience at the institution and benefits both the mentor and mentee. Research shows that feeling at home on campus and having strong social ties—both fostered by peer mentoring—play an important role in student success.

This document reflects what the cluster has learned through examining their mentorship programs. It's a practical resource for universities looking to build or improve peer mentoring programs. It offers institution and cluster-identified promising practices, case examples, and recommendations that support effective peer mentoring programs. Peer mentoring programs help students—particularly students from underrepresented and nontraditional backgrounds—to access help, feel connected, and realize academic and personal success. In some cases, peer mentoring can be transformational. The primary audience for this report is program directors and staff members responsible for implementing and managing peer mentoring programs in student services, academic departments, or dedicated mentoring programs. Researchers and evaluators studying the impact of peer mentoring in higher education may also find value, as it provides an overview of exemplary programs and can inform the design and evaluation of peer mentoring initiatives.

> *"Peer mentors encourage and facilitate academic, social, and professional development through access to campus resources, activities, and community involvement."*

Michael Glick
Stony Brook University

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI-COLUMBIA

Peer mentoring in higher education emerged as an emotional and social support mechanism for students facing academic and personal challenges. It now includes academic assistance, improving retention, graduation rates, and skills like communication, leadership, and problem-solving (Budge, 2006; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Jacobi, 1991).

Mentee Benefits: Students who engage in mentoring have higher rates of academic success and experience a stronger sense of belonging on campus (Campbell & Campbell, 1997). Peer mentoring connects mentees with mentors who have successfully navigated college challenges (Yomtov et al., 2017). Peer mentoring reduces feelings of isolation and fosters a sense of community on campus (O'Shea et al., 2017). It assists students, especially those from underrepresented groups, in navigating college life, building community, and fostering a sense of belonging.

Mentor Benefits: Peer mentors gain leadership, communication, interpersonal skills, increased self-confidence, and self-awareness (Collier, 2022). Working with diverse student groups enhances mentors' cultural competency (Blake-Beard et al., 2021). Mentors experience fulfillment and satisfaction from positively impacting their peers' lives, developing valuable problem-solving and inspirational skills (Crisp et al., 2017).

Campus Community Benefits: Peer mentoring encourages students to support each other, building a sense of belonging and pride in the institution (Strayhorn, 2018). It promotes diversity, inclusivity, understanding and empathy, and contributes to a more vibrant and engaged campus community (Crisp et al., 2017; Hall, 2021). Peer mentoring identifies and helps address barriers faced by underrepresented students, helping to overcome systemic challenges and achieve their potential (Robbins et al., 2004; Campbell et al., 1999).

Drawbacks: Implementing and maintaining a peer mentoring program can be resource-intensive, requiring time, money, and staff (Terrion & Leonard, 2007; Ward et al., 2010). Success relies heavily on mentors' commitment and effectiveness (Ehrich et al., 2004). Some students may need more support than a peer can provide, and mismatched mentor-mentee pairs can lead to ineffective relationships and potential frustration (Garvey & Alred, 2000).

Social and Emotional Support: Peer mentoring provides essential social and emotional support, reducing feelings of isolation and fostering a sense of community on campus (O'Shea et al., 2017). It helps students, especially those from underrepresented groups, navigate college life and build a sense of belonging. Peer mentors empower mentees by increasing their agency, motivation, and engagement, positively impacting their mental health by alleviating stress and anxiety (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Gershenfeld, 2014; Ward et al., 2014).

Strategies for Effective Peer Mentoring Programs:
- Ongoing training and support for mentors and mentees are crucial, involving workshops, conferences, and professional development resources (Terrion & Leonard, 2007).
- Considering the needs and identities of the student population enhances program success, with mentors from similar backgrounds being particularly effective (Gershenfeld, 2014).
- A structure featuring regular meetings and designated activities, including goal setting, planning, reflecting, and navigating university systems is a more effective approach (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Colvin & Ashman, 2010).
- Providing continuous support, such as professional development, networking events, and formal recognition, helps sustain and enhance mentoring programs (Lunsford et al., 2017).
- Regular evaluation using quantitative and qualitative methods ensures program success and sustainability, with data collected on implementation and impact (Jacobi, 1991; Crisp & Cruz, 2009).

> *"Effective and ongoing training is critical to the success of the program, mentees, and mentors."*

Brian Booton
University of Missouri-Columbia

The cluster sought to answer three key questions when examining their institutions' peer mentoring activities:

- How are peer mentoring programs structured and implemented at each institution?
- What factors or set of practices contribute to the success of peer mentoring programs?
- What outcomes have institutions attributed to their peer mentoring programs?

