PEER MENTOR

HANDBOOK

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https://lc.iastate.edu/pm-resources.

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Learning Communities Characteristics

At Iowa State University, a **learning community** is a small group of students who typically take a few courses together, share similar academic interests, interact with peer mentors, participate in out-of-class activities, and may live in the same residence hall.

Other ways students benefit from participating in learning communities include:
- Making friends right away
- Getting to know professors within their major
- Exploring career opportunities
- Gaining hands-on experience in their area of interest
- Easily forming study groups
- Being introduced to university resources and organizations
- Leadership development
- Participating in a collaborative learning environment

Peer mentors play an important role within the learning community. They are experienced and trusted supports and guides to LC students. Mentors serve as role models and resources to those in the LC.

Additional benefits of having a peer mentor include:
- Due to similarity in age, mentees may feel more comfortable approaching and sharing concerns with their peer mentors. This allows for them to find access to the proper support needed throughout their college career.
- They provide a direct connection to another student within their career path/goals who can provide guidance based on their experience.

Benefits to peer support*:
- There is a mutual gain relationship between both mentors and mentees. While the mentee gains life-long skills, the mentor does as well.
  - Mentors develop…
    - Better reasoning skills
    - Greater connection to the university with an increased self-esteem
    - Improved communication and interpersonal skills
    - Better conflict resolution skills, patience, and organizational skills
  - Mentees experience…
    - Increased academic achievement, self-efficacy, and social skills
    - Greater connection to school and peers
    - Increased school attendance and rate of continuing education

Karcher, M. (2007). Cross-Age Peer Mentoring. Research in Action. Issue 7. MENTOR.

Find more information about Learning Communities at Iowa State University at https://lc.iastate.edu/.

Skills for Effective Mentors

Many skills are vital for mentors to develop in order to perform and serve their students effectively. In most cases you will deal with issues related to academics, but as your relationship grows with your students, they may come to you with issues of a more personal nature. These issues will often have an impact on their success as a student. The most important thing to remember in any situation is that you're not a counselor. Know your limits – sometimes the best way you can help others is by referring them to someone else with more experience.

General expectations:

- Use professional oral, written, and interpersonal communication skills.

- Build positive relationships with mentees and provide support and encouragement.
- Utilize your knowledge of the university to make effective referrals to campus and community resources.
- Provide model behavior – use your behavior to positively influence mentees. What you do and say is impactful.
- Employ problem-solving and decision-making skills.
- Work effectively in teams by understanding how difference in knowledge, skills, and abilities of team members contributes to success and effective solutions/outcomes.

Keys to success:

- Listen
- Be consistent
- Ask open-ended questions
- Attend and respond to both content and feeling
- Let the student solve the problem
- Refer to/use your resources
- Be supportive

Ask open-ended questions - Any question that elicits a "yes/no" answer won't be as helpful as a "what, when, how, or who" question. "Why" questions may seem like they would get more information, but keep in mind that they can sometimes imply criticism and cause defensiveness (i.e., "Well, why didn't you go to all the study sessions?").

Attend and respond to both content and feeling - Often there are two things going on at once – there is an issue, and the person has some kind of feeling or reaction to that issue. You need to attend and respond to both. Consider this: "I'm so mad about my chemistry test!"
- What is the content? (performance on the chemistry test)
- What is the feeling? (anger)
It's important to attend to both. Remember that issues presented to you could have some underlying themes and might even be symptoms of a larger problem.

Let the student solve the problem - It's easy to want to try to solve things for people, but that's not really as helpful as it might seem. Usually, the student knows the answer or knows how to solve the problem but needs someone to ask the right questions and encourage their processing.

Refer to/use your resources - You are not a trained counselor and cannot expect yourself to be. When difficult situations arise, know your campus resources. These include Resident Assistants, Hall Directors, other Residence Life staff, your Learning Community Coordinator, and the Dean of Students Office (*see pages 27-28 for more resources*). Help people make use of those individuals and services. It's okay to say, "I don't know" as long as you get the information for the person.

Self-disclosure - Use it as long as it's helpful to the person and not just a story. "I was in a similar situation and I did this which helped," vs. "I was in that situation, too, and no one helped." How helpful was that? Not at all!

Effective communication skills include:

- **Listening** – Fully participate in conversation by being an active listener and utilizing some simple counseling skills such as reflecting, encouraging, and asking questions. Be aware of how your body language can affect a conversation.
- **Observing** – Be aware of how the student is presenting the message or ideas through body language and unspoken words.
- **Communicating** – Be very clear in your presentation of facts and opinions.
- **Decentering** – Try to understand what the student is saying, not by how you hear it, but in how they are approaching and thinking about what they are saying. Communicate with them in ways they will understand.

Effective personal skills include:

- **Availability** – Even if a student does not need to seek you out, they see you as being a helpful mentor when you are present and available to them.
- **Seeking** – Seek students out, especially at the beginning of the year. Students are less likely to seek you out initially, so waiting for them to come to you may be wasted time.
- **Being an example** – Students will observe you closely, especially if they are first-year students who are new to campus. Your role is one of responsibility; make good decisions in what you say and how you act when you're interacting with them. Remember that you are a role model.

