

ISU Learning Communities Peer Mentor Resource Manual



Hello Peer Mentors and Mentor Supervisors!

This manual was developed out of interest for a living archive of peer mentor activities, procedures, and feedback. It is our hope that LC coordinators and mentors will collect related information and store it within a single binder to be shared among mentors from year to year. The manual will allow new mentors to draw on the experience of past mentors and provide insight for organizing learning community activities.

We urge mentors and supervisors to add and update pages each semester as needed. It is also recommended that supervisors review the manual's content with mentors throughout the year and share feedback and suggestions for the future.

The pages in this manual are intended to be used as a template. Feel free to modify it, remove pages, and create additional sections according to your individual learning community needs. We hope you will find the manual useful and welcome your feedback for future updates.

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Learning Communities Vision Statement

Vision

To support Iowa State University's commitment to student learning, the Learning Community program enhances undergraduates' experience by providing interested students with dynamic, focused communities in which students, staff, and faculty can learn and grow together.

Intended Outcomes

To reach the intended outcomes of the learning communities the University must monitor its progress and continually improve the learning communities. The following intended outcomes provide a framework for continuous assessment and improvement. Individual learning communities will develop relevant intended outcomes that are consistent with the following University learning community outcomes.

Students in learning communities will:

- develop a sense of belonging in the university community
- experience higher academic achievement
- increase curricular and co-curricular collaborative interactions with other students, faculty, and staff
- more readily achieve the articulated learning outcomes specified by departments or programs
- demonstrate increased awareness of departmental, college, and University resources
- demonstrate improved critical thinking and collaborative problem solving skills
- demonstrate improved knowledge and skills related to career opportunities
- demonstrate a better understanding of differences and similarities among people
- experience a higher level of satisfaction with the University experience
- show a greater rate of persistence as a result of all of the above.

Faculty and staff in learning communities will experience:

- increased collaborations with students, faculty, and staff
- increased implementation of active and collaborative teaching and learning strategies
- connections between curricular and co-curricular experiences
- increased knowledge about students and their development
- improved reflective practice
- disciplinary and interdisciplinary collegiality
- increased knowledge about university resources
- increased involvement in professional development activities

- increased connections between their learning community work and their scholarship
- increased recognition and reward.

Core characteristics

The Learning Community Advisory Committee recommends that in order to be defined as a learning community at Iowa State, each learning community should possess certain characteristics:

- Clearly defined intended learning outcomes that reflect the University Learning Community intended outcomes and the academic program's intended outcomes
- Clearly defined assessment and evaluation procedures that provide useful data for enhancing student learning
- Integrated and connected curricular learning experiences
- Co-curricular activities that extend learning beyond the classroom
- Collaborative, active learning experiences for students, faculty, and staff
- Effective connections between academic and student affairs programs
- Clearly identified program administration and faculty/staff support structure

Highlights of Iowa State Learning Communities

- Total students in a Fall 2023 LC is 6,518 (5,413 first-year, 1,105 others)
- 93.4% of all first-year students are in a learning community
- Average one-year retention rate for LC students: 7% higher than non-LC students
- Average six-year graduation rate: 10% higher than non-LC students
- 93.2% of first-year students of color are in a learning community
- Over 600 LC peer mentors provide leadership
- Overall student satisfaction and engagement is higher for LC students
- LC students report high levels of engagement on the NSSE benchmarks
- LC program is important for student recruitment
- Total students participating in LCs since 1995: 112,022
- External reviewer comments:

“What you have put in place in the past several years is amazing, both in terms of scope (that is, the numbers and range of learning communities offered and numbers of people involved) and impact. Your retention data and graduation rates are outstanding.”

“Learning Communities at Iowa State reflect a strong student affairs/academic affairs partnership, reflected in its leadership structure, advisory committee, learning community teaching teams, and assessment efforts... few schools walk their talk with genuine collaboration in the ways that you do.”

“Your organizational structure for the learning community effort and your assessment work are among the best in the nation.”

“ISU is one of the only institutions that has actually gone the next step to demonstrate the financial gains to the institution as a result of dramatically increased retention, clearly justifying your budget and demonstrating the wisdom of this institutional investment.”

“The sense of engagement and community among the many people involved in this work is palpable.”