To address these questions, the cluster met monthly for nearly three years to discuss peer mentoring as a community of practice. These semi-structured group conversations generated crucial contextual information about implementing peer mentoring programs and their opportunities and challenges. Information from the group discussions was synthesized to identify five main themes.

Mentor Recruitment, Training, and Retention: Highlights the importance of careful mentor selection and preparation, equipping mentors with essential skills, and creating supportive, motivating environments.

Building Social and Personal Connections: Emphasizes creating and strengthening interpersonal relationships among peers. Focus on building a supportive community and fostering a sense of belonging.

Accessing Campus Resources: Emphasizes the importance of ensuring students are aware of and can easily navigate various resources and services offered on campus. Bridges connecting students with crucial support systems, academic tools, or extracurricular opportunities that they might otherwise overlook.

Navigating and Sharing Unwritten Insight and Modeling: Focuses on helping mentees understand and navigate the unspoken rules and cultural norms of the college environment. Mentors model successful behaviors and share insights that are not typically found in formal resources.

Reflection and Goal Planning: Emphasizes the importance of introspection, self-awareness, and forward-thinking for students, helping them set clear, achievable objectives for their academic journey and beyond.

These themes were used as a framework for the survey design. The survey was administered from November 2022 to January 2023 and targeted program administrators from the cluster institutions. Appendix B displays the survey questions. In all, 46 responses were collected. Four responses were excluded for not meeting the cluster's definition of a peer mentoring program. The remaining 42 responses were analyzed.

The data revealed an additional theme not initially identified during the cluster discussions, also supported by existing:

Mentor Incentives and Recognition: Emphasize the importance of providing financial incentives, academic credit, and formal recognition to sustain mentor engagement and morale.

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Mentee Demographics: The peer mentoring programs served a diverse range of students, with a focus on new-to-campus students (15 responses), first-generation students (12 responses), transfer students (11 responses), and underrepresented minorities (11 responses).

Mentee Academic Status: Most of the programs targeted first-year students (24 responses).

Mentor Compensation: Mentors were equally likely to be paid (18 responses) or volunteer (16 responses), with a small number receiving academic credit (4 responses).

Outcomes: Institutions attributed several positive outcomes to peer mentoring programs, including improved retention (17 responses), increased sense of belonging (12 responses), and increased completion rates (5 responses). Four programs had not determined an evaluation process, or it was too early to measure outcomes.

Key Findings by Theme:

Although each mentoring program was implemented differently, there were common components. Most programs centered on building social and personal connections among students and acclimating students to campus resources to support them throughout their academic careers. Some programs included formal components to help students set goals and reflect on progress. Appendix C features selected peer mentoring programs around cluster campuses.

Cluster members also shared behind-the-scenes information about recruiting, training, and retaining mentors, promoting programs, and incentivizing and recognizing peer mentors. This information may be helpful to other universities seeking to start up or improve their own peer mentoring programs. What follows are examples of activities Eastern cluster universities implemented in each area.

Mentor Recruitment, Training, and Retention

The **University of Missouri-Columbia** conducted bi-weekly information sessions for prospective mentors. These sessions were required for peer mentors, which the university found enhanced the quality and consistency of mentor engagement. The university sought students who had a clear understanding of their personal challenges during their college transition, and who were able to reflect on the lessons born of those challenges. Lived experience was prioritized over academic qualifications, resulting in a more diverse group of mentors and more substantial positive feedback compared to previous cohorts.

In a different University of Missouri-Columbia program, selected mentors took part in a three-day off-campus retreat where they learned about leadership principles and practical mentoring skills like role-playing and self-reflection. The university found this training helped mentors feel confident and prepared to help their peers and provided a clear framework to guide discussions with mentees.

Key Findings:
- Value student experiences as social capital. High GPAs don't always determine the best mentors.
- Comprehensive training/professional development were crucial for mentor success and retention.

