Vision 2020 Application for AY 2

FELLESKAP: Supporting International Student Adjustment and Academic Success through a Program of Mentoring and Fellowship

Team:
- Constance Peterson-Miller, Director, Offices of Admissions and International Student Services, copmille@iusb.edu
- Marina Okopnaia, Assistant Director, Offices of Admissions and International Student Services, mokopnai@iusb.edu
- Christine Bettcher, Student Counseling Center, cbettche@iusb.edu
- 6 students chosen from the full-time international undergraduate and graduate student body, balanced in as much as possible for gender and cultural background.

Dr. Shawn Nichols Boyle, Senior Lecturer, English.

Abstract:
International students develop the confidence and skills necessary for successful adjustment when they associate with those who share common interests, backgrounds, and problems. While pre-arrival correspondence and orientation sessions are critical in preparing international students to enter into our learning community, these support services are offered at a time when students are beset by the demands of new physical, linguistic, pedagogical and social environments. Regular infusions of critical information and follow-up orientation sessions facilitated by OISS staff members provide ongoing support, but as many who work with international students have learned, they often seek information from their peers, and indeed, professionals rely upon these peer networks to both gauge and respond to student needs throughout adjustment.

This structured peer mentoring program seeks to:
1) Help mentees identify the challenges that inhibit adjustment.
2) Train mentors to assist mentees in responding effectively to these challenges.
3) Strengthen the bonds of community through collaborative learning, problem-solving, and support.
4) Develop resources that support international student integration and lay the foundation for academic success.

Narrative:
We made significant process during the first year of the program following our initial timeline for AY1.

We spent July and August researching best practices, determining selection criteria for effective peer mentors, creating assessment instruments and materials, designing training materials for peer mentors, and setting a calendar of activities and bi-weekly group meetings. We have created a peer mentor handbook and peer mentor program implementation guide. We now have a polished version of the Peer Mentor Handbook that contains supporting materials and activities that are suited for discussion between students and their peers; however, it must be updated from time to time as peer mentors continue to provide their feedback and suggestions.

In August 2016, we promoted the peer mentor program during the International Student Orientation. We selected three peer mentors out of five applicants and trained them to become effective peer mentors. In October, we connected with Christine Bettcher from the Student Counseling Center, who expressed interest in the program. Her expertise in mental health and international student adjustment,
together with her personal experience of different cultures, made her a perfect member of our team. Partnering with the Student Counseling Center can also help fight the stigma among international students with respect to seeking support for mental health issues, which in turn, can improve their adjustment experience.

Assessment

Besides continuously receiving feedback from international students through personal communication, we have created several evaluation forms:
For Peer Mentors:
- “What I want to accomplish this semester”
- Peer Mentor Mid-Term Evaluation
- End of the AY Peer Mentor Reflection
For Peer Mentees:
- Mid-Term Peer Mentor Assessment
- Peer-Mentor Post Evaluation
- “I’m Thankful for (peer mentor) because…”
- Peer Mentor Weekly Meeting Report

During the peer mentor training, peer mentors shared that they wanted to learn more about other cultures, to be able to share their own experiences in the United States and IU South Bend, and to experience “the joy of serving.” Additionally, peer mentors wanted their peer mentees to gain new friendships and start thinking positively.

Goal 1. Help mentees identify the challenges that inhibit adjustment.
The program has been introduced as a pilot program with a limited number of participant slots. Initially, only two mentees were selected. However, more international students expressed interest in attending peer mentor program group activities and meetings during the months of November 2016-January 2017. Challenges that mentees and other international students identified through discussions included: social integration and getting involved on campus, academic difficulties, adjusting to new culture and lifestyle, and feeling homesick.

Goal 2. Train mentors to assist mentees in responding effectively to challenges.
The Peer Mentor Mid-Term Evaluations revealed that peer mentor training helped mentors learn new skills on how to manage stress and help mentees get involved on campus. Peer mentors also expressed the desire for additional group meetings and to make the Peer Mentor program mandatory for all incoming international students. We are pleased that the evaluations of our programs and training suggest that participants find them valuable.

Goal 3. Strengthen the bonds of community through collaborative learning, problem-solving, and support.
We have developed a calendar of activities for AY1 that promote collaboration, problem solving, and service-learning. Our group activities became an open forum where international students can freely share their thoughts about current events, community engagement, personal anecdotes and tips relating to their studies, and voice any concerns, academic or otherwise. Workshops on student success intended to support international student adjustment in the U.S. classroom culture. Moreover, peer mentors constantly
demonstrate their enthusiasm and desire to be more engaged in the program. They have decided to start their own Facebook group for participants of the program, where they are able to connect and support each other online.

**Previous group meetings AY 2016-17:**
October 20 – Peer Mentor Training
November 3 – Student Success: Overcoming Procrastination and Test-taking Strategies
December 8 – Happy Holidays: Customs and Traditions from Around the World
January 12 – Time management, planning for the semester
January 26 – Discussion on how to attract more students, feeling welcome in the United States

**Proposed group meetings AY 2016-17:**
February 9 – Valentine’s Day Discussion “Love is Love”
February 23 – African-American Heritage Month (collaboration with Civil Rights Heritage Center)
March 9 – International Women’s Day
March 23 – Field trip
April 1 – International Food Festival
April 20 – Volunteer event in South Bend

**Goal 4. Develop resources that support international student integration and lay the foundation for academic success.**

We have included many of the activities that other schools appear to have found effective in their international student peer mentorship programs. These activities include:
- Resources for both mentors and mentees to use in exploring university and community life, cultural frameworks, and issues that impact student development and academic success: Peer Mentor Handbook, handouts, etc.
- A flexible schedule for mentors and mentees to meet weekly
- Bi-weekly group meetings
- One to two workshops each semester on topics of most interest to students
- Facebook group available for participants

**What we are going to do next**
Since international students have demonstrated strong interest in the pilot year peer mentor program, we would look to expand the program to accommodate all new students seeking to participate as mentees.

**Budget**

**Budget for AY1 – 4600.00**

**Budget for AY 2, as follows:**

**Peer Mentor Stipends**
Although we have called upon volunteer orientation assistants in the past, those students who have been best trained and most consistent in delivering ongoing support have been employed as student professionals in the Offices of Admissions and International Student Services. We believe a stipend
would incentivize mentors to participate in the program and form the basis for accountability. In addition, international students pay tuition and fees at a higher rate than their in-state classmates do, and would benefit from additional financial support since they are limited by law as to where they can seek employment. Finally, we recognize that students who work on-campus perform better academically and socially.

500.00 per year (two semesters) for 6 peer mentors

Refreshments
Light refreshments/treats for group activities
600.00

Program Identity Items
We would like to have a modest budget to purchase t-shirts with the program title/logo.
400.00

**Total Request for AY2: 4000.00**

Address the project’s fiscal sustainability, including any current and future funding sources:

We believe that the Peer Mentor program will continue to receive strong interest among international students. International students pay non-resident tuition rates, as well as an international student service fee. Although the fee was originally set by IU Bloomington to support the admissions process, students should benefit from this fee in other ways.

**Timeline for AY2:**
May 2017: Review existing training and assessment tools and update any materials
July-August 2017: Hire and train six peer mentors
August 2017:
  • Create a calendar of activities and events
  • Promote program during International Student Orientation
  • Select mentees and facilitate goal-setting
September 2017 – April 2018: Implement program
April – May 2018: Assess program and retool for following year based upon assessment findings