Effective body language skills include:

- **Note your posture** – Be open and relaxed! Studies have shown that posture matters the most when people perceive you. It allows them to trust you as a mentor.
- **Smile** – Smiling is a positive signal that sends a welcoming invitation to others. It says, "I'm friendly and approachable."
- **Make eye contact** – Looking at someone's eyes indicates that you are interested, aware, and open to the conversation
- **Lean in slightly** – Leaning forward shows that you are engaged and interested, but be respectful of the other person's space. In most situations, keep about a two-foot distance
- **Do not** – Cross arms, avoid eye contact, or frown. All of these nonverbal cues give off the impression that you are uninterested and unapproachable, discouraging conversation.

Importance of Confidentiality

There must be a mutual understanding between the peer mentor and student that conversations between the two of them are protected. A bond of trust is formed when a student comes to share something with you. It is important that you give them your attention and ensure them, if possible, that what they tell you is kept in confidence.

Information shared between a mentor and student cannot always be confidential. In some specific instances, maintaining that bond of trust means that you need to share information with others. If a student discusses with you a situation that could result in self-harm or harm to others, it is your responsibility to report that information immediately to the appropriate persons (Learning Community Coordinator, Hall Director, Resident Assistant, etc.). If the student has a condition that is beyond your ability to assist with (serious neurosis, alcoholism, drug problems, depression, etc.), it is in the student's best interest that you share that information as well.

People you can share information with:
- Your supervisor(s)
- Relevant professional staff (Student Counseling Services, Dean of Students Office, Hall Directors)
- Those who would already have access to confidential information without your assistance

People you cannot share information with:
- Parents (because of privacy laws; refer parents to your supervisor)
- Significant others
- Friends
- Roommates

If you're unsure with whom to share information, start with your Learning Community Coordinator(s).

Find more information about confidentiality at
https://www.registrar.iastate.edu/resources/policies/ferpa-need-to-know.

Ethical Considerations for Peer Mentors

As you perform your duties as a peer mentor, it is critical to understand and practice ethical behaviors. You were selected for this position because you possess the ability to establish strong rapport with students. The interpersonal skills that made you a prime candidate for the position can also place you in challenging situations. As you serve in your role, it is important to adhere to some guiding principles of the helping profession.

Ethical Standards

(Excerpted from *Student Helping Students* – Ender, S. and Newton, F., 2000, Jossey-Bass Publishers)

1. Peer mentors will have knowledge and act consistently with the standards that are appropriate to the agency in which they are employed.
2. Peer mentors will respect the autonomy and individual dignity of the students they serve.
3. Peer mentors will avoid acting beyond the scope of the service for which they were selected and trained and not attempt to offer professional services requiring more extensive qualifications and training.

Standard 4 is particularly compelling: Adhere to the following practices to ensure that you act in a way that benefits and serves the welfare of students.

- Consult with your supervisor when you face a situation that makes you uncomfortable or when you experience a conflict or dilemma.
- Act appropriately when working with persons for whom you feel attraction. Establishing intimate or strongly personal relationships with your mentees compromises your helping role.
- Remember that as a mentor you are a role model. You are obligated to maintain congruence between what you say to fellow students in your role and how you act in other facets of your life where you can be seen (or heard).
- Avoid over familiarity with mentees by maintaining a degree of professional distance.

Common Issues for Students

Many new students have similar adjustment challenges when they come to college. While everyone transitions differently to the new environment, there are some situations that are relatively common. Below are listed some issues you may encounter.

When assisting students with these issues, be sure that you utilize the resources available to you. Sometimes the most important pieces of information you can provide are the names/locations of others who are trained to assist students with these concerns.

Talk with your Learning Community Coordinator about addressing issues such as these as well as other concerns you may encounter.

Personal challenges

- Moving to a new environment
- Leaving family
- Living with a roommate
- Meeting new people
- Making personal decisions every day
- Facing new peer pressures (alcohol, sex, drugs, etc.)

Intellectual/academic challenges

- Speaking up in class
- Communicating with professors/instructors
- Developing semester course schedules
- Seeking academic assistance when problems arise
- Balancing academics and social life

Physical challenges

- Forming positive health habits and breaking problem habits
- Becoming self-reliant in managing health/stress
- Coping with weight gain/loss
- Finding lifetime hobbies and activities

Interpersonal challenges

- Connecting with a new friend group
- Starting and managing romantic relationships
- Learning how to show emotions in appropriate ways
- Managing conflict or difficult situations
- Recognizing/deciding to act on sexual orientation or identity

Career/lifestyle challenges

- Choosing or changing a major
- Deciding on participation in internships and other work experience
- Deciding to leave school/change schools
- Making decisions related to future issues (career, income needs, etc.)

(*See Appendices for more detailed information about first-year student development and common student issues by month*)

Transfer Students

Some of you will have the opportunity to work with transfer students. While transfer students are "new" to the university, they are not "new" to college. However, they may have some similar issues as first-years in terms of transitioning to a new environment. Such issues as becoming familiar with Ames and the Iowa State University campus as well as adjusting to large classes may be challenges they face. In addition, many of their peers already have established their "friend groups." Finding where they fit may be something you'll discuss with them.