Navigating and Sharing Unwritten Insight and Modeling

Peer mentors provide invaluable guidance to mentees by sharing their experiences and strategies for success, which are often not found in traditional university resources. These insights help bridge gaps in understanding and equip students with the tools they need to navigate the complex world of higher education. By providing a "behind-the-scenes" look into academic and social nuances, peer mentors help bridge gaps in understanding and equip students with the tools they need to thrive in their academic environment. This theme is especially vital for students who may not have a familial or community reference for the intricacies of college life, ensuring they don't just survive, but thrive in their academic environment.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT

The **University of Connecticut** and the **University of Maryland-Baltimore County** both offer programs that connect students with experienced peers trained to normalize and validate student experiences. These mentors help acclimate mentees to the university environment while building self-efficacy skills. Mentors are trained to 'show' rather than 'tell,' demonstrating how to access resources and communicate effectively with faculty. In addition to this peer-to-peer support, the **University of Connecticut** also actively encourages mentees to participate in campus and community activities, and internships, which help students relate classroom learning to real-life situations. These activities and resources, along with workshops, Q&A sessions, and timely reminders, help students navigate the unwritten aspects of college life.
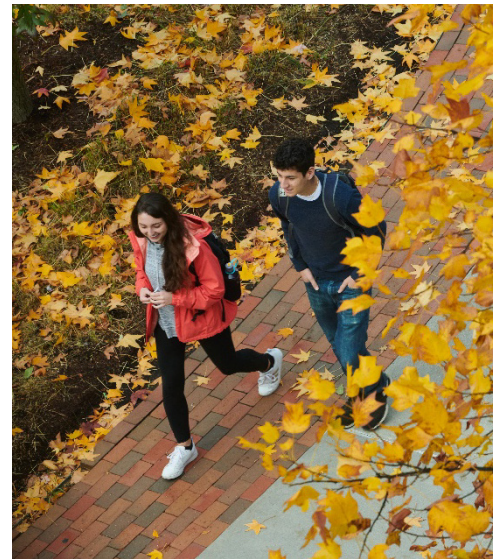
Key Findings:
- Mentors provide less experienced peers with insider knowledge helpful for navigating an unfamiliar college environment, and model behaviors that lead to student success.
- Pairing mentees with mentors from similar backgrounds and lived experiences is beneficial.
- Train mentors to normalize and validate student experience, as well as to 'show' rather than 'tell.'

Reflection and Goal Planning

A common activity for mentees is goal setting and periodic reflection to help students monitor their progress toward goals. For many students, the process of goal setting and reflection can be transformative, instilling a sense of purpose, motivation, and resilience as they navigate the complexities of higher education. Common practices included regular goal setting, reflective journaling, and progress check-ins. The **University of Connecticut** utilizes a "vision board" activity at the start of the semester to help students set and visualize academic and personal goals. A benefit of this activity is that it provides a visual representation of students' ambitions, increasing engagement and motivation.

Mentors also benefit from goal setting and reflection. Both are incorporated into the **University of Connecticut**'s mentor training and leadership development programs. Encouraging self-reflection and personal growth helps keep mentors engaged, hones their mentorship skills, and increases their sense of belonging. The University asks mentors to write reflection papers, which are also used to help evaluate the program along with observations and surveys.

Key Findings:
- Mentors and mentees benefit from activities that help them set goals and reflect on their progress.
- Program leaders can use insights gathered from reflections to measure program efficacy.

Building Social and Personal Connections

Building social and personal connections was the most common theme among the programs offered. For many students, especially transfer, first-generation, and minoritized students, these connections can be pivotal in fostering a sense of belonging and support. Activities ranged from large, organized events to weekly one-on-ones. Some universities also created special events and community-building activities for specific groups of students, fostering affinity among those who share common identities.

Stony Brook University and **Temple University** hold events that help mentors and mentees connect, share experiences and challenges, and celebrate successes. The universities found these events help new students integrate into the university culture and identify as members of the university community. Lessons learned included the value of structuring activities during these events and ensuring they are well-promoted to boost attendance.

The **University of Connecticut**'s summer bridge program and the **University at Buffalo**'s mentee orientation help new students transition smoothly into the mentoring relationship. Emphasizing relationship-building and social connections, social connections and a sense of belonging can be just as important as academic supports for student success.

Social and personal connections are also enhanced through regular interaction. **Temple University** and **Stony Brook University** reported that scheduled meetings between mentors and mentees provide a structured platform for discussions, guidance, and sharing experiences. Maintaining a set schedule helps mentees know what to expect and helps to hold both parties accountable. These meetings also offer universities an opportunity to evaluate their programs and measure impact. Using a standard intake form for the initial meeting helps guide the conversation and sets a baseline for interaction. Tracking numbers of mentees returning for ensuing meetings is a good measure of engagement and effectiveness.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TEMPLE UNIVERSITY

Temple University, the **University of Connecticut**, and the **University of Maryland-Baltimore County** all held separate events for specific student groups, allowing them to address diverse student needs. Organized activities, clubs, and affinity groups that cater to specific populations increases a sense of belonging and inclusion for students from those populations. Lessons learned included tailoring activities in those groups based on student feedback to increase relevance and engagement and the importance of conducting targeted outreach.

