Graduate school is designed to challenge and expose students to multiple perspectives. Grad school represents a paradigm shift for many new students acclimating to new programs, departments, and communities. Achieving work-life balance, developing and maintaining relationships are stressors that can become barriers to academic success.

Fortunately, these challenges can be navigated through mentoring relationships. In broad national studies, mentoring has been identified as one of the most effective ways of bolstering graduate student success and persistence.

What is peer mentoring?

In peer mentoring, a more experienced student provides guidance and support to a new or less experienced student. While the type of support provided is determined by the mentor and mentee depending on the mentee’s needs (and many mentors fill multiple roles!), the general role of the mentor is as a resource.

Peer mentors may be more advanced students within an academic discipline or more experienced in a subject area; peer mentoring is a process-based system in which a mentor passes on knowledge, best practices, or advice. Peer mentoring models lend themselves well to supporting any or all of the following mentoring objectives:

- Training and orienting
- Role modeling
- Emotional support
- Community-building

What are the advantages of peer mentoring?

Peer mentoring increases institutional connection, academic performance, and development of interpersonal competencies for all students, but particularly for those from underrepresented populations.

For mentoring to be effective, it is important that it cultivates a strong mentor/mentee relationship, facilitates institutional connection, and allows students to connect meaningfully.

Peer mentoring has been identified as one of the most successful measures of increasing graduate student success and persistence. Among other things, peer mentoring effects:

- Confidence-building
- Skill-building
- Affinity-building
Tips for establishing peer mentor matches

The success of peer mentoring depends on the strength of the mentor-mentee relationship. Personalized matches taking account of both mentor/mentee interests, aptitudes, desired outcomes and personalities are important.

- When possible, mentees should be allowed to ‘interview’ 3 – 4 potential mentors. It is important for both mentor and mentee to have identify whether a potential mentoring relationship is a good fit.
- Mentor/mentee social functions can be a fun, social way to allow potential mentors and mentees to meet and chat with potential matches.
- Mentorship relationships in which mentor/mentee choice is taken into account have higher success rates than those matched based on matrix- or profile-based matching.

References