Common Issues You Will Assist Students With

Be sure to know and use the resources on campus that will help you assist your students. Never be afraid to refer a student to someone else – there are many people on campus who are trained to assist students with just these issues listed below!

Academic

- Scheduling/registering for classes
- Changing majors
- Grading policies/procedures
- Interacting with instructors
- What to do about missed classes or late assignments
- Questions about which classes to take and differences between instructors, upcoming projects, class work, writing essays, and what to expect from instructors

Studying-related

- How to study
- Time management issues
- Test-taking strategies
- Academic support resources

Personal/General

- Career questions
- Finding internships/work experience
- Finding the right major
- Roommate conflicts
- Weekend activities

Time Management

Time management is one of the adjustment issues with which first-year students are confronted when they come to college. As a mentor, you will provide the most beneficial advice to your mentees by explaining how you handled the task of balancing all of your activities.

A few steps to make time management simple include:

- Set priorities along with major goals that need to be accomplished within the next month, the next few weeks and the very near future.
- Keep a log of how you currently spend your time – this helps you identify time wasted, time that may be better used in other ways, etc. It can be an eye-opening experience.
- Keep a master schedule that lists activities that occur every week (classes, work, meetings, etc.).
- Make a list of assignments due for each week and post it on your desk, near your computer, or somewhere else prominent so you'll see it many times during a day. Check things off as they are completed.
- Get organized so you can easily find supplies and resources when you need them.
- Check out the Time Management information, as well as options for weekly schedule documents, available from the Academic Success Center at https://asc.dso.iastate.edu/time-management.

Troubleshooting Issues

There will be times when students will come to you soliciting assistance for a number of issues. The following are just a few to be considered to give you some assistance with specific actions you can take when these issues arise.

Roommate Issues: Before saying anything else, ask the student if they've discussed their problems/issues with their roommate. This is where the communication needs to be. If they haven't, encourage them to do so and get back to you if there is no resolution. You can help them role play that interaction. If they have talked with their roommate and still need additional assistance to address the issue(s), be sure to use trained staff as resources such as the Resident Assistant and/or Hall Director for on-campus students, or Student Assistance or Student Counseling Services for off-campus students.

Academic Issues: If a student is having academic problems, feel free to talk to them about what they're going through and assist them in seeking assistance. They can request help from the Academic Success Center on campus or an academic advisor. Some people to keep informed of these issues are the Resident Assistant, Hall Director (if applicable), and your Learning Community Coordinator(s).

Peer Mentor Limitations

As a Peer Mentor, you must recognize your limitations when mentoring students. The major cautions are as follows:

1. You should not attempt to make decisions for the student. Suggest various possible solutions to student's problems and aid the student in examining the limitations, alternatives, and consequences of proposed actions.

2. You should not attempt to help students solve problems involving physical, mental, or behavioral concerns. Assist such students to recognize their need for competent specialized help.

3. You should not allow your own personal biases, attitudes, beliefs, values, or needs dictate the handling of a student's problems. However, you should recognize that these will affect your reactions to student's problems and will influence the kind of relationship you have with your students.

4. You should not gossip about a student or betray a student's confidence on matters of a personal or academic nature. Recognize and respect the student's privacy. However, you should remember that you should not remain silent on some matters in which the student may be breaching the law and/or jeopardizing the well-being of themself or others. It will be up to the discretion of the mentor supervisor to determine when personal matters necessitate disclosure to the proper authorities.

5. You should encourage students to express themselves frankly and freely so they can identify, analyze, and suggest solutions for their own problems.

6. In speaking with students who talk about harming themselves or others, do not promise that you will keep that information to yourself. Any threats to harm the student or others' well-being must be reported to your Learning Community Coordinator(s).

Challenges You May Encounter as a Mentor

There is no "standard" method to use to address the challenges you may encounter. Be sure to talk with your supervisor(s) about challenges that you're facing in your peer mentor role. Other peer mentors may also be helpful to you as you address different issues. There are many resources available to assist you. Be sure to use them!

Motivating/Encouraging
- Getting students excited about school/activities
- Students not wanting to participate in planned activities
- Trying to make everyone happy
- Dealing with apathy
- Students not meeting expectations

Role perceptions
- Being viewed as a teacher or parent
- Not being viewed as a peer
- Students wanting you to solve their problems
- Not being seen as an authority figure

Time management issues
- Getting students to show up for meetings
- Working with multiple schedules when trying to plan events
- Finding time to build relationships
- Balancing activities with mentoring
- Having consistent contact with individuals

Personal issues
- Giving advice without personal morals/values getting in the way
- Dealing with roommate issues
- Confrontation issues
- Possible language barriers
- Programming/activities
- Program planning
- Breaking the ice
- Being inclusive
- Getting everyone involved

Addressing questions
- Helping others understand their major
- Not being able to answer certain questions
- Not giving too much advice but empowering the student
- Reaching out to those who need assistance but won't ask for it

Making Referrals

Referring is the act of transferring a student to another person, office, or resource that can provide a different kind of assistance that you are unable to provide. If you are struggling with a specific challenge, you are able to refer to your LC Coordinator(s) or a knowledgeable supervisor. A list of relevant on-campus resources is also included on pages 27-28.

