

PEER ADVISING

Welcome to the SDSMT Peer Advising Program: A Forward by Dr. Pat Beu, Director of Retention and Testing

At the School of Mines, it is an honor and a privilege to serve as a Peer Advisor. Peer advisors are among the very best and brightest students on campus and are deemed to be important cogs in the process of ensuring that first time students are adjusting well to the campus. Peer advisors are sought by faculty and departments because they work hard keeping a pulse on the first-year student experience. Not only do they pave the way for first-year students to be successful but they become friends and confidants to those students at greatest risk of leaving the school prematurely. For these and other reasons, a \$500 stipend is provided by the school to emphasize the value and importance that these upper-level students provide. The School of Mines is grateful for the dedication and efforts expended by peer advisors. Because of this important group of students many first-year students choose to stay in school and complete their degree. To this group the school extends sincere thanks.

The School of Mines Peer Advisor Program

The Peer Advisor Program brings together upper-level students selected from various academic departments to assist with advising and registration of freshmen. The program goal is to ease the adjustment to college life for new students by allowing them to take advantage of the knowledge and experience of the upper-level students. In doing so, we hope to alleviate certain complications that the



incoming freshmen may encounter. Freshmen students who have a positive experience during their first year are more likely to return. Therefore, the ultimate objective of the Peer Advising program is student retention.

Requirements

Peer Advisors must:

- Hold a 3.0 minimum GPA
- Have at least a sophomore standing (32 credit hours completed)
- Be enrolled as a student on the SDSM&T campus
- NOT be on Academic or Social Probation

Human Resources Release and Waiver Form

For student workers who wish to have their SD School of Mines and Technology supervisor (past or present) give a reference, Human Resources (HR) requires that the student complete a Release and Waiver: Written request for Reference. Once completed, forward it to Human Resources with a notation at the top of the form indicating which supervisors you wish HR to contact authorizing them to release information. These forms are available from Human Resources or on the HR website <http://sdmines.sdsmy.edu/hr/forms> (reference and Waiver). If you have questions, please feel free to contact Human Resources (605) 394-1203.

Payment

Peer Advisor compensation is \$500 per semester, and is distributed in monthly payments.

Payments are delivered by direct deposit to the employee's bank account. Peer Advisors will need to fill out the appropriate direct deposit forms at the Human Resources Office located in the basement level of the O'Harra Building. Peer Advisors will need to provide a voided check or savings deposit slip when they hand in this information.

Since Peer Advising is a paid position, it is required that the appropriate paperwork is completed and delivered to the Human Resources Office.

Peer Advisor Expectations

General

Peer Advisors are considered an employees and representatives of the School of Mines. As such they will be expected to act as professionals. Peer Advisors are expected to conduct themselves in a mature, responsible and competent manner at all times. Whether they are on-campus or off-campus, they are observed as representing the institution. Peer Advisors are to set an example for freshmen students for what is considered acceptable academic and social behavior. Values that reflect students who make excellent Peer Advisors include:

1. **Prepared** - peer advisors are prepared to be a friend to a new student and demonstrate consistent, dependable, trustworthy, accepting, honest and respectful behaviors.
2. **Integrity** - peer advisors consistently act in ways that are ethical, earning the respect and trust of their assigned students and supporting community.
3. **Committed** - peer advisors are steadfast in their commitment to the policies and procedures of the school and their position.
4. **Knowledge Builder** - peer advisors actively seek out shared opportunities that enhance the knowledge, skills, and abilities of their students.
5. **Inclusive Attitude** - peer advisors value the diverse racial, economic, cultural, and religious traits of their students and communicate an acceptance of student in spite of differences.
6. **Maintain Confidentiality** - peer advisors act in the best interest of the school and ensure confidentiality, taking care to protect against unintentional disclosure.
7. **Accountability** - peer advisors make regular contact with the director of the Director of Retention and Testing to ensure effective mentoring practices.
8. **Appropriate Behaviors** - peer advisors refrain from profanity, criticism of school faculty or staff, inappropriate physical contact, violations of law or school codes of conduct.

Peer advisors do not take the place of faculty advisors (mentors). Instead they are there to facilitate and aid the Mentors. The mentors will have all the necessary information regarding academic policy and degree requirements. However the mentors may not have current experience in these matters or the necessary availability to insure that these students receive the information. It is their experience on campus that makes peer advisors so valuable to the program.

