

STUDENTS HELPING STUDENTS: A
GUIDE FOR FYEX PEER
EDUCATORS AT SHEPHERD
UNIVERSITY

Shepherd University
First Year Experience Program

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Shepherd University FYEX Peer Educator Program and congratulations on being chosen to be a Peer Educator.

This guide will:

- Explain the mission and goals of the First Year Experience Program.
- Clarify what is expected of you as a Peer Educator.
- Explain leadership principles and practices that will support you in building and sustaining collaboration within your FYEX class.
- Explain mentoring principles and practices that will support you in building and sustaining a successful relationship with your FYEX class.
- Suggest practices and activities that will support you in the discussion topics portion of each FYEX class.
- Provide resources for connecting your FYEX students to vital people, resources and networks in Shepherd University.

FYEX classes and Peer Educators

FYEX classes increase retention and graduation rates and enhance student academic and personal development.

FYEX classes can stimulate:

- Greater connection between students.
- More interaction with faculty.
- Enhanced engagement in learning.

At Shepherd University, the goals of FYEX classes include:

- Facilitating meaningful and productive relationships between students.
- Supporting students' academic and intellectual growth.
- Supporting students' personal and social development.
- Facilitating student connections with faculty, advisors, college and campus personnel, clubs and organizations, co-curricular programs and fellow students.
- Engaging students in experiences across a broad range of learning areas.
- Providing mentoring for first year students.
- Providing leadership experience for Peer Educators.

Why have Peer Educators in FYEX classes? Simply put, *peers influence peers*. You have an opportunity to influence first-year students in a positive and powerful way. You can affect their habits and behaviors. You can help make them feel at home at SU and become a part of the campus community.

There will be approximately 400-600 students involved in FYEX programs their first year at Shepherd. As Peer Educators you are a part of a very special and historic phenomenon that can have dramatic effects in the lives of your fellow students.

Rewards and Challenges of Peer Educators

Working with an instructor in an FYEX class will be very rewarding. You can positively affect each student's first year development and experience, grow and develop as a leader, and build relationships with students and SU professionals that may last a lifetime. Read what these three Peer Educators said about their leadership experience:

"Yes, it was a learning experience and I think I want to do it again."

"Very meaningful and I enjoyed participating. It was GREAT."

"Yes, it was wonderful and very informative to work so closely with first year students."

What are some of the challenges? Gaining student's trust, involvement, engagement, and "buy in" can be challenging. It requires faith, fortitude and persistence. First-year students will find their first year at SU to be demanding on many levels and the benefits and opportunities associated with FYEX may not be immediately apparent to them. However, *Rome was not built in a day*. You have an interest and desire to be a great Peer Educator. And you have the support of the FYEX staff and instructors. We will work together to build positive experiences for first year students, which will impact their engagement, experience and development.

SHEPHERD UNIVERSITY MISSION AND CORE VALUES

Mission Statement

Shepherd University, a West Virginia public liberal arts university, is a diverse community of learners and a gateway to the world of opportunities and ideas. We are the regional center for academic, cultural and economic opportunity. Our mission of service succeeds because we are dedicated to our core values: learning, engagement, integrity, accessibility, and community.

Core Values

Committed to excellence, Shepherd University embraces the following five core values:

Learning

Shepherd University creates a community of learners who integrate teaching, scholarship, and learning into their lives. In order to create challenging, relevant experiences, inside and outside of the classroom, the University continually evaluates and assesses student learning. We recognize and accommodate diverse learning styles and perspectives necessary for global understanding.

Engagement

Shepherd University fosters environments in which students, faculty, staff, and members of the community engage with each other to form mutually beneficial relationships. We believe that meaningful engagement, with ideas and with people, promotes deep learning and nurtures critical thought.

Integrity

Shepherd University strives for an environment of honesty and fairness in its actions. University officials seek input from students, faculty, and staff and make informed and objective decisions. We expect all members of the community to act in accordance with this value.

Accessibility

Shepherd University provides services to all qualified students. Our staff and faculty are available to students and are committed to respecting and meeting individual needs. University governance and budgeting structures reflect our commitment to transparent processes and public access to information.

Community

Shepherd University comprises a community that includes students, faculty, staff, alumni, and involved citizens. We

meet the needs of this community through assessment, development, and implementation of innovative programs and initiatives. We strive to create a safe environment based on mutual respect and acceptance of differences.

