EEEC Online Peer Mentoring Guide

With the onset of COVID and all courses moving online, peer mentor support transitioned as well. What began out of necessity grew and strengthened into an opportunity to continue to provide peer mentor support to online students. Although most of the courses in which mentors now work are asynchronous (vs. synchronously via Zoom during the pandemic), there is still a need and growing opportunity to engage undergraduate students virtually. While there are many ways in which you may utilize peer mentors in an online environment, the following strategies have shown to be effective:

Asynchronous

1. Correspondence: Have peer mentors send weekly emails (to individual students) or make announcements in Blackboard to the entire class. They can provide an overview of the upcoming lesson, study tips, share their experiences, etc.
2. Supplemental materials: Peer mentors can create short videos and/or PowerPoint (or other digital presentation) on course topics or other important information, such as study skills and campus resources, such as the Learning Center and Counseling Center.
3. Social media: Does your class have a social media account? If not, what about your college? If not, AUM does and peer mentors can share information, activities, photos, etc. of course happenings.
4. Office hours: Peer mentors are required to hold two hours of office hours each week. Online mentors host these via Zoom. Please ask your mentor to pick the days/times each week and share this information in Blackboard. Include the Zoom room link and other information about the mentor.
5. Discussion Boards: Peer mentors can post, keep track of, and respond to discussion board posts.
6. Engaging students with their peer mentor: Some students find it difficult to reach out, so there is value in adding an assignment/providing points for students who schedule an appointment and meet with their peer mentor, such as a midterm check-in.
7. Registration: Peer mentors can help guide students with the registration process (making an advising appointment, registering for classes, etc.).
8. General support: Navigating Blackboard, Financial Aid and Student Accounts, ordering food via GrubHub, etc. are other processes that peer mentors are more familiar with and are able to help.

Synchronous

In addition to the above:

1. Zoom support: Peer mentors can admit students into a Zoom session, take attendance, monitor the chat, etc.
2. Icebreakers: Peer mentors can open the class with a short community-building activity.
3. Discussions: Similar to being in a face-to-face course, peer mentors can lead discussions, answer questions, or present a topic.

Skills for peer mentors in online courses

1. Good written communication and netiquette
2. Familiar with Blackboard and other basic technology
3. Friendly and personable
4. Timely in responding to emails and other correspondence
5. Familiar with student support services/resources, particularly those offered online
6. Inclusive and culturally competent

Peer Mentor Online Resource Guide: <https://libguides.aum.edu/c.php?g=1156661&p=8453291>

Communication

If mentors are not comfortable sharing their personal phone number, they may sign up for Google Voice: <https://voice.google.com/about>.

Typical communication in online courses:

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| **Technology** | E-mail/Blackboard Announcement | Zoom | Live Chat/Text App/ Direct Messaging |
| **Common match structures** | One-to-one/  one-to-group | One-to-one or group | One-to-one, group |
| **Interaction mode** | Asynchronous | Synchronous | Could be either |
| **Interaction schedule and frequency** | At least once per week | Often scheduled, frequency determined by professor, mentor, and/or students | Unscheduled, frequency can be determined by professor, mentor, and/or students |
| **Strengths of model** | Easy-to-use and familiar technology, allows for longer messages and file attachments, little tech maintenance by program | Real-time interactions and synchronous conversation, putting a “face” on the match | Immediate, potentially 24/7 contact, mobile-friendly and easy-to-use, free (unless program develops app) |
| **Challenges of model** | Participants may wait for messages to be read or responded to, not ideal for quick conversations, “outdated” technology to youth, requires constant staff nudging of participation | Limited activity integration, video can exacerbate feelings of distance | Limited message length in some apps, not ideal for in-depth sharing of complex feelings or thoughts; limited ability to share files/ resources; data plans can incur monetary costs; messages may not be encrypted |