Key Findings:
- Include a range of options for social interaction, from large group events to one-on-one meetings.
- Create spaces and affinity groups for students to connect with others who share their identity(ies).

Accessing Campus Resources

Peer mentoring programs enable students to learn about campus resources, increasing the likelihood they will use the available resources. Intentional activities help students connect with crucial support students, academic tools, and extracurricular opportunities they might otherwise overlook.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO (SUNY)

The **University of Missouri-Columbia** sends weekly email blasts to mentors and mentees, highlighting campus resources, student organizations, and events. Campus staff monitor message open rates and event sign ups to gauge the efficacy of their emails and adjust content accordingly. The university found that including more student-driven content increased relevance and engagement. Both **Stony Brook University** and the **University at Buffalo** provide mentor-led workshops on a wide range of topics, from accessing financial aid to improving one's own executive functioning and study skills. These workshops provide essential information in a peer-led format.

A common pain point for new students is major selection. Peer mentors can be helpful here as well. For example, the **University of Connecticut** recruits juniors and seniors to provide information about majors to new students and answer questions. The program helps students make informed decisions about their majors by leveraging the insights of their peers. Results include better-informed major choices and a strengthened sense of belonging in the major. The **University of Connecticut** evaluates the program by tracking mentor-mentee interactions related to major inquiries. Based on its success, the university is now working to expand the program to regional campuses.

Key Findings:
- Use student-created content in outreach to increase relevance to and engagement with their peers.
- Enlist mentors at key checkpoints, such as picking a major, to help students navigate key decisions.

Incentives and Recognition

Peer mentoring is a key role that students add to their academic and personal responsibilities. Therefore, seriously thinking about incentives and recognition and monitor the time students spend in training and mentoring is key to program success. Otherwise, the university risks burning out its mentors, decreasing program utilization, and unintentionally excluding mentors from diverse backgrounds (e.g., low-income students, adult learners, student parents) with valuable experiences to share.

The **University of Connecticut**'s end-of-year Floor Mentor Awards Program celebration recognizes outstanding mentors. The awards serve as a way to incentivize continued commitment and recognize exceptional mentors. The celebration also provides an invaluable opportunity to promote the mentorship role and incentivize other mentors. Of the 42 programs, 22 of them either paid mentors or provided academic credit. This approach helps maintain mentor engagement and acknowledges the significant time commitment required for effective mentoring. By incorporating various forms of incentives and recognition, institutions can create a supportive environment that values the contributions of peer mentors and ensures the longevity and effectiveness of mentoring programs.

Key Findings:
- Providing incentives, including compensation, is important for mentor motivation and retention.
- Formally recognizing mentor contributions boosts morale and assists in recruiting future mentors.

Incorporate the student voice into the design and promotion of peer-mentoring programs.

The **University of Missouri-Columbia**'s email outreach for resources/events and the **University of Connecticut**'s responsive programming highlight the importance of incorporating student voices. The **University at Buffalo**'s Campus Living uses inclusive community agreements to set the tone for inclusion and belonging, reinforcing the value of student involvement in shaping program culture.

Provide mandatory training and professional development opportunities for mentors.

Examples include the **University of Missouri-Columbia**'s three-day offsite mentor training and the **University of Connecticut**'s mentor leadership development program. This "mentor the mentors" approach and comprehensive training programs the cluster discussed highlight the need for robust preparation, including courses, reflective practices, and support from experienced mentors.

When choosing mentors, prioritize a diversity of lived experiences and understanding of the college transition over academic credentials.

Programs at the **University of Connecticut**, **Temple University**, **Stony Brook University**, and the **University of Maryland-Baltimore County** highlight the importance of mentors leading targeted activities, underscoring that social connections support a sense of belonging and student success. The **University of Missouri-Columbia**'s selection process shows the value of lived experience as social capital, resulting in higher satisfaction and engagement of mentees. Including mentors with diverse backgrounds can help provide relatable role models for mentees.

Create a range of options for social interaction among mentors and mentees, and include options tailored to diverse student identities.

The success of large events to weekly one-on-ones, as demonstrated by the **University of Connecticut**, **Temple University**, **Stony Brook University**, and the **University of Maryland-Baltimore County** highlights the importance of offering diverse interaction opportunities. For instance, **Stony Brook**'s round table series foster social connections and a sense of belonging.

Provide formal opportunities to recognize and reward outstanding mentors; provide other incentives and/or compensation if possible.

The **University of Connecticut**'s year-end Floor Mentor Awards incentivizes excellence and commitment and provides community acknowledgement. Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent (2004) and Garvey & Alred (2000) underscore that recognition and compensation are crucial for retaining effective mentors, preventing burnout, and enhancing mentor motivation and program sustainability.