FYEX GOALS AND PROGRAMS

Overall goals of the FYEX Program are to:

- Provide a student-centered program.
- Deliberately design a program with:
 - Active involvement/engagement
 - Social integration
 - Personal reflection
 - Personal validation
- Be proactive by early, preventative action taken to address student needs.
- Be intrusive by reaching out to students and initiating supportive action.
- Be diversified by tailoring or customizing classes to meet the distinctive needs of different student populations.
- Be personalized by delivering a program in a manner that recognizes each student's individuality and attempts to address personal needs.
- Be comprehensive (holistic) by developing a program that focuses on the student as a "whole person" and addresses academic and non-academic factors that affect student success.
- Be collaborative by forming collaborative alliances and partnerships between different organizational units of the university and community.
- Become durable by making sure the program is institutionalized and is part of the organizational budget and has longevity.
- Be empirical (evidentiary) by recognizing that the program must be supported and driver by assessment data (both quantitative and qualitative), which is used to prove program impact or value and used to continually improve the program.

FYEX Programs

Peer Educator Program

Peer Educators are recruited through references from faculty and staff, direct requests, past FYEX classes, and general student email announcements.

Overview of the position:

The FYEX Peer Educator will serve as a student role model and resource for first year students. He or she will work closely with an instructor in order to assist new students with the often-overwhelming transition to university life. He or she will help lead group discussions as well as help familiarize new students with campus resources and activities. Through this process, Peer Educators will gain valuable experience with teaching, teamwork, mentoring and leadership. After an interview with the FYEX Director, the

student will enroll in FYEX 200 (Peer Educator), which carries one credit and is graded. Permission of the FYEX Director is required prior to enrolling.

Specific Responsibilities:

- Attend all scheduled classes.
- Meet weekly with instructor.
- Lead at least one class session under the supervision of the instructor.
- Keep instructor informed of any concerns regarding the well being of students enrolled in the class.
- When students are absent, follow up by phone, email or in person to encourage class attendance.
- Co-facilitate discussion on a wide array of topics including time-management, study skills and diversity issues as listed on the syllabus.

Minimum Qualifications:

1. Must have attended Shepherd University for at least two semesters.
2. Must have strong leadership, communication and interpersonal skills. Must be comfortable with group interactions.
3. Must have a good knowledge of campus operations and services and be sensitive to numerous issues including home-university transition and student academic and personal concerns.
4. Must be in good standing with the university and must have a minimum of a 2.5 cumulative GPA.
5. Must demonstrate the ability to work collaboratively with faculty, administration and staff on first year experiences.
6. Must show initiative and creativity.

First Year Seminar (FYEX-101)

These one-credit classes meet at a variety of days and times as listed in the class schedule or check with the FYEX Director. The course addresses the core curriculum competencies of wellness, information literacy, critical thinking, experiential and life-long learning. It is a class that helps students transition from high school to university life. It talks about expectations by students and instructors and gives an overall view of the services that are provided by the university. It fills the first-year experience graduation requirement (FY) in the core curriculum. A copy of the Shepherd University common reading is required for the class.

Interest Groups (FYEX 102)

Interest Groups are small groups of a maximum of 15 who enroll in a FYEX 102 class to investigate an “interest” taught by a SU faculty or staff member or someone with a special talent or skill. The classes meet on various days and at various times in various locations around campus. Because Interest Groups fill a student’s first-year experience requirement for graduation from SU, the Interest Group must include the Tier 1 core competencies of wellness, critical thinking, information literacy, experiential and life-long learning.

The classes carry one credit and are graded. Both a mid-term and final grade are given. Intellectual and self-management skills are discussed at the beginning of each class period. These skills are listed on the class syllabus.

Expectations and Responsibilities

The foundation of good leadership is integrity, especially the ability to inspire and maintain trust. (Gary Pavela)

In *The Basic School: A Community for Learning* (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1995) contains seven principles for the design of ethical standards.

Honesty. Each person carries out his or her responsibilities carefully and with integrity, never claiming credit for someone else’s work and being willing to acknowledge wrongdoing.

Respect. Each person responds sensitively to the ideas and needs of others without dismissing or degrading them.

Responsibility. Each person has a sense of duty to fulfill willingly the tasks he or she has accepted or been assigned.

Compassion. Each person is considerate and caring. There is recognition that everyone, from time to time, feels hurt, confused, angry or sad. Instead of ignoring such conditions, people reach out to one another.

Self-discipline. Each person agrees to live within limits. At the simplest level, self-control reflects habits of good living.

Perseverance. Each person is diligent, with the inner strength and determination to pursue well-defined goals.

Giving. Each person discovers that one of life’s greatest satisfactions comes from giving to others, and recognizes that talents should be shared, through service.

