

# **Peer Mentors in Teaching Roles**

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Mimi Benjamin, Lora Leigh  
Chrystal, Kurt Earnest, & Sean  
Grube

# Method

- Reviewed RFP information and examined peer mentor job descriptions
- Drafted a working definition of mentors who teach
- Identified programs whose mentor job description seemed to meet the definition
- Contacted Learning Community Coordinators of identified programs and asked them if their program met the working definition
- Six programs responded that their program met the definition
- Generated a list of questions related to the topic

# Method

- Requested and received IRB approval for study
- Conducted a one hour focus group with mentors from three of these programs and a one hour interview with a mentor from one program
- Coordination of the focus groups posed additional challenges due to mentor and investigator schedules

# Teaching

- We define teaching as the process of planning and delivering content to students. The content delivered does not have to be discipline specific, however. For instance, a session on study skills or transition issues that a mentor facilitates would meet our definition of teaching
- In addition, a structured tutoring session that is facilitated by a peer mentor would also meet our definition of teaching

# Most Effective Approaches

- Forming Relationships with Students
  - Casually dropping in
  - Making yourself accessible to students
  - Helping to build community

# Most Effective Approaches

- Group Functions/Group Dynamics
  - Recognizing there is no “one” way
  - Making sure everyone is participating
  - Paying attention to the group
  - Empowering students in the group to take charge

# Most Effective Approaches

- Techniques
  - Having a variety of speakers
  - Redirecting questions
  - Feedback session

## **Group Function/Group Dynamics**

“One of the most successful approaches that I’ve had was pushing each person in the group. Like one week I would just say, ‘Ok, you’re gonna be the one in charge, making sure everything gets done, make it happen.’ And then sit back and watch, help them along when they needed it, but let them figure everything out. And that way they learned what they needed to do . . . And they learn also what they have to do to get the other team members to work for them and to get the job done right.”

## Technique/Feedback

“We did a feedback session last week. We had them write what is working well for them in the community. . . We used those to see what needed to change and what needs they had. It helped us determine whether we were meeting their needs.”

# Least Effective Approaches

- Structure
  - Structured programs don't work as well
  - Office hours
- Content
  - Issues with types/variety of speakers
- Techniques
  - If students don't use resources
  - Giving them the answers

## Techniques

“I think with freshmen in general, they are still in their high school mentality. . . . They expect us to do so much more for them. They really need to realize that they need to start doing more for themselves. We’re here to help them but. . . we’ll take them to a website and show them the resources that are available to them, but it doesn’t do them any good if they don’t utilize it.”

# Preparing for Teaching

- Equipment / Tools
- Techniques
  - Learning about audience
  - Individual review of material
  - Review of material with faculty member
  - Relying on experience

## Technique/Know Audience

“Each time it’s a little different so you are always having to refresh yourself on the material. . . . Even though I’ve done it like four times, tonight it is going to be different than the other times. People are going to bring different questions. I need to still have fresh in my mind the things that I want to make sure to point out.”

## **Technique/Review Material (Labs)**

“I had to go through the lab and know the lab forward and backward so I would be able to help if somebody has a problem, if somebody needed some guidance on the lab.”

# How They Teach

- Structure
  - Sitting in a circle or square
  - Bringing snacks to class
  - Maintaining email contact
- Atmosphere
  - Making the work entertaining

# How They Teach

- Techniques
  - Casual discussion
  - Opening go 'round
  - Letting students teach each other
  - Having an agenda
  - Showing them how to do the work
  - Providing old study guides
  - Knowing their academic schedules (tests, projects)

## **Technique/Letting Mentees Teach**

“Along those lines of telling them your experiences, a lot of times some of the students in the group will have more experience in a certain area just because of maybe a job they’ve had or something they’ve been interested in. And I notice that a lot of times they learn better from one another than from me actually saying something. . . .”

# Having an Impact

- Verbal affirmation
  - Students open-up to peer mentors
  - Students ask for mentor input outside of class
- Formal assessment
  - Student lab grades

# Having an Impact

- Observation of change
  - Seeing students make changes as a result of something the mentor suggested
- Quality of relationships
  - Interactions outside of class
  - Random questions when they see me on campus

## **Observation of Change**

“When you see how they’ve changed their habits to a suggestion you made, that’s a big thing. Or when they see you on campus and yell your name as loud as they can. . .

. [W]hen they recognize you and that you’ve helped them. It doesn’t have to be anything big.”

## **Quality of Relationship**

“I figure that if they are asking me for my input out of class, then I feel like I have done something.”

# What they learned

- Skills
  - Leadership
  - Interpersonal
  - Organizational
- Working with groups
  - Engaging groups
  - Differing learning styles
- Individual
  - Role modeling
  - I don't have to have the answers
  - How to be a better student

## Learn/Different Learning Styles

“Everybody learns differently and everybody responds differently to certain types of teaching methods. So you have to . . . teach in all different ways to reach all different kinds of people or you’re not gonna be successful. Not everybody’s gonna learn what you want them to learn.”

# Implications/Recommendations

- Relationships

- Mentors see that relationship-building with the students is key to their success

- Training/Supervision

- Mentors gather a lot of experiential knowledge; we need to supplement that with resources about teaching.
- Provide training on learning styles

# Implications/Recommendations

- Learning Objectives for Mentors
  - We spend a lot of time and effort considering the objectives of learning community involvement for students. We need to consider what we want mentors to learn and be intentional about providing opportunities for them to reach these learning objectives.

# What's next for this study?

- Presented preliminary data
- Recently granted a continuation for the study
- Will continue conducting focus groups and analyzing data into Fall 2005
- Feel free to participate if your mentors fit the teaching definition!

# Questions