In order to make an appropriate referral, you need to know three things:

1) A clear definition of the kind of help the student needs and/or is seeking.
2) Your own limitations, skills, and abilities.
3) What services, resources, and specialists are available on campus and in the community.

Reasons for making a referral:

- Your knowledge, time, or resources are too limited.
- You lack the training to help.
- You are not able to establish adequate rapport with the student or they are hesitant to speak with you about the issue.
- After trying to help the person, you find your methods are ineffective.
- You are personally involved and feel you cannot be objective.

Suggestions for Making a Referral:

- Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know, but I'll find out." Always make a referral rather than provide misinformation.
- Talk to your supervisor, instructor, or a professional staff member if you have any doubts or questions.
- Don't be afraid to talk honestly with the student about why you think a referral is necessary.
- Be sure the student has accurate information on where to go, when, and whom to see. It is usually a good idea to put this in writing for the student to take with them.
- You may help the student by locating a phone number or email address for them, or helping them set up an appointment. Some students may even need to be escorted to the place of the referral.
- **Don't be afraid to follow up to see how a student is doing after your referral.**

What to Expect from Supervisors

Working with your supervisor(s) will be key to your success as a peer mentor. Your supervisor(s) will provide you with information about the program as well as expectations for your role. Listed below are some topics to be sure to discuss with your supervisor(s) at the beginning of the semester. Some topics will be revisited regularly during your time as a mentor.

Program goals/Outcomes

- What does your supervisor want you to accomplish in your role? (Goal setting for short term, semester, year)
- What should students gain from their participation in the program?
- How will your mentor responsibilities help students accomplish the program goals?

Expectations

- Do you have a copy of the job description?
- What are your supervisor's expectations of you?
- What are your expectations of your supervisor? What do you need from your supervisor in order to be effective?
- How will you know that you're being successful in your role? How and when will your supervisor provide you with feedback?

Providing Information

- Does your supervisor want you to keep track of the interactions you have with students? If so, how?
- Is there a form your supervisor would like you to use to report information?
- What is the budget when planning activities for the learning community?

Meetings

- What is the intent of the meetings?
- What information should you be prepared to share at the meetings?
- When and where will you regularly meet?
- If there is more than one mentor for the program, should mentors plan to meet outside of regularly scheduled group meetings with the supervisor?

Resources

- What resources does your supervisor have that you may need access to (this may include a budget, professionals in the field/contacts, etc.)?

The most important thing to do is talk with your supervisor(s) about what you need and what you should expect from them so that you can be most successful as a peer mentor.

Tracking Student Information

There will be times when it will be helpful to have a record of the interactions you've had with your students. This helps you discuss how your job is going with your supervisor as well as assist residence hall staff or other campus resources if one of your students ever needed professional help for certain issues. An easy way of remembering your interactions with your students is by writing them down. You don't need to record every interaction, as some interactions will be social; but when a student comes to you to discuss a problem they're dealing with or something pertaining to your mentor role/relationship with them, it's a good idea to keep a record. There are many ways that this can be done, so you should ask your supervisor about their expectations of tracking information or feel free to do whatever works best for you. A few examples of how to do this are:

- Keep a file box that holds index cards. Have an index card for every student and record interactions on that.
- Keep an Excel or Google Sheets file on your computer that records interactions with students.
- Keep a pad of paper or digital notetaking option to record interactions on a daily basis.

It is important to remember, whichever way you choose to record interactions with your students, it must be kept confidential and put away so that only you have access to it. Check with your supervisor about what information they want you to track.

Icebreakers/Energizers, Team Builders, and Conversation Starters

Icebreakers/energizers and team builders are a great way to start off any meeting in order to set the tone for the duration of the gathering. They allow participants to feel integrated within a group, break up already formed groups/cliques, and unify all individuals by participating in an activity that has a shared goal for the entire group.

Conversation Starter Ideas:

As a mentor, you should be in constant communication with the students with whom you are working. Many times, you will have specific reasons to approach them in conversation. Other times, you may need a "starter," especially if the student is shy and not likely to approach you. The following are some ideas to use to start up conversations with students in your community:

- The most basic… introduce yourself as the peer mentor and let the student know what your role is and how you'll be available to them throughout the year.

- Ask about the classes they are taking, how they're going, etc. If you have a similar major, ask about their instructors – maybe you've had some of the same ones.

- See if they've gotten involved in any groups on campus. Learn about their interests so you can continue to ask them questions or pass on information related to the subjects they like.

- Take information you've heard from others (maybe about where a person is from or activities they enjoy) and talk to them about it – "I heard that you played basketball in high school. Have you heard about ISU's intramural program?" or, "Someone told me you were from Chicago. I am too – what area are you from?"

Visit https://lc.iastate.edu/pm-resources *for a list of icebreakers and teambuilders.*

Facilitation Strategies

Peer mentors are expected to facilitate a variety of interactions – from community building and social events, to study groups and classroom activities. Group facilitation is a valuable skill to possess, and you will find many uses for it as you continue your academic and professional careers.

