

What Is a Mentor?

Peer mentors are students who have been successful in specific courses and have been recommended by the faculty to serve as mentors. They are not tutors, but, rather, facilitators who can help students develop the thinking and reasoning skills that characterize intellectual maturity. Mentors are learning assistants who are content competent in a particular subject and can assist students in gaining a better understanding of course material. Mentors also serve as empathetic listeners, resource guides, and, most of all, supportive friends.

What do mentors do?

Mentors do their best to help your students succeed. By demonstrating successful student behavior, mentors show students what it takes to succeed. Mentors have the opportunity to work side by side with students while encouraging, supporting, and listening to them as they struggle through the course content. Mentors focus on developing the skills students need—note taking, studying effectively, and confidence—so that students will not only succeed in your course, but also throughout their careers.

Most mentors conduct collaborative learning sessions throughout the week for students. It is in these sessions that mentors have the best opportunity to help students. Carefully guiding the session, mentors try to redirect questions among the students, encouraging each student to think independently while contributing to the group. Students who come to the sessions and actively participate will be more likely to gain a stronger understanding of the material.

What do mentors avoid?

Although most mentors have a firm grasp of the material that the instructor presents in class, they have been carefully trained not to tutor students in the traditional one-on-one tutoring approach. In keeping with this strategy, mentors usually do not readily tell students what the answers are to their questions. Instead, mentors tend to refer students to other sources of information—the text, their classmates, and especially instructors. A mentor's true skill lies in their ability to empower students to find answers on their own. Mentors do not lecture on the course material. In fact, mentors are specifically trained that they are not teachers. Instead, mentors let students teach each other.