> *"One of the core tenets of our mentoring program is building community and belonging, and by creating responsive programming it underscores this tenet and shows a genuine commitment."*

Michael Petro
University of Connecticut

STEPS TO CREATE A MENTORING PROGRAM

Drawing from the cluster's work, we provide the following guidance for creating a mentoring program. These steps can be tailored to institutional circumstances — size, structure, student demographics, and resources.

Identifying Goals and Objectives
- Clearly define the purpose and desired outcomes of the peer mentoring program
- Consider the unique needs of the student population and tailor the program accordingly
- Incorporate students in the development process to ensure their needs are addressed

Developing a Budget
- Prioritize funding for recruitment, retention, and mentor compensation and recognition
- Plan for scalability and sustainability by securing long-term funding sources or partnerships
- Build flexibility into the budget to accommodate unexpected expenses or changes in the program

Building a Team of Stakeholders
- In addition to faculty/staff, engage students in the design and implementation of the program
- Integrate the peer mentoring program with other support services provided by the institution
- Establish a robust support system with a dedicated staff person overseeing the program

Developing a Training Program
- Provide comprehensive training on mentoring techniques and interpersonal skill development
- Offer training for mentees on goal setting, prioritizing tasks, and utilizing mentor support
- Ensure ongoing support and professional development opportunities for mentors and mentees

Recruiting and Selecting Peer Mentors
- Establish clear criteria for selection (achievement, leadership, soft skills, diversity, identity)
- Effectively market to potential participants and define the target population
- Provide adequate training and support to mentors to equip them for their role

Matching Mentors & Mentees
- Establish clear match criteria based on relevant factors (academic interests, personality traits)
- Use a variety of methods to pair mentors/mentees, such as self-selection or matching algorithms
- Consider diversity/inclusion when matching to ensure equitable access to supportive mentors

Scheduling and Logistics
- Create a flexible schedule that accommodates the diverse needs of participants
- Develop clear communication plans to keep participants informed and engaged
- Leverage technology to maximize efficiency and facilitate mentor and mentee communication

Establishing Evaluation & Assessment Procedures
- Include assessment/IR into early conversations to evaluate and drive continuous improvement
- Regularly evaluate the program to assess outcomes and areas for improvement
- Use program outputs (i.e. mentor/mentee reflections) to gather information useful for evaluation
- Utilize evaluation results to inform decision-making and program improvements
- Adapt the program to unique needs and circumstances of the institution and student population

RESOURCES FOR IMPLEMENTING & EVALUATING PEER MENTORING PROGRAMS

- **Peer-to-Peer Support Toolkit:** EAB offers a collection of four tools to help design and scale peer support programs—profiles of exemplar programs, a peer support audit, a mentor support guide for recruitment and training, and a peer support calendar and curriculum. These resources can help institutions identify areas of improvement in existing peer support programs and understand best practices for developing new programs.

- **College Transition Mentoring Toolkit:** National College Transition Network provides program design, tools, and resources to establish a peer mentoring program. The toolkit's overall program design is conceptualized as a coordinated network led by a Mentor Coordinator and supported by designated staff from adult education programs. The toolkit offers a comprehensive resource for institutions interested in replicating NCTN's successful mentoring model.

- ***Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring* (Fourth Edition):** This cornerstone publication from MENTOR details research-informed and practitioner-approved Standards for creating and sustaining quality youth mentoring programs. The six evidence-based Standards are applicable across almost every type of youth mentoring program and include Benchmarks and Enhancements to ensure the safety and effectiveness of mentoring relationships.

- **Peer Mentoring Supplement to the *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring*:** MENTOR and the Taco Bell Foundation collaborated to produce this publication designed to help practitioners and funders plan and deliver strong research-based peer mentoring programs. The content is valuable for peer mentoring models focused on educational transitions and career entry.

- **Best Practices for Running a Mentorship Program:** Together, a mentoring software company, shares' best practices' based on the experiences of successful program administrators. While not specific to higher education, this white paper covers launching the program, pairing mentors and mentees, supporting mentoring relationships, and common traits of successful programs.

- **A Step-by-Step Checklist to Launch a Mentoring Program:** Together also offers a comprehensive checklist guiding institutions through six key phases: building, planning, communication, launch, feedback, and evaluation. This checklist ensures mentoring programs are well-structured, effectively communicated, and continuously improved based on feedback and outcome assessment.