We expect you to exhibit character and integrity in everything you do as a Peer Educator. You have been chosen for this position on the basis of your sincere expression of interest, your past accomplishments as a leader and student, your reputation and your promise of commitment to this program’s mission and goals. So, we expect you to:

- Champion the principles and values of the FYEX Program.
- Fully and consciously participate in the FYEX Program.
- Collaborate with the various partners who are involved, instructors, faculty, staff, and advisors.
- Demonstrate integrity, self-discipline, reliability, a team attitude and personal organization skills in following through on your responsibilities.
- Ask for help when it is needed and provide it to others when you are capable. Refer students to appropriate help if needed.

Class Meetings

- Be prepared mentally and physically for each class.
- Be on time for the classes.
- Follow up after the class by email or by calling missing students.
- Follow up on any issues with students or the group.
- Thank any guests or lecturers who may have attended the class.

Mentoring and Connecting with Students

If possible, devote some of your outside of class time with students in your class, individually or in small groups. These connections and relationships are integral to the success and impact of the FYEX class. You will need to proactively seek out students and initiate the communication that will make these arrangements possible. The process may be awkward at first but it will be worth it and will mean a great deal to the students. This is where you can get to know the students in your class better, assist them appropriately with any personal or social adjustment issues they may be having, encourage them more intensely as learners and just enjoy building relationships. Class field trips may help you get to know the students also. Meeting with small groups or individuals with a more focused purpose and strategy can make a big difference.

Communicating and Collaborating with Faculty and other SU Professionals

As a Peer Educator one of your key roles is to help students build a great network of associations at Shepherd. This takes time, thought, communication, relationship building, and planning. While the students are the core of the FYEX class, your instructor and other Shepherd professionals are considered key partners with you in building a successful experience in developing this network of assistance and guidance.

Keep in regular contact with your instructor. This can be done by email or by using their office hours for meetings.

Some advice:

- Do your best to form personal relationships with students and constantly assess and troubleshoot group dynamics. Discuss these with your instructor.

- Be attentive to enhancing the depth of communication among students, particularly in group discussions.
- Talk to students about challenges they may be facing (roommate problems, academics, stress, depression, health issues, etc.) and refer them to appropriate sources of help.
- Work on “buy in” process throughout the semester. There will be challenges with students as they may be confused about some purpose of FYEX classes, or may not understand the differences between FYEX-101, FYEX-102 (Interest Groups), and departmental first-year seminars. However, effectively defining the purpose of the class you are in by the instructor in the beginning and getting student feedback throughout the semester by you will help.
- Throughout the semester, stay on task with reminding students about the college calendar, scheduling with their advisors and registering for the next semester’s classes.

<u>Peer Educator Expectations</u>	<u>Faculty/Instructor Expectations</u>	<u>FYEX Program Expectations</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - With the instructor, carefully plan meetings, activities and events. Always be on time. Be a mentor and guide. Share your experiences with the students (even if they are embarrassing). - Assist students with academic and transition issues by referring them to the Academic Support Center or the Counseling Center. - Create a network of support & connect them to campus resources. - Encourage communication with faculty and advisors. - Keep students informed about upcoming events and promote campus and community involvement. - Encourage group involvement outside the classroom and promote friendships. - Orient students to tools and skills critical to their college success. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do not assume the role of professionals (advisors, career counselors or mental health professionals). Refer students to them for guidance in areas such as choosing courses, clarifying requirements, assessing their fit for a major or careers, addressing serious personal issues, planning for the future, etc. Any questions or issues in these areas should be brought to the attention of the class instructor or FYEX Director. - Link students, faculty and advisors. - Constantly communicate with your instructor. - Model and coach active learning to promote deeper understanding of the material. - Model positive academic and social behavior. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Follow through with attendance and contact any students who miss class. - Be on time to your FYEX class. - Be positive and active during the FYEX class. - Immediately let your instructor know of any troubles out of the ordinary you are having with individuals in the class. - Document class activities. Take pictures if you have a digital camera and email pictures to FYEX Director. - Be knowledgeable about school policies. - Maintain a positive image inside and outside of class. - Respect individual differences and diversity. - Maintain a balance between your personal, social, academic and professional roles in the class.

Facilitate small group activities and discussions

FYEX courses have a maximum of 15-20 students. From a standpoint of group dynamics the optimal small group size for discussion is 3-6. This means that oftentimes you will

need to break the larger group into smaller groups for in-depth discussion. Some of the communication skills and techniques that are vital in personal, small group and large group interactions are establishing norms, listening actively, using “I messages,” varying small group formats and processes, and giving and receiving feedback.

Here are some skills and practices that you will need to be aware of and continuously improve on when leading small group discussions.