Skills of the Group Discussion Leader:

Acceptance	The facilitator needs to take contributions with unconditional acceptance as much as possible. This means developing the ability to accept honestly every contribution that any member of the group makes as worthwhile and valid. In doing this, you are expressing to them that you like them as individuals and accept them just as they are. When a facilitator has been able to develop this attitude of acceptance the members will participate more freely and will discuss their genuine concerns.
Listening	The facilitator should practice verbal and nonverbal listening skills. You can demonstrate nonverbal listening by: • sitting or facing the speaker squarely • being aware of your facial expression You can demonstrate verbal listening by: • restating their questions • reflecting on what they have said • encouraging the quiet members to contribute
Organization	Let the group know the agenda ahead of time. Give them a written agenda (write it on paper, the blackboard, a flip chart, etc.).
Questioning Skills	Vary the types of questions that you ask: • ask open-ended questions that have no right or wrong answers, but that prompt discussion • ask questions that clarify • ask probing questions that prompt speakers to extend their responses • closed questions emphasize factual information (Yes or No)
Basic Ways to Keep the Discussion Ongoing	• raise pivotal questions • turn back questions to the group • allow silences for reflections • show acceptance by nodding or emphasizing key words • have participants respond to each other

Strategies to Facilitate Different Types of Situations:

Go 'rounds - Ask the group a question or to share some specific information. Go around the room. If someone needs to pass, allow that but then come back to them. This is a great way to get folks talking and involved right away and allows them to know that their active participation is desired and expected.

Ideas Gallery - This is an alternate way of brainstorming. Put large pieces of paper on the wall with categories of information you'd like the group to think about. Ask them to move from one paper to the next, read what's on the paper, and add their own thoughts. This activity gets them moving (a change of pace from typical brainstorming) and suggests an expectation that everyone can contribute. This also allows those who are more introverted to have a comfortable way of sharing their ideas.

Sentence Stems - Create a list of open-ended questions on a blank sheet of paper. Cut the questions out and place them in different envelopes. Divide students into small groups of 3-5. One student should select a question from the envelope and respond. The goal is to promote dialogue so the group can be encouraged to ask questions or share additional insights where appropriate. Rotate the envelopes until each student has had an opportunity to respond or until the questions have been exhausted.

Think-Pair-Share - Ask the students to do some personal reflection and write their thoughts down on paper. This gives them a chance to process individually first. Pairing up in groups of two gives them a chance to share their thoughts and process a bit further. Finally, have the each pair share out with the larger group. This approach gives the introverts an opportunity to approach the topic in a way that might best suit them initially (through writing) and the extroverts a chance to approach it out loud, which might be their preference.

Case Study - Using stories is a great way to showcase a variety of problems at no-to-low stakes for students that allows them to practice making decisions. This might be especially useful for mentors who teach or assist in teaching.

Force Field Analysis - This activity asks people to consider their "Ideal Situation", "Worst Possible Situation," and "Present Situation" so that they can identify inhibitors to their success and driving forces that will lead to success. A copy of the form is available for download on our website at https://lc.iastate.edu/pm-resources. This might be a useful tool in program planning or determining how the group is functioning.

Mind Maps - Mind mapping is a technique for noting information or explaining a process or concept. When using the mind mapping technique, you would display information graphically as opposed to the traditional method of sentences and words arranged on a page. To promote interaction and dialogue it is sometimes helpful to have students develop mind maps as a group and then explain to others in the class why they chose certain symbols and icons. Graphic representations of concepts can then be displayed around the room.

Continuum Activities - These activities ask students to take a stand and place themselves on a continuum between extremes on various issues. Continuums can be used for such topics as values clarification, working together, transition issues, ethical issues, group work, leadership, and getting acquainted. It's best to establish ground rules before starting and ensure that everyone doesn't have to explain/defend their position on the continuum, although those who wish to share why they've placed themselves in a certain spot on the continuum will be invited to do so.

Example of Facilitation Strategy: *Inside Outside Circles and/or Double Circle*
1. Have a large group of students number off by two's (1, 2, 1, 2, etc.)
2. Have 1s form a circle, surrounding the 2s. Have the 2s form a circle inside the 1s, facing the 1s.
3. As the facilitator, you will begin asking one question to the group, to be answered by each "pair." Give the pairs approximately 1 minute to share their answers to each question with each other.
4. Ask the inside circle to make a move (e.g. "all move 2 people to their left" or "all move 1 person to their right").
5. With the move completed, each person should be facing a new individual. Remember to introduce yourselves to the new person. Proceed to ask a new question and allow approximately 1 minute for sharing.

You can use this activity as a get to know you ice-breaker.

Sample Questions for Inside Outside Circles and/or Double Circle
- What is your favorite holiday and why?
- What is your favorite hobby and how often do you make time for it?
- If you could have a pet what would you choose?
- Who is a role model in your life right now?
- What is the greatest problem facing the world today and what steps should we take to address it?

You can also link the activity to course content by generating a list of questions that draw upon the day's lecture or items for an upcoming test.

Strategies for Handling Disruptive Group Behaviors

Under participation by members within a group activity are clearly observable, but the causes may be less certain. Some people will attend or join the group because it is a requirement or expectation, or because "everybody else is doing it," making it difficult to increase involvement and investment within the group. Below are a list of common behaviors along with reasoning for the act, and how to handle the situation appropriately.