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About the Eastern Cluster

The **Eastern Cluster** is a collaboration of nine universities committed to a shared goal: closing equity gaps. To achieve this, we've developed tailored strategies that improve peer mentoring on our campuses, benefiting not only mentees but also student mentors and the broader campus communities. In the vast landscape of higher education, our mission centers on the student. Guided not just by faculty but by peers who understand their challenges and experiences, our students are never alone. Our collective efforts contribute to a larger academic discourse, showcasing the profound impacts of peer mentoring. As we look forward, we envision a future where every student succeeds, with peer mentoring playing a pivotal role in this transformative journey. This powerful tool bolsters student success and retention by fostering a sense of community that extends beyond classrooms, promoting student agency and enhancing overall well-being.

About Powered by Publics

Powered by Publics (PxP) was a groundbreaking collaboration that brought together 127 institutions. Grouped into 16 transformation clusters, each focusing on unique student success challenges, these institutions worked collectively to enhance college access, dismantle long-standing barriers, and advocate for equity in pursuit of its ultimate goals to close achievement gaps and boost degree completion. Facilitating a collaborative learning community, PxP empowered the broader public higher education community to implement effective, evidence-based practices for equity and college completion. The ambitious goals for the initiative included a significant increase in undergraduate degrees and halving equity gaps for disadvantaged students by 2025. PxP marked an important milestone in public higher education collaboration, setting a precedent for future initiatives.

About APLU

Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) is a membership organization that fosters a community of university leaders collectively working to advance the mission of public research universities. The association's U.S. membership consists of more than 230 public research universities, land-grant institutions, state university systems, and affiliated organizations spanning across all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and six U.S. territories. The association and its members collectively focus on increasing access, equity, completion, and workforce readiness; promoting pathbreaking scientific research; and bolstering economic and community engagement. Annually, its U.S. member campuses enroll 4.3 million undergraduates and 1.3 million graduate students, award 1.25 million degrees, employ 1.2 million faculty and staff, and conduct $58 billion in university-based research.

APPENDIX B — SURVEY FOR INSTITUTIONAL REPRESENTATIVES

Cluster 9 of the APLU Powered by Publics project is collecting information about best practices and successful interventions within undergraduate peer mentoring programs.

The first section of questions are about the overall undergraduate peer mentoring program or initiative. The second section of questions provides space to share two specific programmatic activities that support belonging and/or developing student agency.

Please share your contact information.

> First Name: _____
> Last Name: _____
> Email Address: _____

Please select your institution.
- ○ Stony Brook University
- ○ Temple University
- ○ University of Buffalo
- ○ University of Connecticut
- ○ University of Delaware
- ○ University of Maryland-Baltimore County
- ○ University of Missouri-Columbia
- ○ University of South Florida
- ○ University of Vermont

What office/unit is the mentoring program housed in? (i.e., Athletics, First-Year Programs, College of Arts & Science)

_____

Please provide an overview or description of the peer mentoring program.

_____

What is the mentoring program's focus? (i.e., first-generation students, new transfer students)

_____

What is the program length? (i.e., first-semester only, sophomore year)

_____

Approximately how many mentees are assigned to each mentor? (i.e., mentor to mentee ratio)

_____

Are the mentors paid or volunteer?
- O Paid
- O Volunteer
- O Other

How many students participate in the program? (i.e., number of mentees)
- O 1 – 10
- O 11 – 50
- O 51 – 100
- O 101 – 250
- O 251 – 500
- O 500 - 1,000
- O 1,001 - 3,000
- O More than 3,000

How many mentors support the program? (i.e., number of mentors)
- O 1 – 10
- O 11 – 50
- O 51 – 100
- O 101 – 250
- O 251 – 500
- O 500 - 1,000
- O 1,001 - 3,000
- O More than 3,000

What additional costs or partnerships are needed for the program to be successful?

_____

Please share some program outcomes. (For example, higher retention rate among participants or number of students admitted into a graduate school program)

_____

Describe a specific programmatic activity supports student belonging on campus and/or developing student agency.

_____

How does this activity fit into the overall peer mentoring program?

_____

What works well about this activity?

_____

How is the success of this activity measured? (i.e., what metrics do you use to evaluate the activity)

_____

What are some lessons from the field related to this activity? What would you do differently?

_____

From research and discussions, five themes emerged as key areas or strategies within undergraduate peer mentoring programs as a way to increase student sense of belonging and student agency.