A peer advisor wears many hats in their attempting to meet the needs of first-time students. This is what it means to be a Peer Advisor:

- Attend and assist with GES 115M Mentoring class presentations, panel discussions and activities
- Attend all classes
- Let the instructor know if you will not be
- Assist with taking attendance
- Befriend students
- Interview each student in class
- Pass on concerns/observations to the instructor
- Contribute during Instructor's lecture
- Accept assignments to participate
- Consult with the instructor before class to determine how you can help
- Support socializing activities with first-year students
- Plan one socializing activity with class in month of September
- Assist with organizing departmental social and academic activities
- Contact the Department Chair and ask if you can help organize an activity
- Provide "Peer Advisor on Duty" hours

- Dedicate one hour a week in the TLC to meet with students to help them
- Assist departments with contacting assigned first and second year students
- Work with your department chair in determining with what activities peer advisors can help
- Provide WebAdvisor assistance and advising for assigned students
- Provide regular email, phone and mail contact with assigned students
- Attend, assist and present at training seminars and all-campus meetings (on-campus and off campus opportunities)
- Assist with registration and COMPASS days (spring semester)
- Assist with web page construction
- Assist with the study skills course presentations, panel discussions, and activities
- Assist assigned departments with contacting students with deficiency grades (DEF)
- Assist with organizing year-end socials

Peer Advisors are asked to assist faculty and departments in a variety of ways during the course of the academic year, including the following:

- Provide students with course scheduling advice and help plan a tentative schedule for academic review by the student's mentor.
- Aid students in understanding the role of faculty advisors (mentors)
- Explain and help students with registration procedures (WebAdvisor)
- Refer students to appropriate university services for additional help and information.
- Assist with the new student Orientation Programs
- Assist with COMPASS days (placement exams and registration)
- Host small group discussions with students on academic issues.
- Assist with phonathons to contact prospective and returning students
- Attend relevant on and off campus seminars and conferences that focus on the first-year experiences of students
- Host informal group activities with the students
- Maintain consistent contact with students via phone, email and personal contact informing them of important dates and opportunities
- If possible, schedule office hours so that students can meet outside of class

Fall Semester Assignments

The School of Mines gains approximately 300+ incoming (freshmen) students every new academic year. Students are divided into groups of 20 to 40 students depending upon assigned advisors, mentors or majors. Preferably each group is paired with a mentor from that specific major department but staffing issues may make this difficult. Each mentor is assigned at least one peer advisor to aid them during the course of the semester.

Peer advisors are chosen from upper-class students who have been on campus at least one year and have demonstrated successful experience in the School of Mines system. Applicants are chosen based on academic conduct, referrals and interviews.

During the course of the first semester, incoming freshman students are assigned to a college specific mentoring class. Currently the class is held as an 8-week course in which peer advisors may participate by:

- Discussions in lecture/group format on topics from:
 - Academic and Social Composure/Maturity
 - Academic Responsibilities (General Education Courses)
 - Tutorials on WebAdvisor and WebCT or D2L
 - Managing Finances
 - Health and Health Care Issues
 - Support Services (Campus Counselor, TLC, etc...)
 - Career Center and Career Fairs
 - Scholarship opportunities
 - Campus Groups
- Assisting with participation in social events, such as
 - Attending on-campus activities and events
 - Going out for ice cream or burgers
 - Organizing a pizza party
 - Hosting a BBQ and tailgate party
 - Going bowling
 - Watching videos or going to the movies
 - Organizing Birthday parties
 - Forming Intramural teams
- Maintain consistent contact with assigned students, informing them of important dates and opportunities.



Spring Semester

The School of Mines gains additional incoming freshmen students during the spring semester. These students are also placed into a mentoring class. However, the number of incoming students is usually small enough that only one or two classes are needed. Accordingly not all peer advisors from



the fall semester will be needed to facilitate these classes.

Again, peer advisors are to maintain contact with the students from the fall semester mentoring classes.

A list of additional job opportunities will be provided at the beginning of the spring semester. Due to scheduling conflicts that may arise during the spring semester, peer advisors will not be required to do all of the jobs on the list; however an honest effort is expected.

Summer

There will be numerous opportunities throughout the course of the summer for peer advisors to help and a schedule of events/activities will be provided to peer advisors at the end of the spring semester. Among those scheduled will be summer Orientation/COMPASS days. Peer advisors who are in Rapid City and available to help may be asked to assist during these events.