Sample Learning Community Outcome Rubric

(Insert your learning communities RFP rubric content here)

Intended learning outcome	Corresponding department/ college outcomes	Specific LC experiences which promote this outcome	Assessment Plan: Evidence or artifacts to determine whether outcome has been achieved
Example: Students will develop competency in communication & technical skills to make effective presentations.	Be able to present an effective oral report.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> --Train students in basic PowerPoint skills --Individual & group presentations in class --Guest speakers & attendance at one or more events in the lecture series --Follow up discussion after lecture series events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> --Instructor & peer evaluation & critique --Final presentation showcasing skills learned --Record student presentations for self-review and critique
Example: Students will use critical thinking & problem solving skills in applied situations.	Be able to apply knowledge to solving real life problems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> --Linked course assignments --Analysis of case studies --Field trips to observe actual work situations --Service learning projects --Study groups & team problem solving exercises 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> --Instructor evaluations of projects & assignments --Student journals & self-evaluations --Observations of students --Follow up discussions on case studies, field trips & service learning experience
1.			
2.			

Learning Community Course Syllabus
(Insert the class syllabus information in this section)

Preparing for the Role of a Peer Mentor

Sample Peer Mentor Job description (Course-based)

(Insert your specific mentor job description here)

The peer mentor is a student staff member who provides leadership in the XXX Learning Community. Mentors assist in achieving the goals of the program which are (list program goals). XXX Learning Community is a fall-only/year-long program. ## of first-year students from (major/s) in (your college) may participate. Each Mentor will serve as a role model and will help (#) new students in making the transition to college life.

Qualifications

For consideration, candidates must possess the following qualifications:

- Minimum grade point average of 3.0
- Juniors and seniors are preferred, but other qualified applicants will be considered
- Strong interpersonal skills
- Knowledge of the major and college
- Positive attitude
- Self-motivation
- Successful completion of (course they will be assisting with)
- Must be available to attend Peer Mentor Training in August prior to the beginning of school

Responsibilities

Peer Mentors for XXX Learning Community will have the following responsibilities:

- Coordinate one social activity/team-building event per month for the program participants.
- Maintain participant email list and provide information about the learning community to all members through this list.
- Help students become familiar with university resources; advise and refer participants to appropriate university resources, as the need arises.
- Attend (xx) class and facilitate study groups for the class.
- Attend a weekly meeting with the learning community staff.
- Assist learning community coordinator in planning field trips/site visits.
- Meet individually with students once a month. Record observations and submit monthly reports to the coordinator.
- Participate in service learning projects with the learning community.
- Participate in Peer Mentor Training the week prior to the beginning of fall semester and throughout the semester as needed.

Compensation

Peer Mentors receive an hourly rate of (\$XX) and work approximately 10 hours a week. Demands on a peer mentor's time are many. After academics, the mentor position takes next priority; therefore, mentors are not to accept additional employment.

Application Process

Please complete the attached application and submit it by (date) to (coordinator) in (office). Submit two reference letters with the application. Following review of all applications, interviews will be scheduled (with all applicants? With those individuals whose applications pass the screening process?). Interviews will last one hour and will be scheduled during the week of (dates).

Questions about the peer mentor position or the application process should be directed to:

- Coordinator
- Phone number
- Email address

Peer Mentor Role Expectations

(Include specific mentor tasks to be completed throughout the semester here)

Peer Mentor Activity Timeline

(Include specific, week by week, tasks and activities in this section)

Getting to Know Your Peer Mentor

(The newly hired mentor can fill this out in the spring and turn it in to the coordinator before leaving for the summer. A copy should stay in the manual so the mentors can learn more about one other)

Name:

Major/Year:

Hometown:

Email Address/Cell Phone:

Career Aspirations:

Learning Community I Was In/Year:

Where I've Lived on Campus:

Where I'm Living This Fall:

What I'm Doing This Summer:

Favorite ISU Dining Food:

Favorite ISU Memory:

(Adapted from materials created within the Program for Women in Science & Engineering)

Mentor Training Materials

(Include any training procedures or guidelines specific to your department or learning community in this section)

Reasons for Being a Mentor

(Generate a list of reasons for being a mentor in this section. It can be helpful to visit this information during performance reviews)

After sitting through Spring Training on a Saturday morning...

The most important thing I learned is:

One thing I resolve to do is:

The first thing I will do to contact my students is:

I've already decided that as a team we will:

Something I don't want to forget before next fall is:

I am glad I (re)accepted this position because:

Do not lose this piece of paper! Keep it where you can find it this summer/fall!

(adapted from the Program for Women in Science & Engineering)

This is what I want to accomplish this semester...

