

EMBEDDING PEER MENTORS

AS A STRATEGY TO SCALE HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICES,
SUPPORT GUIDED PATHWAYS, AND PROMOTE EQUITY

BECKY WAI-LING PACKARD

MOUNT HOLYOKE COLLEGE



GOALS

Participants will...

- Identify different sources and types of peer mentors
- Understand why peer mentoring can promote equity and inclusion efforts
- Locate initiatives within HIPs and guided pathways
- Learn about factors that promote their effectiveness and pitfalls to avoid
- Have an opportunity to discuss strategies they plan to use on their own campuses

SCENARIO

Midwestern Regional University wants to expand service learning as a core component of the sophomore year. To invest in this effort, they recruited peer mentors who could help support sophomores as they transition into their roles in the community.

They prioritized peer mentors who had prior experience with community service initiatives. Their plan is to assign one peer mentor per course, with the peer mentor attending one class meeting each week, providing office hours, and offering written electronic feedback on the students' reflections.

What do you like about this plan? What questions do you have about this plan?



TYPES OF PEER MENTORS

Types

- Same stage, small group cohort
- Near-peer
- Step ahead peer

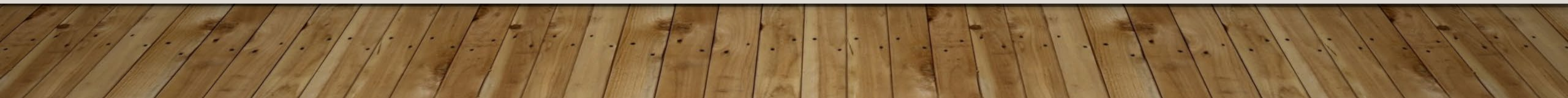
Sources

- Academic, residential, social, orientation/transition

Mode

- In-person, electronic (virtual, asynchronous)

Term

- Short-term (a few mtgs), semester/year
 - Fixed, flexible
- 



INFRASTRUCTURE: WHAT DO YOU HAVE IN PLACE?



STRIKING A BALANCE

- Leveraging peer mentors to expand capacity (and buffer faculty workload)
- Investing support in the peer mentors and their development



LOCATION WITHIN HIPS OR GUIDED PATHWAYS



EQUITY AND INCLUSION

- Peer models can serve as social vaccines or buffers for underrepresented students (Dasgupta et al., 2015)
- Peer-to-peer interaction important for classroom climate
 - Negative peer interactions during a capstone course as a reason to leave field (Amelink & Creamer, 2010)
 - Setting an egalitarian norm can help (Sullivan et al., 2018)
- Peer mentor investment improves their outcomes, too!
 - Recruiting a diverse cohort,
 - Prepare with inclusive peer mentoring built in



AVOIDING PITFALLS

- Source or supply (availability or crowding of field, recruitment strategies)
- Legitimacy and preparation (delegation, skillset, inclusive practices)
- Appropriateness of role and tasks (boundaries, grading)
- Intensity/Workload/Exhaustion (intensive enough to matter; peer's workload; diversity of cohort)
- Leveraging the investment (cultivate the cohort/leadership experience)
- Assessing effectiveness (having a plan from the beginning, changing over time)

REVISIT SCENARIO

Midwestern Regional University wants to expand service learning as a core component of the sophomore year. To invest in this effort, they recruited peer mentors who could help support sophomores as they transition into their roles in the community.

They prioritized peer mentors who had prior experience with community service initiatives. Their plan is to assign one peer mentor per course, with the peer mentor attending one class meeting each week, providing office hours, and offering written electronic feedback on the students' reflections.

What do you like about this plan? What questions do you have about this plan?



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION (3-4 PEOPLE)

PICK ONE OR TWO TO REFLECT ON AND GAIN FEEDBACK

ANY BARRIERS? STRATEGIES?

- **Source or supply** (availability or crowding of field, recruitment strategies)
- **Legitimacy and preparation** (delegation, skillset, inclusive practices)
- **Appropriateness of role and tasks** (boundaries, grading)
- **Intensity/Workload/Exhaustion** (intensive enough to matter; peer's workload; diversity of cohort)
- **Leveraging the investment** (cultivate the cohort/leadership experience)
- **Assessing effectiveness** (having a plan from the beginning, changing over time)

WHAT SHOULD BE IN THE TRAINING?

- Role clarification
- Technical training (what will mentors be expected to do?)
- Trouble shooting/problem solving (what situations might they encounter?)
- Inclusive practices (what will it look like to be asset-oriented, foster belonging, be approachable and/or transparent, to be culturally-responsive)
- What else?

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Will you have a mentor contract? If faculty are involved, will they sign too?
- Will groups of peer mentors meet together? If course-based, will faculty and peer mentors meet regularly? If not, how will they communicate?
- How might you leverage on-line resources or social media?
- How will you enlist nominations for peer mentors?

THANK YOU!

Take a look at the recommended readings/resources

Contact me if questions

bpackard@mtholyoke.edu