Working with the students

Every student is different, and therefore requires a unique approach. As such, peer advisors will require a certain amount of information about the student and their situation before they can attempt to help them. The following Communication “Keys to Success” are referenced in the *Iowa State Peer Mentor Handbook* <http://www.lc.iastate.edu/pmhandbook.pdf>

Communication Keys to Success:

- 1. Listen***
- 2. Ask open-ended questions***
- 3. Attend and respond to both content and feeling***
- 4. Let the student solve the problem***
- 5. Refer to/use your resources***

Communication Suggestions:

Ask open-ended questions: Any question that elicits a “yes/no” answer won’t be as helpful as a “what, when, how, who” question. “Why” questions seem like they would get more information, but keep in mind that they can sometimes imply criticism and cause defensiveness (i.e., “Well, why didn’t you go to all the study sessions?”).

Attend and respond to both content and feeling: Often there are two things going on at once – the issue itself, and the individual that has some kind of feeling or reaction to that issue. The Peer Advisor needs to attend and respond to both. Consider this: “I’m so mad about my Chem test!” What is the content (performance on the Chem test)? What is the

feeling (anger)? It's important to attend to both. Remember that issues presented could have some underlying themes and might even be symptoms of a larger problem.

Let the student solve the problem: It's easy to want to try to solve things for people, but that's not really as helpful as it might seem. Usually, the student knows the answer or knows how to solve the problem but just needs someone to ask the right questions and encourage their processing. Help students discover for themselves the right solutions to their problems.

Refer to/use your resources: Peer advisors are not trained counselors so they should not expect themselves to be. A knowledge of resources (i.e. department personnel, campus counselors, ADA coordinator, Dean of Students and Residence Life staff, etc.) will be very helpful to new students. It's okay to say, "I don't know" as long as an attempt is made to get the information for the person.

Self-disclosure: Use it as long as it's helpful to the person and not just a story. "I was in a similar situation and I did this which helped," vs. "I was in that situation, too, and it sucked and no one helped me and blah, blah, blah." How helpful was that? Not at all!

Communication Skills Include:

- ***Listening*** – Fully participate in a conversation by being an active listener and utilizing simple counseling skills such as reflecting, encouraging and asking questions. Be aware of how body language can affect a conversation.
- ***Observing*** – Be aware of how the student is presenting the message or ideas through body language and unspoken words.
- ***Communicating*** – Be very clear in the presentation of facts and opinions.
- ***Empathizing*** – Try to understand what the student is saying, not by what is heard, but in how he/she is approaching and thinking about the subject. Communicate with the student in ways they will understand.

Personal Skills Include:

- ***Availability*** – Even if a student does not need to seek out their peer advisor, they see their peer advisor as being a sage mentor when peer advisors are present and available to them.
- ***Seeking*** – Seek students out, especially at the beginning of the year. Students are less likely to seek a peer advisor out initially, so waiting for *them* to come to *you* is usually wasted time.
- ***Being an example*** – Students observe peer advisors, especially if they are first-year students who are new to the campus environment. The peer advisors' role is

one of responsibility, so make good decisions in what is said and how to act when interacting with them. Remember that peer advisors are role models.

Adjustment Issues

Every student will face some challenges adjusting to life on campus. While each student will transition differently, it is important to be aware of the possible issues that may arise.



The following are in reference to the *Iowa State Peer Mentor Handbook* <http://www.lc.iastate.edu/pmhandbook.pdf>

Personal challenges:

- Moving to a new environment
- Leaving family
- Living with a roommate
- Meeting new people
- Making personal decisions everyday
- Facing new peer pressures (sex, drugs, alcohol, etc.)
- Conforming to behaviors that conflict with personal beliefs

Intellectual/Academic challenges:

- Speaking up in class
- Communicating with professors
- Managing course demands and schedules
- Developing semester course schedules
- Seeking academic assistance when problems arise
- Balancing academics and social life

Physical challenges:

- Coping with weight gain/loss
- Competing athletically
- Forming positive health habits and breaking problem habits
- Becoming self-reliant in managing health/stress
- Finding lifetime hobbies and activities
- Sleep problems

Interpersonal challenges:

- Connecting with a new friendship group
- Starting and managing romantic relationships
- Learning how to show emotions in appropriate ways
- Managing conflict situations
- Recognizing/deciding to act on sexual orientation

Career/Lifestyle challenges:

- Choosing an academic major
- Changing a major
- Deciding on participation in internships and other work experiences
- Deciding to leave school/change schools
- Making decisions related to future issues (marriage, income needs, etc.)