Academically:

Personally:

Professionally:

As a Peer Mentor:

This is what I want to accomplish this semester...

Academically:

Personally:

Professionally:

As a Peer Mentor:

Planning Guides

(Use this section to keep a record of planned activities and details for planning events)

Student Management Tools

(Use this section to save student tracking and event attendance templates)

Peer Mentoring Meeting Report

Peer Mentor _____

Attendance (if present)

	Meeting Dates					
Team Members						

- 1.) Prepare items before the meeting.
- 2.) Document attendance.
- 3.) Summarize action items as a result of the meeting discussion.
- 4.) Turn in to your supervisor every two weeks along with your time sheets. Be prepared to discuss at peer mentor meetings.

Date Time	Before the Meeting		Action Items resulting from the Meeting		
	Icebreaker and/or Team builder	Desired Meeting Outcome(s)	Students	Peer Mentors	Coordinator

(report adapted from Agricultural Engineering learning community)

Peer Mentor Tips and Recommendations

(This section can be used to record suggestions for future events and recommend specific procedures)

Current Mentor Information

Fall 20XX Mentors

Name
Department
School Address
Email Address
Phone number

Departmental Mentor Contact Lists

(Include a list of all current mentors, faculty and staff members associated with the learning community in this section)

Special Projects and Events

(Keep a list of the various projects and events that will be implemented during the school year here)

Action Plans

(Use this section to keep planning check-lists, to-do lists, and course planning materials)

These are some actions you should consider (the peer mentors ranked them in order of importance):

1. Making contact with my students before school starts.
2. Having the first month's activities planned during the summer
3. Having a "free food" activity during the first week of class
4. Asking students the first week of classes what they'd like to do
5. Establishing Canvas as a central tool of the learning team

Using the above suggestions, form an action plan:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Event Advertising and Communication Plans

(Keep copies of event publicity and records of communication methods in this section)

Post-Mentor Feedback

Challenges and Rewards

(Record comments from past mentors about their experiences here)

Rewards of Being a Peer Mentor

Example: "The rewards of becoming a peer mentor are....."

-Mentor name, mentoring year

Please complete the following peer mentor assessment. Score yourself in relationship to your effectiveness as a peer mentor for this class. The rating key is as follows.

1 – Never or almost never; 2 – Seldom; 3 – Sometimes; 4 – Often; 5 – Always or almost always

As an XXX Peer Mentor you:	1	2	3	4	5
Identified and resolved problems in a timely manner.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Worked well in group problem solving situations.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Used reason, even when dealing with emotional topics.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Focused on solving conflict, not blaming.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Maintained confidentiality.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Listened to others without interrupting.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Kept emotions under control.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Remained open to others' ideas and tried new things.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Spoke clearly and persuasively in positive and negative situations.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Listened and got clarification.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Responded well to questions.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Actively participated in team meetings.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Exhibited objectively openness to others' views.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Gave and welcomed feedback.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Contributed to building a positive team spirit.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Put success of team above own interests.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Built morale and group commitment to goals and objectives.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Supported everyone's effort to succeed.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Exhibited confidence in self and others.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Inspired and motivated others to perform well.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Effectively influenced actions and opinions of others.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Accepted feedback from others.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Gave appropriate recognition to others.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Made self available to team members.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Provided regular performance feedback.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Developed team members' skills and encouraged growth.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Continually worked to improve supervisory skills.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Supported the courses goals and values.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Benefited the course success through outside of class activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Prioritized and planned team activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Used team time effectively.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Organized or scheduled team members and their tasks effectively.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Developed realistic team action plans.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

*Adapted from the AE Learning Community Mentor Questionnaire

Student Peer Mentor Evaluations

(Feedback from the learning community students about their mentor can go into this section)

I'm Thankful for (peer mentor name) because....

Archive Materials

Reflections from Previous Mentors

(Information gathered from the exit interviews of mentors can be added to this section)

If I only knew then what I know now...

Over the summer I wish I had....

The first thing I did for my learning team was....

The first week of classes I.....

Something I wished I had planned in advance.....

If I could do it all over again, I would definitely....

(Adapted from WiSE learning community)

Activities Archive

(Keep a list of past activities and events with comments and suggestions for the future in this section)

Student Evaluation Archive

(Keep past mentor evaluations and feedback from students in this section)

Mentor Contact Archive

(Keep a list of all former mentors in this section for reference)