Behavior	Reasons Behind It	How to Handle
Side Conversations	• May be related to the discussion • Boredom • Sitting too long • May want attention • May be confused • May have questions	• Pause/ignore it • Do a more active learning activity • Confront at break • Move closer towards them • Mix up seating • Give option to leave • Make eye contact
The "expert" who challenges the presenter	• May be more knowledgeable • May need attention	• Recognize expertise • Confront at break • Use as group leader • Redirect comment to group for their opinions
Acting out to get attention	• Bored • Releasing tension • Unsure of how to act around others	• Give chance to succeed • Change teaching techniques • Allow laughter • Pause • "Let's get back on track…" • Confront at break • Confront off-color comments
Low participation	• Bored • Shy	• Change activity • Small group work • Give more openings for participation • Talk at break • Allow time to prepare thoughts
Tangents and rambling	• Misunderstood question • Wants/needs attention	• Try to use their comment • Redirect attention • Thank them and go to next point • State how they are off the subject, discuss at break • "Your point is interesting…" • Try to refer back to it later
Putting down ideas and negative comments	• Has a legitimate point • Wants/needs attention • Personality conflict	• Ask them to clarify • Ask group for their reactions • Ignore it

Tips for Increasing Involvement:

- Provide simple methods that solicit total participation. This facilitates equal involvement from all types of personalities, reserved to exuberant. For example, have everybody write down an idea, and break the group into smaller groups to share their idea. This initiates more active participation amongst the group.

- Ensure that all group members know the task, the limits of time, and the need for staying on track. Establish clear and specific norms for when the meeting will start and list expectations. This will keep the group focus towards the end goal, creating a rewarding outcome when finishing on time.

- Challenge the group to make an investment in the activity by providing a reward or treat. If no positive reward is given, then individuals may leave voluntarily or become disinterested.

- Observe group behaviors that show the lack of involvement. Invite members to discuss what is going on with the group and what can be done about it. For example, make an observant inquiry such as, "The group seems tired and detached today. Is something going on that we should talk about?" This method allows for members to provide input and suggestions.

Establishing Effective Study Groups

A large part of your job as a mentor is to maintain an environment that encourages academic success. The students involved in your learning community are in a wonderful situation where they can take advantage of the common academic goals of their peers. A great way to encourage the daily integration of academics into the lives of your students is by encouraging them to study together on a regular basis. The following is just a short list of the positive effects of study groups:

- Provide an opportunity where peers can teach each other by reinforcing and clarifying learning.
- Make learning more interesting and fun by providing a type of support group.
- Help students feel more comfortable with material so they can discuss it in the classroom environment.
- Motivate students to study because the success of the group depends on the participation of all members.

Things you can do as a mentor to help establish study groups:

- Create sign-up sheets that go along with the classes you know your students are taking.
- Provide tips on how to study effectively – staying on subject, having an agenda, setting a start and stop time, etc. Check out the Academic Success Center website for more ideas: https://asc.dso.iastate.edu/successful-studying.
- Work with your resources to set study hours in a quiet location.

Programming & Activities

Getting feedback

Identifying program activities and getting feedback from students is a good way to find out how things are going in your community is to ASK the people who are participating in it. This can be done several ways.

Brainstorming - Ask students about their goals for the year and what kinds of activities they would like to see made available – both social and educational. Write down the ideas they give you! When you're looking for something to plan, go to that list. People like knowing that their comments matter.

Survey/Assess - After an event, create an electronic or paper survey to provide to participants asking what they thought about it – if the content was good, what they learned, what could've been done better, what was done well, etc. You can also ask for verbal responses. Be sure to take these comments into consideration for future planning. Again, don't forget to use your resources (like your Learning Community Coordinator) to help you assess and evaluate your new data.

Talk with Other Mentors - Get together with other mentors and see what programs/activities they have tried, what has worked and what hasn't. Remember to take into consideration your learning community differences that might affect the outcome of a particular program.

Program planning checklist

As a mentor, there will be times when you will need to plan programs and activities for your learning community. These may be social or educational/academic in nature. Ideas include:

Educational/Academic:
- Bringing in speakers
- Organizing study groups
- Taking tours of companies related to the Learning Community major/theme
- Attending lectures on campus
- Portfolio and resume workshops
- Campus group presentations: Student Wellness, Office of Student Financial Success, Academic Success Center, etc.
- Community service opportunities

Social:
- Going together for meals or dessert
- Pizza parties
- BBQs and tailgates
- Bowling
- Watching movies
- Birthday parties
- Intramural teams
- ISU sporting events
- ISU music events

Some things to take into consideration when planning include:

- What type of program/activity do I want to offer (social, educational, etc.)?
- Where will this program be/what facilities are available?
- What resources do I need to carry out this program? Do I need specific equipment and where can I obtain it if needed?
- What dates are possibilities for this program – how can I maximize attendance and avoid conflicts?
- Are there any costs involved in this program? Will I need monetary support?
- Do I need approval for this program?
- Does this program comply with university policies regulating activities?

