

Peer Advising Q&A

Note: This Q&A section was composed using the results and the conclusions of the discussions from the CREATES Erasmus+ Project's Peer Advising Workshop that took place at the University College Freiburg in July 2018. It is included in the [CREATES Toolkit for Peer Advising](#). For more information and additional educational tools, visit: <http://europe-creates.eu>

1. What should a peer advisor be like?

A peer advisor should value the importance of healthy interpersonal relationships, put emphasis on building trust and closer connection with their advisees, and impose positive influence on them. Moreover, a peer advisor must be aware of the concept of multiculturalism and the sensitive topics that it entails. Their approach to advising must be objective, in a sense that they should not let their prejudices and personal feelings get in the way of assessing and properly addressing the issues at hand. In addition, they should be ready to embrace the responsibility for the success of their advising sessions, and advances, as well as failures of their advisees.

2. What are the responsibilities and duties of a peer advisor?

In general, institutions define the role of a peer advisor individually, which means that the responsibilities and duties of a peer advisor might be varying significantly across institutions. Moreover, some people imply that the way this role is defined also depends greatly on the community feeling. However, there seems to be an agreement about peer advisors being the ones to show their advisees the best way to embrace all the unspoken rules and norms, values and rituals of the relevant culture.

3. What are the different definitions of peer advising?

Peer advising can be commonly understood as “students helping students” (Diambra & Cole-Zakrezewski, 2002, p. 56). The services have been intentionally designed to assist in the adjustment, satisfaction, and persistence of students toward attainment of their educational goals (Koring & Campbell, 2005, adapted from Ender & Newton, 2000). This can be in the form of supporting others in learning and success (Koring & Campbell, 2005, p. 11) and thereby ideally supplement academic advising provided by faculty. Less academic peer advising would be the assistance of the fellow students with class scheduling, time management, and program progression issues (Diambra & Cole-Zakrezewski, 2002, p. 56). Furthermore, to support the wellbeing and success of students in their study program, especially in the transition between school and family life to university and adult life, peer advisors can support advisees by introducing them to and helping with the student life, solitude e.g. in the beginning of their studies (spending time together), survive the university bureaucracy, dealing with the transition to adulthood and self-reliance, etc.. Peer advisors need to be selected and trained for their role, especially if they support academic advising (as cited in Ender & Newton, 2000, p.2) (Marter, 2016, p. 5). In addition, peer advising programs take advantage of the benefits of peer-to-peer interaction, since students play an important role in other students’ college experiences (Swisher 2013, Penn State, <https://dus.psu.edu/mentor/2013/03/considerations-peer-advising-programs/>). The support peer advisors provide should be ongoing (From a presentation of Jennifer Layton McCluskey, Director of Retention Initiatives Maryville University of Saint Louis).

4. What is the best way to prepare peer advisors for their role?

A great amount of practice and preparation is required before one becomes competent enough to advise their fellow students. The emphasis is, of course, on the intercultural trainings and development of cultural tolerance. Communication skills matter very much, which could be enhanced and trained through role plays, exercises and even through different events taking place in regular classes (e.g. presentations, group work). There are recommendations to implement the use of group advising sessions, where prospective peer advisors could also join. Moreover, many emphasize the importance of composing a peer advising handbook, which could serve as a guide. Once students are engaged in peer advising, they should focus on creating a safe space for evaluation and feedback (e.g. online forums), which would help them improve and acknowledge certain drawbacks in their method.

5. How to create a good match between a peer advisor and an advisee?

Peer advising should create a space for similarly minded students, where the level of understanding can be relatively high and the possibility for conflict low. Such a setting may have a positive influence on the exchange of tacit knowledge and experience on the intergenerational level, which in a traditional setting does not seem to be very possible, even when encouraged. Furthermore, a single student can have questions regarding various areas of studying life, which makes their need for advising quite multidimensional. In order to ensure that there is a “good match” of a student and their advisor, the solution might be the implementation of a peer

advising system that would include more than one advisor for each student. The chosen advisors should cover thematically any issue that might occur. This could also be done offering an online-platform where peer advisors introduce themselves and can be contacted directly by peer advisees.

6. How to make peer advising more attractive and more accessible? How to encourage students to seek peer advising?

It has become evident that many students do not feel comfortable with asking for advice in person. For such a reason, online platform would make it easier for students to reach out to their advisors. There is also an idea of advisors having their profiles open on the online platform, where they could introduce themselves to students. According to these introductions, students could then pick the right advisor for the situation that they are currently struggling with. Furthermore, the online platform could be also used for planning the meeting. On the one hand, there is a need for more structured meetings, but at the same time more spontaneous. For instance, there should be an opportunity to arrange meetings off campus, in a more relaxed setting. On the other hand, this balance is very difficult to be achieved and maintained over time. One of the persistent problems with peer advising is also the lack of a group feeling. Since it usually takes place in a one-to-one environment, students might feel isolated and less capable to cope with studying than their peers, simply because they are not aware of the fact that most of the students need advising and use it throughout their studies. This could be solved by introducing additional activities that would take place in a group, e.g. Stammtisch meetings in the Common Room. Moreover, this type of events could be open for prospective peer advisors too, as it can help them learn more and be better prepared for their role.

In general, it is recommended to offer a variety of possibilities of peer-advising to address different needs of students. These can in summary be that students are assigned to a peer advisor but can also change it, that peer advisors offer activities in groups as well as the possibility of one-by-one meetings, that peer-advisors act alone or in a group with other peer advisors.