Western New England University Peer Mentoring Program: Creating a Community for Learning

Bonni Alpert, Assistant Dean, Student Disability Services
History

Prior to 2007:

- Had a handful of students with spectrum diagnoses
- Offered Academic support
- More was needed
College challenges:

- Retention
- Social isolation
- Stress
- Depression
- Academic difficulties
- Employment challenges
How to serve these students?

2007: Our Mission

- Academic Accommodations
- Peer Mentoring
- Campus Education
Spring 2007 Pilot Program

- Hybrid internship/ independent study
  - Coordinated effort between SDS and Psychology Dept.
  - 3 mentors, 2 mentees, 2 supervisors
  - A one semester commitment
Objectives of the Program

- To provide social support and friendship in “real-life” contexts

- To provide a direct, hands-on approach

- To provide brief, but regular contacts with peer mentors in order to reduce stress, develop interpersonal and problem solving skills and promote a sense of accountability

- To raise the awareness of the college community
Outcome

- Clinical notes and assessments indicated modest social skills improvement in the mentees
- Positive feedback from mentors
- Newsletter distributed to WNE community with great feedback
One Semester Was Not Enough......
Our Current Model

- Coordinated effort with Applied Behavioral Analysis Doctoral Program
- Commitment of two academic semesters for mentors and mentees
- Mentors receive internship credit and valuable experience
- Mentees form peer connections and work on targeted skills
Expectations for Mentors

- Weekly Supervision
- Clinical Logs
- Reading/Annotated Bibliographies
- Clinical Assessments and Reports
- Culminating Project to Educate Campus Community/Protocols
- Meeting with mentor/mentee/grad fellow
Clinical Log

**Description of Contact** (be objective, be respectful and careful in your choice of words):

- Overview of interaction (location and time of meeting, topic(s) covered):
- Description of mentee behavior (include specific verbal and non-verbal behaviors (i.e., specific language used, punctuality, facial expressions, eye contact, body posture, tone/quality of voice, etc.).

**Comments**

- General thoughts/impressions:
- Specific interpretations and thoughts regarding mentee behavior(s):
- What worked well with respect to engaging your mentee, motivating him/her to work on specific goals and developing a realistic plan of action (be specific)?
- What could you have done differently?
Clinical Log

Goals (please include any specific goals for the following meeting):

- What goals have been identified by you and your mentee (include data from assessments and previous meetings)?
- Which goal(s) seems most pertinent for the upcoming meeting? Explain:

Follow Up (include your plans for subsequent meetings with mentee):

- Where and when will your next meeting take place:
- What topic(s)/issue(s)/goal(s) do you plan to address:
- Describe, in as much detail as possible, your plan for addressing the topic(s)/issue(s)/goal(s) above:
ABA and the Peer Mentoring program

- 1) preparing mentors and mentees to identify and describe measurable, objective goals related to academic and social success,

- 2) developing individualized assessment and skill-building programs to implement with mentees (examples include initiating conversations, decreasing interruptions during conversation, and professional interviewing skills).
Protocols

Protocol for Question Asking

- **Components:** Instructions, Modeling, Rehearsal, Feedback
- **Example:** Target = Question Asking
- **Instructions:** “I have a list of topics we are going to discuss today. I want you to ask me questions about my topics throughout our conversation. If you do not ask me questions at appropriate times, I will pause our conversation and provide an example of a question you might ask. You will then practice asking me the question. I will tell you how you are doing throughout the conversation and after the conversation.”
- **Modeling:** Statement- “I went to lunch with my roommate on Friday and we both had Pho.”
  - Possibly Questions: “What is Pho? Oh, do you know of a good Vietnamese restaurant in town?”
- **Rehearsal:** You try it
- **Feedback:** That’s a really great question. Pho is… OR I’m so glad you asked! There’s a great Vietnamese restaurant down Dickinson Street. It’s called ‘Vinh Chau.’”
This Program is Unique

- Informal Peer support/Scientific approach

- Structured practice ➔ Generalized skills