

Performing Your Role: Mentor & Role Model



This Chapter Includes:

- 2 Mentoring Undergraduate Students
- 3 First-Year Adjustment Issues
- 5 The Helping Model
- 7 Helping Skills Checklist
- 8 1:1 Meetings with Students

Mentoring Undergraduate Students

What is a Mentor?

As a mentor, peer educators demonstrate appropriate behavior both inside and outside the classroom and help new students transition to the university. The role of the mentor involves setting a mood of openness, trust, and freedom of expression in pursuit of ideas and self-truth. Mentors fulfill these roles by:

- Being approachable and available to students
- Upholding the tenets of the Carolinian Creed
- Modeling an appropriate balance between academics and involvement
- Helping students engage in healthy and responsible decision making
- Creating and maintaining an appropriate professional relationship with students
- Demonstrating empathy toward students' needs and problems

Research has established that student involvement in and out of the classroom contributes to student retention and success. First-year students especially need faculty and peer mentors and facilitators to take a proactive role in getting them involved in and connected to the college experience.

Below is a list of mentor characteristics and mentoring behaviors. Use this as a catalyst for producing your own list of behaviors that you would be willing to practice with your students and which are consistent with your strengths, talents, values, and philosophy.

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| • Active listening | • Respectful |
| • Availability and approachability | • Sponsorship |
| • Consistency | • Takes a holistic interest in students, supportive of academic, personal, social, professional, spiritual, and physical dimensions of student growth and change |
| • Empathy | • Treat students in an ethical manner, does not use students for selfish gain, or abuse power (especially does not complicate the relationship through sexual involvement) |
| • Extend yourself, make an extra effort | • Trustworthy |
| • Follow through | • Willingness to share own experiences |
| • Friendliness | |
| • Let students know they matter | |
| • Make students aware of on-campus opportunities for personal development | |
| • Open to feedback and able to respond in a non-defensive way | |
| • Predictability | |
| • Provide feedback | |
| • Reactive in a non-judgmental way | |

First-Year Adjustment Issues

Certain times in the academic year tend to be universally challenging to students. Those who understand the ups and downs of the first college year are better able to help students negotiate the challenges of transition to college. Below are some typical adjustment issues faced by students throughout the first year and a list of strategies you might use to help them during their transition.

August/September

Adjustment Issues:

How a Mentor can Help:

Excitement	Harness this excitement by sharing what it means to be a Carolinian.
Testing new-found freedom	Act without judgment and connect students with on-campus or community opportunities that align with their interests.
Frequent calls and visits home	Share own experiences about the transition to college. Create an opportunity for your students to spend time together outside of class.
Homesickness and loneliness	Take time outside of class to meet with students and give them an opportunity to be heard.
Anxiety about roommates, professors, classes	Demonstrate a willingness to listen and answer questions.
First exams	Direct students to on-campus resources like the Student Success Center.

October

Adjustment Issues:

How a Mentor can Help:

Roommate problems begin to arise	Listen and be attentive to your students' needs.
Students question: "Do I fit in here?"	Let students know they matter. Promote sense of belonging through community building in your class.
First test grades returned	Follow up with students to see how they're doing.
Midterm exams	Demonstrate an interest in students' academic growth and development.

Consequences of decision making experienced	Act without judgment and actively listen. Connect your students' interests with positive opportunities.
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November

Adjustment Issues:	How a Mentor can Help:
Midterm grades returned	Maintain an approachable demeanor and follow up with students.
Roommate challenges become clearer	Actively listen to students. Ask questions and direct to appropriate resources.
Many exams and papers due before Thanksgiving	Demonstrate time management and positive academic strategies through your own behavior.
Excitement and/or anxiety regarding going home for Thanksgiving	Listen and be attentive to your students' needs.
First series of campus-wide illness (cold, flu, strep, etc.)	Support your students' wellness. Connect students with various wellness resources on campus.

December

Adjustment Issues:	How a Mentor can Help:
Anxiety over preparations for finals	Acknowledge their feelings and connect students with academic success resources.
Excitement and/or anxiety regarding going home for holidays	Ask open-ended questions to help students explore their thoughts and feelings.
Sadness about leaving new friendships and/or love relationships	Practice empathy and share own experiences.
Roommate challenges continue	Actively listen to students. Ask questions and direct to appropriate resources.

Helping Model

I. Work for understanding (theirs and yours)

A. Paraphrase

Restate facts, ideas, and/or feelings in your own words to check if you are listening and hearing what is being said.

B. Clarify understanding

Ask questions and restate content/feelings to see if you are on the right track and understand what is being said to you, e.g., "Let me make sure I understand what you are saying. What I heard was..."

C. Ask open-ended questions

Open-ended questions typically begin with words such as "Why" and "How," or phrases such as "Tell me about..." Often they are not technically questions but statements which implicitly ask for a response.

D. Work past surface level

Remember that the problem they approach you with may not be the actual or underlying problem they want help resolving. You may have to dig deeper.

E. Summarize

Summarize as you go – Try to pull the important ideas/concerns/problems together at different points to be sure everyone is on the same page.