See Appendix B for a program planning worksheet.

Reserving meeting space on campus

At different times during the year, you might find it useful to reserve meeting or activity space on campus. The following is a list of available spaces and reservation contact information. Visit the Room Scheduling website at https://www.fpm.iastate.edu/roomscheduling/ for additional information about space on campus. For meeting spaces in the Department of Residence visit https://www.housing.iastate.edu/administrative-processes-procedures/.

Taking a field trip

Some peer mentors have responsibility for organizing field trips. If your mentor role requires this of you, consider the following:

- Identify the site
- Contact the location and identify a contact person
- Identify any costs associated with the trip
- Have students provide emergency contact information before departure
- Reserve university vehicles if needed. Go to https://www.transportation.iastate.edu/making-reservations for information.

Note: All student drivers must have a current Motor Vehicle Record and complete an Agile FleetCommander Profile. Further details are located on the Transportation Services website at https://www.transportation.iastate.edu/driver-train-req.

Additional Activities

- Consider having students do a reflection of the experience – either a written reflection or verbal reflection in the group.
- Work with your Learning Community Coordinator(s) in advance to determine any payment or reimbursement processes – you will likely need to save all receipts!

Faculty-Student Interaction

Alexander Astin, a scholar of higher education, noted in his 1993 book "What Matters in College," that faculty-student interaction was one of two factors that made the greatest difference in getting students involved in the undergraduate experience. As a peer mentor, you will be asked to consider ways that faculty and student interaction can be increased. Below are several ideas that have been tried by others.

Low risk

- Host a faculty-student coffee meeting.
- Coordinate a series of faculty-student lunches. Groups of four or five students could be invited to attend during various points in the semester.
- Ask a faculty member who is familiar with Ames to conduct a tour of the town for new students.
- Ask faculty members to present a favorite lecture or a fireside chat with students.

Curricular

- Have a group of faculty members and students attend a movie related to a course topic or area of study and have faculty and students discuss the implications.
- Design a service project that involves students and faculty members. Discuss what was learned following the service-learning project.
- Invite faculty members into the orientation courses/learning community seminars and have them discuss the field.
- Host a round table in which faculty discuss opportunities for student involvement in faculty research.
- Before a major exam, see if faculty members would be available to conduct a late-night study session. Offer pizza and soda.

Active

- Have faculty and students engage in a low ropes event early in the semester as a teambuilding activity.
- Have faculty members visit learning community floors during move-in and meet students and parents as they check-in.
- Have groups of students interview key faculty members within their major and provide a brief presentation to the learning community about what they learned.

Miscellaneous

- Have mentors interview faculty members briefly and create a faculty directory that includes interesting facts about the faculty they are likely to encounter in their first or second year.
- Have guest faculty members judge a contest or assess a group of student presentations.

Faculty members lead very busy lives. When planning an activity, consider the demands that are placed on their time and consider their personalities. Contacting the faculty member(s) well in advance of the event is important (minimum of 1-2 weeks). Make sure your event is organized and make sure that you do what is necessary to promote a high student turn out to these events. At the end, be sure to send a thank you note to the faculty member.

Resources

Dean of Students Office

The Dean of Students Office offers several departments and services that will certainly be useful to you as a mentor in referring a student to the proper place. Departments include:

- Academic Success Center
    - 515-294-6624, https://asc.dso.iastate.edu/
- Center for LGBTQIA+ Student Success
    - 515-294-5433, https://center.dso.iastate.edu/
- Center for Student Educational Success
    - 515-294-1020, https://www.dso.iastate.edu/center-for-student-educational-success
- Hixson Opportunity Awards
    - 515-294-6479, https://hixson.dso.iastate.edu/
- International Students and Scholars Office
    - 515-294-1120, https://isso.dso.iastate.edu/
- Margaret Sloss Center for Women and Gender Equity
    - 515-294-4154, https://sloss.dso.iastate.edu/
- Military-Affiliated Student Center
    - 515-294-9801, https://masc.dso.iastate.edu/
- Office of Multicultural Student Affairs
    - 515-294-6338, https://multicultural.dso.iastate.edu/
- National Student Exchange
    - 515-294-6479, https://nse.dso.iastate.edu/
- Off-Campus Student Support
    - 515-294-1020, https://www.dso.iastate.edu/off-campus-support
- Parent and Family Programs
    - 515-294-1020, https://parents.dso.iastate.edu/
- Office of Sorority and Fraternity Engagement
    - 515-294-1023, https://sfe.dso.iastate.edu/
- Student Accessibility Services
    - 515-294-7220, https://sas.dso.iastate.edu/
- Office of Student Assistance
    - 515-294-1020, https://studentassistance.dso.iastate.edu/
- Office of Student Conduct
    - 515-294-1020, https://studentconduct.dso.iastate.edu/
- Student Legal Services
    - 515-294-0978, https://studentlegal.dso.iastate.edu/
- Student Support Services (TRiO)
    - 515-294-0210, https://trio.iastate.edu/student-support-services

For more detailed information on the services that the Dean of Student's Office has to offer, visit their website at: https://www.dso.iastate.edu/.