- Establish purpose and norms.
- Plan process and content in activities.
- Utilize diverse small group activities within a larger group.
- Acknowledge diversity and difference within the group.
- Develop and use clear prompts in discussions.
- Speak concisely and clearly.
- Ask for, acknowledge, accept, reflect on, and respond to constructive feedback.
- Provide supportive and constructive feedback.
- Celebrate individual and group accomplishments.
- Notice non-verbal cues.
- Listen actively.

Being resilient in the midst of “chaos” of individual and group development

Peer leading will likely, not inevitably, test your resilience and even confidence as a leader. Even if your intentions and commitment are sincere and your plans state of the art, students will buy into your role of Peer Educator at different rates and some may never buy in. If this happens (and it probably will) it is important that you maintain a sense of hope and be resilient. Be aware that individual development and group development take time. Be resilient and patient while not losing sight of your goals.

Consider Arthur Chickering’s Seven Vectors of Development (Evans, Nancy et al, 1998):

<p>Individuals and groups develop in different ways and at different rates. Each student’s readiness for the rigors of college will vary. Arthur Chickering has identified seven distinct maturational stages (he calls them “vectors of development”) through which young adults typically proceed in their college years. Remember that each student is unique and will be at different points on his/her developmental path.</p>	<p>1st Achieving competence (physical, intellectual, interpersonal). 2nd Managing emotions (dealing with anxiety, anger, conflict, etc.) 3rd Becoming autonomous (developing one’s own values, becoming less dependent, cooperating with others). 4th Establishing identity. 5th Freeing interpersonal relationships (developing tolerance and respect for others, engaging in healthy intimate relationships). 6th Clarifying purpose (developing a personal philosophy, clarifying career and personal goals). 7th Developing integrity (consistently acting on the basis of one’s principles).</p>
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This formulation reminds us that development is a two way street involving the student’s readiness AND the Peer Educator’s skills, commitment and resilience. Do not give up prematurely on students, do not blame yourself when gratification is not instant and maintain optimism and belief. Believe in and encourage others as well as yourself.

In addition, you need to be aware of the stages of group development. Typically, it involves 4 stages: Forming, storming, norming and performing (adapted from Bens 2000).

Forming stage: The purpose of the group needs to be established (and agreed upon): people need to get comfortable with each other and rules of “norms” (formal or informal) for expected behaviors need to be agreed on.

Storming stage: The group works through the “discrepancies between the initial hopes and the realities of working together” (Bens 2000). This is normal. All teams lose games sometimes. But great teams learn, adapt and improve as a consequence of experience and reflection. You need to self-assess your own facilitation and leadership skills and help the group assess itself so that modification leading to further development can happen.

Norming stage: The group has discussed and worked through issues and come up with new ways of interacting, planning and fulfilling purposes.

Performing stage: Leadership becomes much more shared; various members can facilitate; communication is honest and open and responsibilities and planning are democratically distributed.

One of your most important roles as Peer Educator will be to build and enhance group connections within your class. The first few weeks of the semester will be the most critical time for establishing these group connections. The strength of the connections built during these first few weeks will determine the success of your class. Listed below are some helpful tips and suggestions for establishing group connections:

- Don't identify yourself as an instructor or authoritative figure; instead emphasize your role as a peer who is there to share your experiences.
- With your instructor's permission, encourage everyone to share one event from their week at the beginning of every class.
- Establish a policy of openness among group members.
- Make yourself available to the members of your class.
- Care about the students in your class but do not interfere.
- Encourage students to interact outside of the class time.
- Find out what students want, need and expect from you.

Mentoring

The most vital aspect of what you do within the FYEX class will be the relationships you form with each student as well as the relationships students form with each other. The capacity to establish, sustain and grow relationships is both an art and a skill. Relationships will not always “just happen.” Consciousness of mentoring dynamics and techniques, as well as proactive commitment and effort, are crucial to your success as a mentor.

What is a mentor?

As stated by Tim Elmore in his DVD “Lifelines,” Mentoring is a relational experience where one person empowers another by sharing his or her resources.” A mentor “closes the gap between potential and performance.”

A definition of mentoring involves the following:

- Initiating and developing relationships.
- Sharing experiences, time and knowledge.
- Connecting others to resources and other mentors.
- Inspiring and guiding others to reach their higher potentials.

What do mentors do?

Committed and effective mentors consciously commit to the following:

They initiate and follow up on relationships. An effective mentor does not wait for students to come to her or him. Rather, In Elmore’s terms, she or he acts as a “good host” who initiates relationships by seeking out people, asking questions, listening and demonstrating interest, suggesting possibilities and follows up.

