

Pack Peers Make a Mentoring Difference

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Introduction and Need for Idea

- Transitioning to college can be an intimidating experience for many first year and community college students.
- Many students entering the Agricultural and Extension Education program come from towns with populations that are a fraction of the size of the student population at NC State.
- To combat feelings of isolation and aid students in their transition to NC State, Pack Peers – Peer Mentor Program was started in 2018.
- All incoming first year students are paired with an upperclassman to help with the often difficult, first few weeks on campus.

How It Works

- An undergraduate student assistant was responsible for development, implementation, and coordination of the Pack Peers Program.
- Over the summer, a list of incoming students was obtained by the program coordinator.
- To recruit upperclassmen to serve as peer mentors, an email was sent to all current students explaining the program and asking for participation as well as a Google Form for interested students to fill out with general information about themselves and their interests.
- A similar Google Form was also sent to incoming students to introduce the program, collect background information, and gather data regarding concerns about starting at NC State.
- Responses were used to pair students based on at least one common interest or concern.
- Incoming students who did not complete a survey were still paired with a Pack Peer.
- Upperclassmen serving as Pack Peer mentors received notification with the name, contact information, and reason for pairing of their Pack Peer mentee.
- A sample email was provided to personally invite their mentees to attend the departmental welcome back event and first departmental club meeting of the year.

"Coming to NC State as a transfer student, I really would have enjoyed the opportunity to participate in a program like Pack Peers. Pack Peers allows students to connect with those that they will see over the rest of their college career, as well as giving them a sense of belonging and support during the nerves that arise when starting at this university. I have loved serving as a mentor in this program, as I have gained lifelong friends with my Pack Peers."

-Ally, Pack Peer Mentor



"Pack Peers was a great thing for me because coming from a small town the idea of transitioning to such a large university scared me. Thankfully I had Ally to rely on and show me the ropes during the first few weeks to ease that transition."

-Malachi, Pack Peer Mentee

Costs and Resources Needed

- Access to incoming students' contact information is imperative to the success of the program.
- The use of Google Suite or utilization of Google Forms is also helpful for creating surveys.
- An estimated 15 hours was spent creating and matching mentors and mentees.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

- Pair each entering student with a mentor, even if they do not indicate initial interest, as many incoming students are not in the habit of checking their email daily and may miss the initial recruitment email.
- Some peer mentors might need reassurance if their mentee is unresponsive or does not want to participate.
- During the implementation year, monthly events were planned for Pack Peers.

Results to Date/Implications

- The Program was introduced in Fall 2018 and continued in Fall 2019.
- 120 students entering the Agricultural and Extension Education Program at NC State have had the opportunity to participate.
- Approximately 45 upperclassmen volunteered to serve as mentors, with about 15 mentors who served for two years in a row.
- An estimated 60-70% of new students have utilized their Pack Peer.
- Approximately 20% of former freshmen/transfer students who initially participated as mentees, returned to serve as a mentor.

References:

- Robinson, D. (2018). *Perceptions of first-year college students: The impact of peer mentors on student success* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Southern Connecticut State University, New Haven, CT.
- Woelk, C., & Weeks, P. P. (2010). The student success leader program: College-level service enhances learning outside the classroom. *NACTA Journal*, 54(2), 18-20..