II. Ask individual to come up with alternatives or possible solutions

A. What can you do?

B. What can you control in this situation?

C. What do you want to happen?

III. Help them make a plan

A. Focus on one or two steps to take.

IV. Follow up

Traits of an Ineffective Listener

- Interrupting or rushing the speaker
- Not making eye contact
- Showing interest in something other than the conversation
- Finishing the speaker's thoughts
- Topping the speaker's story or making it about you
- Giving unsolicited advice

Traits of an Effective Listener

- Asking open-ended questions
- Embracing silence
- Paraphrasing ("what I hear you saying...")
- Acknowledging their feelings
- Being nonjudgmental
- Finding an appropriate time and place to talk
- Limiting distractions (cell phones, people walking by, etc.)
- Being conscious of body language and signals it may send
- Use proper physical attending skills

Roadblocks to Communication

Ordering, Directing, Commanding ("You must...", "You have to...", "You will...")	Praising, Judging, Approving ("I approve...", "I agree...", "You did the right thing...")
Warning, Admonishing, Threatening ("You had better...", "If you don't, then...")	Reassuring, Justifying, Excusing "It's not so bad...", "Don't worry...", "You'll feel better...", "That's too bad...")
Moralizing, Preaching, Obliging ("You should...", "You ought...", "It is your duty...", "It is your responsibility...")	Diagnosing, Analyzing, Interpreting ("I know what you need...", "Your problem is...", "You don't really mean that...")
Advising, Giving Suggestions, Solutions ("What I would do is...", "Why don't you...", "Let me suggest...", "It would be best for you...")	Close-Ended Questioning, Probing, Cross-Examining, Prying, Interrogating ("Why...", "Who...", "Where...", "What...", "How...", "When...")
Persuading with logic, Instructing, Lecturing ("Do you realize ...", "That is not right...", "The facts are...")	Distracting, Humoring, Diverting ""Forget it...", "That reminds me...", "We can discuss it later...", "Let's think about the good things...", "You're just having a bad day...")
Evaluating, Judging, Blaming, Criticizing ("You are wrong...", "You're not making sense...", "That's crazy...")	Over-identifying, Generalizing, Universalizing ("I know just how you feel...", "Lots of people feel that way...", "It's not the first time...")

Adapted from *Thomas Gordon's Roadblocks to Communication*

Helping Skills Checklist

As a mentor to my SEOE students, do I...

- Pay attention to my body language and facial expressions?
 - Maintain eye contact
 - Lean in towards the student
 - Make sure my arms are not crossed
 - Nod encouragingly
- Focus completely on my student?
 - Avoid distractions
 - Demonstrate sincere concern, empathy, and interest
- Use reflective listening techniques?
 - Ask occasional questions to gather clarifying information
 - Validate student ideas, thoughts, concerns, etc.
 - Ask open-ended questions
- Maintain an open and respectful attitude?
 - No interruptions or unsolicited opinions
 - Avoid playing the “expert”
- Use silence appropriately?
 - Allow students to fully articulate or express thoughts/feelings

1:1 Peer Mentor Meetings with Students

Conducting 1:1 meetings with your mentees is the primary responsibility that we will ask of you as a mentor. You will be expected to meet with your mentee(s) at minimum once a month. The location and duration of these meetings are up to you and your mentee(s) to decide. If you feel like they are facing challenges, utilize the 1:1 to identify the best way to support them. Students are very appreciative of opportunities for someone to listen to them talk about their experience. You will be required to fill out a short Microsoft Form after each meeting (sent out at beginning of each month) that will help us track meetings as well as give you an opportunity to ask for support if you feel like your student may need additional assistance or resources. You will not be required to tell us everything that you and your mentee discuss, as we want you to be as present as possible in your meetings. We will provide you with a few guiding questions each month that are relevant to timely issues students may be experiencing that you can use if needed.

Who do I contact?

- Alexa Dean, Undergraduate Academic Advisor
 - ajdean@email.sc.edu
 - 571-309-0176
 - Contact for anything and everything regarding the peer mentorship program
 - Please get in touch with me if you have urgent concerns about your mentee(s) - you will also have the opportunity to bring issues to my attention each month in your Microsoft Form
- Katie Frame, Lab Technician
 - mframe@email.sc.edu
 - Katie's schedule is more flexible than mine during the advising season (Sept-Nov), so please reach out if you need something.

Guiding questions to ask in 1:1 meetings:

Month	Guiding Questions
September	• Set SMART goal for semester • How has your first weeks/month been at USC so far? What has been the easiest adjustment? Hardest? • What are you most looking forward to for the remainder of the semester?
October	• How are you feeling about upcoming midterms? • What courses are you struggling with? What courses are you excited about? • What resources are you using to be successful? Do you need help seeking additional resources?
November	• How are you feeling about going home for the Thanksgiving break? • Have you gotten involved on campus yet? If so, what is one organization or activity you've gotten involved with? • How are you navigating life with roommates/suitemates?
December	• Reflection on semester • How are you feeling about upcoming finals? • What did you enjoy most about your first semester? What was the hardest part of the semester? • What are you looking forward to in the upcoming spring semester? What will you do differently?