They ask questions. An effective mentor asks a lot of questions and actively listens. He or she may ask about highlights of a student’s day or week, strengths and weaknesses, hopes, fears, needs, goals, challenges, etc.

They listen. An effective mentor spends most of his or her time listening. She/he is aware of his/her own listening habits and listens “comprehensively, critically and empathetically.”

They model what a good student is and does. An effective mentor “walks the walk.” She or he holds him/herself accountable to the same standards she gives to mentees. As a “learning coach,” he/she exhibits that he/she sets and monitors goals, manages time, prepares for and attends class, participates in study groups, communicates with professors, etc. According to Elmore, “mentors don’t stop with words...they furnish a living example, modeling the principles they discuss”

They are a life and learning coach. An effective mentor consciously facilitates the academic, social and personal development of mentees. This is not to say that he/she needs to be or should be overbearing. However, there are times in a mentoring relationship where sensitively delivered honest feedback and assessment rather than being passive will help a mentee grow. A mentor may be a friend but is not “just a friend” (Elmore). As relationships and comfort levels expand, an effective mentor may push the envelope and raise deeper issues in order to help a mentee consider higher possibilities. A mentor is not a counselor. He/she knows when to refer to others who have appropriate professional training and credentials.

They reflect and assess. An effective mentor reflects introspectively on how he/she is doing.

They cultivate and demonstrate resilience. Mentees will not always do what we would like or what we think they should be doing. They may not attend a class, show a lack of commitment, act in disrespectful ways, etc. Don't take it personally. You can invest in people and try to encourage them but you cannot control their behavior and responses. Just let them know that you are available and you care.

They connect mentees to resources and to professional staff. An effective mentor is not everything for everybody. No one can be. He/she connects mentees to resources and people. They refer them to professionals on campus who can help them. This helps them build a powerful network of support.

They facilitate goal setting and monitor goal attainment. An effective mentor encourages and helps mentees to develop and monitor goals. A great mentor is not overbearing but does (especially as comfort levels develop) remind mentees of their goals and encourage mentees to hold themselves accountable for their goals. Essentially, an effective mentor helps a mentee stay focused.

They provide encouragement and confidence. An effective mentor reaffirms her/his belief in students' capabilities and possibilities even when things might not be going well for the students.

Communication

Communication is vital for a mentoring relationship to develop. Here are some good communication suggestions:

Seek students out: At the beginning of the Fall Semester 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 prompts 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 mentor you must address both. 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 and use your resources: No one expects you to know the answer to every problem you are presented with. However, we do expect you to use campus resources already in place and 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 the students in your class. You should 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 attitude.

Questions you should be asking

Talking to the students in your class 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 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?
- Are you reviewing the material in each class weekly?
- Are you scheduling "goof off" time?
- Do you know when the last day to Withdraw is?
- Are you starting your assignments early?
- Have you seen your Advisor?
- Have you gone to your professor's office hours?
- Are you going to the Academic Support Center for tutoring?
- Have you formed a study group?

Mentoring do's and don'ts

Do:

- Emphasize your role as mentor and a more experienced student.
- Be friendly with and respectful of all the students in your class.
- Remember that personal information shared is confidential.
- Show up on time to class and be prepared.
- Know when to ask for help.
- Make an effort to get and keep students involved in campus activities.
- Provide options for events on and around campus.
- Refer students to appropriate resources.
- Keep in mind you are a mentor not "just a friend."
- Make yourself available for students.

Don't:

- Present yourself as an instructor or teacher.
- Cross mentor/student boundaries.
- Let personal issues affect your role as a leader.
- Neglect your duties as a Mentor.
- Interfere in the personal lives of mentees.
- Take advantage of your position.
- Assume that all students are facing the same issues.
- Make light of student issues or pass judgment.
- Neglect your relationship with the Instructor of your class.
- Wait for the student to approach you if you think there may be something wrong.

Remember that as a mentor you are NOT:

- A surrogate parent.
- A professional counselor.
- A flawless or infallible idol.
- A social worker.
- A lending institution.
- A playmate or romantic partner.

WEB RESOURCES FOR PEER MENTORS

Mentoring Peer Resources

<http://www.mentors.ca/mentor.html>

The Mentoring Group

<http://www.mentoringgroup.com/home.html>

Formal mentor programs

<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/OR/ConsumerGuides/mentor.html>

National Mentoring Partnership

<http://www.mentoring.org>

Bibliography

Here is a list of resources that have been used for this guide. We have also included a few other recommended resources that can help you develop as a leader, mentor, learning coach and connector.

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