Theme: Recruiting/Training/Retaining Mentors
Activities could include: nominations to identify mentors, work-study opportunities for mentors, or professional development activities for mentors.
Theme: Social and Personal Connections
Activities could include: weekly check-ins between mentor and mentees, activities around shared interests, nudging reminders, or referrals.
Theme: Accessing Campus Resources
Activities could include: workshops, listening/Q&A sessions, or reminders and links at key times of the year.
Theme: Navigating/ Sharing Unwritten Insight
Activities could include: suggestions to identify and find resources, or tips to navigate university systems.
Theme: Goal Planning/Forward Thinking
Activities could include: reflections on academic progress and educational journey, or goal planning sessions.

Which theme does this activity fit within?
- ○ Recruiting/Training/Retaining Mentors
- ○ Social and Personal Connections
- ○ Accessing Campus Resources
- ○ Navigating/Sharing Unwritten Insight/Modeling
- ○ Reflection/Goal Planning
- ○ Unsure

Describe a second specific programmatic activity supports student belonging on campus and/or developing student agency.

_____

How does this activity fit into the overall peer mentoring program?

_____

What works well about this activity?

_____

How is success of this activity measured? (i.e., what metrics do you use to evaluate the activity)

_____

What are some lessons from the field related to this activity? What would you do differently?

_____

From research and discussions, five themes emerged as key areas or strategies within undergraduate peer mentoring programs as a way to increase student sense of belonging and student agency.

Theme: Recruiting/Training/Retaining Mentors
Activities could include: nominations to identify mentors, work-study opportunities for mentors, or professional development activities for mentors.
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Theme: Navigating/ Sharing Unwritten Insight
Activities could include: suggestions to identify and find resources, or tips to navigate university systems.
Theme: Goal Planning/Forward Thinking
Activities could include: reflections on academic progress and educational journey, or goal planning sessions.

Which theme does this activity fit within?
- ○ Recruiting/Training/Retaining Mentors
- ○ Social and Personal Connections
- ○ Accessing Campus Resources
- ○ Navigating/Sharing Unwritten Insight/Modeling
- ○ Reflection/Goal Planning
- ○ Unsure

The following are examples of peer mentoring programs in the Eastern Cluster. These programs have demonstrated the impact that peer mentoring can have on student success and equitable student outcomes.

University of Missouri-Columbia

- *Transfer Experience and Advising Mentors* (TEAM) is a 10-week program that connects new transfer students with previous transfer students who participated in the TEAM program to build community and promote knowledge of academic resources. Through one-on-one mentoring, weekly group meetings, social events, and service projects throughout the semester, TEAM helps transfer students 'find their place' at Mizzou, and develop professionally, academically, and personally.

- *Initiative to Maximize Student Diversity* (IMSD) and *Maximizing Access to Research Careers* (MARC) Thanks to support from the National Institutes of Health, the University of Missouri operates two complementary programs designed to help create the researchers needed to face these myriad problems and to support and train our next generation of diverse research leaders and innovators in biomedical and behavioral sciences. Both the Initiative to Maximize Student Diversity (IMSD) and Maximizing Access to Research Careers (MARC) integrate academic and social support with mentoring and paid research opportunities that prepare students to matriculate into research-focused graduate programs.

University at Buffalo

- The *First-Generation Peer Mentor Program*s matches first-generation students with an experienced upperclassman who serves as a role model, mentor, and resource throughout the first year at UB. Mentors and mentees are expected to meet on their own at least monthly during each semester for a professional or social activity. Examples include attending workshops, mentor journaling, and participating in required surveys/assessments.

- The School of Public Health and Health Professions (SPHHP) *Envision Mentoring Program* will provide our undergraduate students of color an opportunity to engage with UB alumni professionals of color throughout their undergraduate journey.

University of Connecticut

- *UConn Connects* is the University's largest and oldest volunteer mentoring program, established over 30 years ago. Offered by the Academic Achievement Center, UConn Connects is an academic intervention program designed to provide students with the skills and support needed for succeeding in their courses and beyond. Student participants meet weekly with an undergraduate peer mentor who is knowledgeable about important university resources and are trained to assist students with developing effective strategies for academic and overall college success.

- *Transfer Insiders* are current University of Connecticut students who have successfully transferred to the University. They serve as mentors to help future, newly enrolled, and existing transfer students acclimate to the campus community and flourish in and out of the classroom at the University of Connecticut.

- The *Student Support Services (SSS)* program matches upper division SSS students, who are first-generation, socioeconomically disadvantaged, or from other traditionally underrepresented groups with SSS

first-year students. Mentors provide guidance and support in their academic, personal, and professional development during their transition to college.

