

Suggestions for communicating with students

Seek Students Out: At the beginning of the year when students are still trying to get to know you, you may have to seek them out to discover if they are having problems. Getting to know them early on can help you detect a change in behavior that may require attention.

Listen: Participate in the conversation by being an active listener and then ask questions to get further information. Be conscious of your body language, facial expressions and tone of voice.

Observe: Pay close attention to the student's body language as you can sometimes learn more about the problem by how they're acting than what they're saying.

Communicate Clearly: Be clear about facts, opinions, and expectations.

Ask open-ended questions: Instead of asking 'yes' or 'no' questions which won't get you very far, ask questions beginning with "Why" or "How" which usually elicits more information about a problem or situation.

Attend and respond to both content and feeling: When a problem arises there are often two issues that you must respond to: (1) the problem itself and (2) the emotional response to that problem. As a Peer Mentor, you must address both. Also, keep in mind that the problem and the reaction your mentees are experiencing may be part of a larger problem.

Let the student solve the problem: In most cases, the student already knows the answer and is merely looking for someone to ask the right questions and support them in coming to a decision. Avoid statements such as "you should"; you can direct students to appropriate resources and then let them solve the problem on their own.

Refer to/use your resources: We don't expect you to know the answer to every problem that you are presented with; however, we do expect you to be able to use the resources we've provided you in order to refer students to the appropriate place. It is OK to make a mistake. That is how you learn and become better. However, don't answer a question unless you are willing to take responsibility for the answer you give.

Use Self-Disclosure: As long as it's helpful you should feel free to share experiences with your students. You should, however, avoid statements such as "I had that problem and no one would help me, etc". These types of statements are not at all helpful. Try always to maintain a positive and active attitude.

Questions You Should Be Asking

Talking to your students to find out their needs is very important, but they are unlikely to be able or willing to simply articulate their needs to you. Here are some questions that you should be asking your students to find out if they are staying “on course” or if they are falling behind.

Are you going to class?

- Skipping class is the #1 reason why students fail.

Are you setting aside time to study?

- College is a full time job. However, many of them will have jobs that cut into their studying time. It is important to talk with them about time and space management skills.

Are you reviewing the material in each class weekly?

- In order to really understand and be able to remember all the material seen in class, a student needs to be actively engaging in learning. Active learning is one of the skills you will need to model for your students.

Are you scheduling “goof off” time?

- Everyone needs down time. It is important that they create time in their schedules for relaxing and simply hanging out with friends and family. Nonetheless, it is equally important that they have a balance between work, school, and friends.

Do you know when the last day to Withdraw is?

- After this date they cannot withdraw from a class. It is not only important that they know this date, but they should have a copy of the academic calendar on hand. This way they can anticipate any situation that may arise.

Are you starting your assignments early?

- Have a discussion with your students about procrastination. The unexpected happens... sicknesses, accidents, computers die, etc. Students should start assignments early to plan for the unexpected.

Have you seen your advisor?

- Students need to meet with an advisor before scheduling for next semester.

Have you gone to your professor’s office hours?

- Professors want to help and want to know their students.

Are you going to tutoring?

- Some students do not know tutoring is available. Have them visit the learning resource center website

Have you formed a study group?

- Studying in groups is more efficient than studying alone. As a peer mentor you can facilitate the creation of such groups and you can monitor their development. We can work with the learning resource center staff to help you in facilitating this.

Communication and Confidentiality Protocol

During the course of the year, you will encounter many different situations and problems. For each problem, here are some protocols of who should be contacted.

Listed below are some examples of problems and the proper protocol. You will likely be presented with challenges that do not appear on this list in which case you should use your judgment and/or contact your supervisor.

Issues Regarding Academic Progress, Course Selection or Uncertainty Regarding Major

Listen (and listen some more) to the student's concerns and fears. Reassure them that these types of feelings are not uncommon. Share your own experiences or (confidentially) those of others. But mostly listen! All of these issues should be discussed with advisors. Advisors have expertise in graduation requirements as well as in students' academic and personal development. Refer the student to the advising office within their college, and positively represent the professional competencies as well as concern for student welfare. If the student is unsure of which major they're interested in, suggest that they visit The Center for Exploratory Studies.

Issues with a Course and/or Professor

Discuss what the problem(s) are with the student(s) involved.

Is the student:

- Preparing for class?
- Attending class?
- Actively participating in class – taking notes, asking questions, etc.?
- Following up by reviewing notes, revisiting assigned readings, completing assigned problems, etc.?
- Seeking other students help through study groups or more informal meetings?
- Utilizing support resources such as SI groups, writing centers or tutoring?
- Utilizing the professor's office hours?

Does the student perceive an issue with the professor's teaching style and/or grading?

- Suggest that the student(s) bring up the concerns with professor during office hours.

In the very rare instance that a class perceives issues with the professor, make sure that they share their concerns with the professor in smaller groups in a civil, respectful and responsible manner. Keep in mind that the students need to be taking responsibility for their own learning via devoting time and energy to engaging in the learning process before, during and after class. If you truly believe that the students are fully investing themselves in the learning and communications process, and perceive that there is still a class-wide problem, you need to bring this to the attention of your supervisor.

Roommate Issues:

- Discuss the problem thoroughly with the student(s) involved to make sure you get the whole story.
- Encourage the student discuss the problems with their roommate as a first step toward solving the problem.
- Discuss strategies with the student to make the situation more manageable until the school year ends (even if this means that the roommate refuses to change).
- Sometimes the solution is that there is no workable solution, the student simply has to stick it out.
- Encourage the student to contact their RA if the problem cannot be solved between the roommates.
- If the problem still persists contact your supervisor for more information.

Addictive Behaviors:

- Notify your supervisor or the RA. Don't hesitate. Any sensitive matters will be dealt with confidentially.
- If the student approaches you, be supportive and most importantly, listen.
- If the student is an immediate danger to themselves or someone else, you should contact help immediately with the RA or hall director or call RUPD. Notify your supervisor
- If the student is not an immediate danger, you should continue to be supportive and encourage the student to seek assistance. Contact the RA for assistance and advise them of the situation. Notify your supervisor

Depression:

- If you suspect that a member of your LC is suffering from depression, you should notify the RA and your supervisor.
- Speak with the student, listen and be supportive.
- If you believe that they are an immediate danger to themselves or to others, contact the RA and hall director or RUPD if you can't reach residence life staff. Notify your supervisor
- If you notice signs that a student(s) has changed dramatically (i.e. they don't seem interested in anything, you notice their academic performance is decreasing, etc.), tell the RA and notify your supervisor so as we can assist in ensuring the student is utilizing appropriate assistance.