

DIXIE STATE UNIVERSITY FYE PEER MENTOR PROGRAM PROPOSAL

February 6, 2018

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is proposed that the peer mentor program be expanded to cover every section of FYE; this would require hiring a force of roughly 40 part-time student mentors.

Total Proposed Budgetary Needs: Approximately \$70,000

OVERVIEW

1. Background and Description

With an estimated 2400 new freshmen anticipated to be attending next fall, it can be assumed that if each class of the newly mandated FYE/Connections holds approximately 30 students, there will be 80 different sections. Regardless of whether an FYE section is taught as a seminar or 7 week course, peer mentors will be needed to assist with engaging students in the curriculum, co-curricular activities, and to serve as an early-alert system for those that fall behind academically and culturally (connected to Dixie Life).

2. Program Scope

The peer mentoring program will primarily serve two purposes during the school year. First, the mentors will be a bridge between recruitment and retention by communicating with these soon-to-be freshmen throughout the summer and engaging them within the first few weeks of school. Second, they will be an early alert system for the university by identifying students at risk of academic failure.

The mentoring program will, in reality, begin as soon as high school students begin committing to Dixie State University. This means that peer mentors will need to begin interacting with soon-to-be-freshmen as soon as June. During the summer months they will serve as the initial peer-contact for each student and strive to engage them in the areas of interest that they have. Therefore, each peer mentor will be assigned to one of four main themes of "active life" engagement (athletics, creativity, entertainment, and the outdoors) and interact with students who select them.

Additionally, the peer mentors will create, and participate in, activities designed to engage each freshmen active-life theme. These tailored activities will serve as a way of connecting likeminded students to the peer mentor as well as one another. These events will also tie the student to campus and give a sense of belonging.

The peer mentor program will be expanded from only serving SSC 1020 sections to mentoring all FYE sections next fall. Peer mentors will attend the seminar and/or 14 week course and will attend any event tied to the class. Apart from attending the class, they will meet individually with each student in the class four times throughout the semester (essentially every other week). During these interactions, peer mentors will assess each student's personal, social, and academic needs. They will document every interaction, including, but not limited to, what concerns the student had, resources provided, goals set, and progress made.

The peer mentor program will serve as an additional early-alert initiative, providing students with the correct services they need to continue being successful throughout the semester. It is important to note that the peer mentors are not

meant to be the ones who intervene in every problem a student may have. Rather, they are meant to handle minor issues and connect the student with the appropriate resource on campus. For example, significant personal issues will be referred to the Health and Counseling Center rather than have a student attempt to handle it.

Peer mentors will be required to be part of a two-credit leadership course that focuses on the skills needed to properly mentor freshmen students, as well as be a leader on campus. It will also serve as a way for mentors to share successful strategies in improving the retention of our freshmen class.

The program will be limited to the first semester with peer mentors being scaled back significantly in the spring. There may be other limitations of peer mentors depending on those students and programs who are excluded from the FYE program or who may require special accommodations that our peer mentors cannot service. Some sections of this FYE course (such as those in athletics) may need more than one peer mentor in their course depending on how many seats are open to them.

3. Operational Requirements

The expanded program must include the following:

- Hire and train peer mentor force of 40 students
- Increased funding to compensate time and efforts of expanded program

4. Deliverables

Increased retention rates due to:

- Faster response time to student concerns/conflict
- Ability to intervene in student schedules earlier in the semester (too many high failure rate courses)
- Immediate peer connection point for each student that is approachable and trained to assist and refer each student to the appropriate resource

Expanding this program will also lend very valuable data analytics into the progress and concerns of our freshmen class. The program will include an initial intake form, mid-term progress survey, and end of term evaluation of each student. Beyond that, we will also have debrief forms measuring the results of every interaction from the peer coach's perspective of the student. When combined together, we will have an incredibly detailed report of our students that will help the institution make informed decisions in the future about ways to better serve our freshmen.

5. Budget Request

Part-time Peer Mentor (Need 40 mentors)

Hourly Wage: \$9/hr.

Weekly Hour Limit: 10 hr. / week

Semester Cost per Mentor: \$1500

Total Peer Mentor Cost: \$60,000

The bulk of the funding needs to be put into getting the very best students Dixie has to offer. These students need to be able to relate to freshmen and be intrusive enough to discover potential problems a student may not voice right away. Therefore, the compensation needs to be significant enough to attract the right types of students.

Operating Budget:

\$9,000

There will need to be several training sessions that prepare peer mentors on how to interact with their students. They may need specialty training such as QPR (suicide prevention) and access to the common reading book, as well as other readings that may be required as part of the program. Plus, they will need funding to cover the active life activities they create for the first few weeks of school. Due to these training needs, there will need to be a robust operating budget to help in paying for it all.

6. Implementation Plan

Once the curriculum/structure for the FYE course is finalized, the peer mentor training procedures need to be created. The two-credit course each mentor takes needs to be included in the Student Leadership Program that is currently being created by Dr. Gitau.

Peer mentors need to be hired by mid-term of spring semester and initial training completed by the end of term. Ideally, mentors will be assigned to freshmen through the summer and begin communication before the fall semester even begins.

Faculty will need to be updated on the specific roles a peer mentor will play in their classes and be on the same page before the seminar sessions begin.

All data gathering forms should be created by February and include Institutional Research in their development. The intake form must be ready to go before the bulk of students start committing to DSU and registering for classes.

7. High-Level Timeline/Schedule

February:

- Data Gathering forms created
- Create Job Description for part-time student peer mentor positions
- Create training procedures for peer mentors

March:

- Post student peer mentor positions and interview/hire team by end of the month
- Begin peer coach communication plan to incoming freshmen students 2018

April:

- Peer mentors go through intensive training and create personal videos to send out to incoming students
- Begin personalized communication plan of peer mentors to assigned FYE cohorts as they begin registering

May:

- Schedule summer training sessions with peer mentors
- Assign summer reading to peer mentors and continue communication with incoming freshmen

June:

- Schedule and assign peer mentors to specific courses of FYE as they fill
- Send intake form to incoming freshmen class
- Interact with new freshmen at all orientations
- Begin peer mentor communication

July:

- Finalize assignments and goals for peer mentor program
- Continue communication with incoming freshmen with expectations of FYE course and relevant dates

August:

- Final training session with peer mentors. May be some form of retreat the week before the FYE Seminar
- Attend Seminar and begin mentoring program
- Peer mentors meet each student in their 60-student cohort and begin one on one interactions checking for indicators of potential failure with freshmen
- Begin active life events

September:

- Initial grade check and course corrections as needed
- Peer Mentors attend 14 week course as needed

October:

- Mid-semester evaluation of peer mentors by Assistant Director
- Mid-semester evaluation of freshmen cohort by peer mentors
- Mid-semester self-evaluation of freshmen

November:

- Begin push for spring registration
- Discover those who plan to transfer or drop out and refer to advisement for intervention

December

- Identify students who still haven't registered
- Ensure freshmen sprint to the finish
- Evaluate effectiveness of peer mentor efforts
- End-of-term self-evaluation by peer mentors
- End-of-term self-evaluation by freshmen
- End-of-term self-evaluation of freshmen cohort by peer mentors