Peer Advisor Recruitment

Peer advisors should know what is expected of them in their positions and we ask that they “keep an eye out” for prospective students to become new peer advisors. If potential peer advisors would make a good addition to the team, we would like to meet them. Please inform them of the program and refer them to the office of Academic and Enrollment Services for an application form and an interview. The referring Peer Advisor may be asked about referrals or sit in on an interview.

Moral, Ethical and Legal Obligations

As a representative of The School of Mines, peer advisors will be held to the same moral, ethical and legal obligations of other School of Mines employees.

- Peer advisors may advise the students on their academic decisions. They should be able to deal objectively and impartially with the students. They do not make any recommendations that will result in immoral, unethical or illegal actions by peer advisors or the students. It is best to state from the beginning of a relationship that not only do the peer advisors represent this university but that they have a responsibility first to the school and then to the student.
- Peer advisors recognize the limits of their training, expertise and competence and refer students in need of further expertise to those who have the appropriate qualifications. Please do not make any guesses or assumptions.
- Peer advisors recognize the limits of their competence and perform only those functions for which they are qualified.
- Peer advisors may not use their position to improperly influence or recruit students to student organizations, fraternities, sororities, or to switch majors. It is

proper to encourage students to get involved with campus activities and organizations.

- Peer advisors are not counselors so counseling students on personal or emotional issues or make any recommendations relating to these issues are discouraged. They are to refer the student to the campus counselor or another professional.
- Maintain Confidentiality. Respect the privacy of the student, especially with other students. Some students may approach a peer advisors with sensitive information about their academic progress, personal life or adjustment on campus. This is to be considered *privileged information* and is not to be shared openly. Assure the students of this confidentiality.
 - If a peer advisor feels it is necessary, they may share this information with
 - The Director of Retention and Testing
 - Other peer advisors who only have a need to know
 - The student's mentor
 - Campus staff that should be informed in the event that the student may be of harm to him/herself or others (counselor, Dean of Students, etc.)
 - Peer advisors cannot share personal information with
 - A student's parents
 - Either a peer advisor's or student's significant others
 - A peer advisor's friends or the student's friends
 - A peer advisor's roommates or the roommates of the student
- Maintain a professional distance. As peer advisors you are encouraged to interact with the students. Forming friendships is appropriate but peer advisors may not date their assigned students.
- Treat students equitably and do not play favorites or create special privileges. This does not mean to treat every student the same. Differences in individual students may require that a peer advisor spend more or less time with specific students.
- Tell the student the truth about college policies and procedures, but be careful not to defame the reputation of campus faculty, administrators, and staff. A poor personal experience with a particular professor or class is not every student's experience. Do not allow personal feelings to influence the crucial advice that may help a student become successful. Truth and slander are two different things. Be careful and judicious of what is said about a professor or class.

Slander or defamation is the communication of a statement that makes a false claim, expressly stated or implied to be factual, that may harm the reputation of an individual, business, product, group, government or nation. Most jurisdictions allow legal actions, civil and/or criminal, to deter various kinds of defamation and retaliate against criticism.

- It is expected that peer advisors support the educational philosophy and policies of The School of Mines. Most are very supportive of the school that they have become successful at. However, there are always policies, programs or personnel that are a challenge for some students and peer advisors may have to quietly keep some opinions to themselves. It is expected that peer advisors not “bad-mouth” a given professor, even when they feel justified. Demeaning school programs and procedures may not help new freshmen students. Even though peer advisors have their own ideas and philosophy about educational technique, arguments against such policies and personnel should be made in other forums and not with new students.
- Respect the privacy of the student. Some students may approach a peer advisor with sensitive information about their academic progress or adjustment on campus. This is to be considered privileged information and is not to be shared openly. Assure the students of this confidentiality. Discretion is important. If concerns exist about a particular student, it may be appropriate to discuss the matter with another peer advisor, mentor or the Director of Retention and Testing. It may be best to refer students to these individuals.
- **Do not participate in or tolerate any form of sexual harassment.**

Sexual harassment is harassment or unwelcome attention of a sexual nature. It includes a range of behavior from mild transgressions and annoyances to serious abuses, which can even involve forced sexual activity. (Dziech et al 1990, Boland 2002) Sexual harassment is considered a form of illegal discrimination in many countries, and is a form of abuse (sexual and psychological) and bullying.