Information Technology/Computer Labs

The Information Technology Center on campus offers electronic equipment rental free of charge to students. An example of equipment offered includes:

- Laptop computers
- Apple iPads and Pencils
- Video Equipment
- Digital cameras and accessories
- Graphing calculators
- Power banks, chargers, adapters, and accessories
- Projectors and screens
- Sound systems

For more specific equipment information and guidelines for reservations, visit the Tech Lending website at: https://www.lib.iastate.edu/find-borrow-request/tech-lending.

There are several public computer labs located in Parks Library. The locations are listed on their website at: https://www.lib.iastate.edu/visit-and-study/computers-and-printers/computer-and-computer-labs.

Highlights from the Residence Halls Policy Handbook

As an integral member of a learning community within the residence hall system, it is important that you are aware of and follow the hall policies that are outlined in the Policy Handbook (https://www.housing.iastate.edu/behavioral-policies/). It is not your role to enforce these policies but to abide by them and encourage appropriate behavior among your students. If you are not part of a residential learning community, it is helpful to be aware of these policies if you work with those who are living in the halls. Policies that may affect first-year students include the following:

Quiet/Study/Courtesy Hours Policy

Quiet/study hours are designated times for sleeping and studying when noise should be kept to a minimum. These hours are maintained to help provide an environment in which students can succeed personally and academically.

The minimum acceptable quiet/study hours are listed below:

Sunday–Thursday   11 p.m. – 8 a.m.
Friday–Saturday   2 a.m. – 9 a.m.

Extended quiet/study hours will be in effect during the last two weeks of each semester. A study break, not to exceed one hour, may occur between 9 p.m. and 10 p.m. daily during those weeks, except for the Saturday right before finals week in which the house may allot a 4-hour block of time ending before 10 p.m. for a study break. Each hall will determine, within these limits, when its study break will be. During the study break, all policies will be enforced; noise should not exceed levels deemed acceptable during courtesy hours. Each house will post its approved quiet/study hours policy.

You are responsible for helping to enforce quiet/study hours. If noise is problematic for you, ask the individual involved to be quieter. If the problem persists, contact your RA or the RA on duty. Anyone may document policy violations. For information on the documentation process, talk to your RA or hall director/apartment director.

Alcoholic Beverages and Controlled Substances

All state, federal, and local laws and University policies pertaining to alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and other drugs, including controlled substances, apply to on-campus residents and their guests.

Only residents and their guests who are 21 years of age or older may possess and consume alcoholic beverages in the privacy of their residence hall rooms/apartments. Residents under 21 years of age may not possess, transport, or consume alcoholic beverages, may not have a guest (regardless of the guest's age) who consumes or possesses alcoholic beverages in their room/apartment, and may not possess alcoholic beverage containers (empty or full) in their rooms/apartments, including containers used as decoration. Residents and their guests are responsible for providing verification of age upon request by a staff member. Any individual who refuses to provide age verification will be assumed to be under 21 years of age.

Maple and Eaton Halls, and Lincoln, Palmer, Pennell, and Stange Houses in Friley Hall are

substance-free areas. Use of substances, including alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs are prohibited to all students in these areas, regardless of age. Residents found responsible for violating the University alcohol policy, including first offenses, will be removed from the substance-free living environment depending upon the severity of the violation. If there is no space available for relocation, an alternate sanction will be determined.

Alcohol in open containers may not be consumed or possessed anywhere outside a student room/apartment, including hallways, courtyards, public areas, community centers, and other University grounds. Balconies and patios are considered to be inside the apartment.

Containers of alcohol larger than one gallon are not permitted in the residence halls.

Guests and Visitors

Only those residents contracted for and assigned to a specific room/apartment are permitted to live there. A guest must abide by public health and safety requirements adopted by the University and DOR and all policies of the University and the DOR. You are responsible for informing your guest of all policies.

The guest and host are mutually responsible for the conduct of the guest. All guests must be respectful of all roommate and community member rights. Guests of one roommate should not infringe on the rights of access of other roommates. Residents may have overnights guests in their room. All overnight guests must be given permission by other roommates in advance. The stay of any overnight guest may not exceed three (3) consecutive nights and may not exceed six (6) nights in one month.

DOR staff reserves the right to require a guest to leave if university policies and/or DOR policies are violated or if complaints are received from members of the community. The privilege of having guests may be revoked if the privilege is abused or DOR or university violations occur involving guests.

Wrapping Up the Year

Some learning communities conclude at the end of fall semester, while others continue through spring. However, when programs come to an end, students may appreciate having some type of closure activity to conclude their learning community experience.

Ideas for wrapping up the year may include:

- Providing awards or certificates to honor achievements or to acknowledge their participation.
- Writing personal notes to each student to thank them for their participation.
- Having a reception/tea/banquet for students at the end to celebrate the semester/year.
- Having students create collages of what they learned in the learning community.
- Asking students to provide a personal reflection of their learning community experience and having a time set aside for them to share.
- Maintaining a scrapbook or PowerPoint and sharing it with the students at the end.
- Taking a group photo and giving everyone a copy. Ask participants to sign each other's pictures.
- Scheduling a re-connection meeting for the semester after their participation in the learning community has concluded.