- The **Black Leadership and Community Cultivation (B.L.A.C.C)** is a peer mentorship program targeting first-year and transfer students managed by the African American Cultural Center. Participants are paired with an upper-class student mentor to help them navigate their college life at the University of Connecticut. Mentors serve as liaisons to campus resources, services, organizations, events, and opportunities. Both mentors and mentees enroll in a 1-credit course that familiarizes students with campus resources and strategies for academic and professional success.

- **First Year Experience (FYE) Mentors** play key roles in assisting first-year (or new transfers) students with the transition to UConn, specifically through co-teaching and mentoring a FYE course alongside a staff, graduate student, or faculty instructor. As FYE mentors, students gain leadership, teaching, communication, peer counseling, planning, and presentation skills. Mentors are enrolled in a three-credit Educational Psychology course where they build connections and reflect on the theory and practice of new student transition.

- The **Asian/Asian American Mentoring Program (AMP)** is an award-winning peer education program in the Asian American Cultural Center that assists first-year students with adapting to the college environment. New students are paired with continuing students who serve as a resource to assist them through their first year. AMP workshops are designed to provide students with support and connections to resources that will aid them in successfully adapting to the academic, co-curricular, personal, and social rigors of college to promote their retention and timely graduation from UConn. AMP also connects mentees to other students, faculty, and staff while also informing them on how to be involved with the Asian American Cultural Center and its affiliated student organizations.

University of Maryland-Baltimore County

- The **Academic Peer Advocate Program** pairs first-time, full-time, degree-seeking undergraduate students in their first and second year, with trained and compassionate peers dedicated to providing individualized support during their transition to college. APA's mission is to empower their peers to take advantage of the appropriate campus resources and to confidently seek help when needed.

- The **First-Generation Peer Mentoring Program** is designed to support the success of current first-time and full-time first-generation students at UMBC. Students participating in this program can expect to meet other first-generation students and become a part of a large, supportive community that works to share resources, find lasting friendships and connections, and create an impactful college experience.

- The **McNair Scholars Program Scholar2Scholar (S2S)** provides multiple opportunities for our scholars to connect with each other throughout their time as a scholar as well as when they become alumni. S2S is centered around holistic critical mentoring, "a network of power-dynamic-flipped, student-centered, reciprocal relationships." Therefore, all the students are mentoring one another and learning from each other. S2S consists of pods & affiliate groups.

University of South Florida

- The **Male Empowerment Network (MEN)** provides an opportunity for male first-year students to be matched with male upper-class mentors who help them acclimate to USF, share strategies for success, and provide a highly focused and integrated model of academic, career, co-curricular, and social resources.

Participants are matched based on common interests, backgrounds, academics, etc. MEN participants learn how to navigate campus, utilize resources, address challenges, and explore interests.

Stony Brook University

- ***Women in Science & Engineering (WISE)*** matches up to six first-year female students interested in science, mathematics, or engineering in small mentoring groups led by an advanced undergraduate mentor devoted to Stony Brook's math and science requirements. The mentoring group will become an important focus for mentees' academic and scholarly activities, as WISE aims to help women take advantage of all of the opportunities available at a major research university.

- The ***College of Engineering and Applied Science (CEAS) Peer Mentoring Program*** assists first-year and transfer students in their transition to Stony Brook University. Peer mentors encourage academic, social, and community involvement and facilitate student access to campus resources and activities. The Peer Mentoring Program fosters a sense of community and positive connections among the students, staff, and faculty of CEAS and the greater Stony Brook University Campus.

- ***ACE (Academic Community Engagement) Peer Mentors*** provides social support service to students registered with Student Accessibility Support Center (SASC) for a full academic year. A peer mentor's role is to provide mentoring functions/services that will assist a SASC student with their self-determined social goals and the transition to college life.

- ***Campus Living Resident Advisors, Academic Assistants, and Community Assistants*** who support the personal and academic development of their peers within a curricular approach to learning and student development.

Temple University

- The ***Honors Peer Mentoring Network*** helps incoming Honors freshmen and transfer students thrive in their new surroundings by connecting them with upper-level mentors who will build and foster meaningful relationships, act as resources and guides in helping students transition to the Honors community, connect them with Temple and Philadelphia resources, and develop skills for their current and future success.

- ***Academic Resource Center Peer Mentor Program*** is an exciting program whose purpose is to create a community for undeclared students. It's an opportunity for current undeclared students to meet with former undeclared students with the goal of sharing their major declaration story. This includes what worked for them, what didn't work, challenges, and successes. The idea is that there is hope that every University Studies student will declare a major that's a good fit for them. Furthermore, by hearing someone else's story, each student will feel empowered and motivated to actively participate in their own journey.

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