



Peer Advisor Testimonials

Note:

These sample materials were developed at UCF and are included in the CREATES Toolkit Peer Advising as an example of different experiences from Peer Advisors. For more information and additional educational tools, visit: <http://europe-creates.eu>

Benedikt & Johanna:

Our main motivation to become peer-advisors was to offer guidance to first-years starting a new chapter of their lives. This new chapter often creates many questions, insecurities and challenges, as well as new inspiration and possibilities. We remember this time in our own first year very well, and hoped that our involvement as peer-advisors would make the first year somewhat smoother for our advisees.

The peer advisors preparation meeting gave plenty of food for thought, but it was often exchange of ideas between the two of us, as well as with other peer-advisors that helped us to prepare. Peer-advisors can find themselves in all kinds of situations that you cannot truly be prepared for. It therefore often comes down to a sensitivity towards other people's personal situations and a grasp of finding solutions to possible problems.

Considering the diversity of our group, we took care to find the most suitable meeting times and concepts for our peer advising group meetings. This included the interests and expectations of our advisees and appropriate locations where everyone would feel comfortable. For us, it was important to create group meetings where the conversation and activities could go two ways: talking about serious topics and concerns of the first-years. We never saw advising meetings as a one-way street of advisees asking questions that the peer-advisors could then answer. Instead, they provided an opportunity for a seemingly random group of students to learn about each other, and from each other. Our aim was getting to know all our advisees and create a personal connection, so they would feel comfortable talking about their personal situation and we would be able to give proper advice. In the end, this showed us that that we are connected in many more ways than just being students!

Luisa:

Listening, learning that advising is not needed but merely let the other person talk and reflect him/herself and she will eventually reach a conclusion without a lot of input from my side. What I learned about myself in this process is that I am quite happy with my choice of studying in this program and that I really care about student engagement (e.g. in the student council). I think first year students should learn early on how important it is and how to use the opportunities we have to shape our study program.

Juliana:

I would like to start by saying that I chose to be a peer advisor because it felt like a very nice way to connect with the new generation and helping them go through their first steps. While advising I have become more informed on university matters, such as how to choose courses, how the program is structured and whom to contact when you need advice. I also became more open and better at developing group conversations to make everyone feel welcome.

Kaja:

Through being a peer advisor, I have immediately switched from being a first-year student myself to someone who has experience and can share it. Personally, I improved my skills to explain the program and share my experience in a helpful manner. With this I mean reassuring my advisees that they will manage and giving advice that would have been helpful for me at that time. I also really enjoyed forming close relationships with students not from my cohort, which I do not get to see daily in class. It was very interesting to hear how they experience the first two semesters. Moreover, I reflected upon the Foundational Year.

I think it was quite helpful to have a schedule that proposed when we should have meetings with our mentees and what should be addressed. Clearly, we did not limit ourselves to the

more formal questions, but it was a good starting point to hear from our advisees how they are feeling within their first year of studies. Often, it was enough if we started a topic, then a discussion around certain courses, methods of preparing for an exam or nice places to hang out in summer developed and our advisees engaged with each other without much input from our side. The preparation was sufficient, as I also had good memories from my advisors in the first year that shaped my idea of the role of a advisee . However, we were insecure how to deal with people that never responded to our messages and invitations. It was good to have advisor pairs, as we alternatingly could host the meetings in our homes and had different experiences to share. Sometimes it was challenging to schedule a meeting where everyone had time. Additionally, I have the impression that the meetings decreased in importance for the advisees.

In general, I think that the advising system is a very helpful system to welcome first-year students in the LA program and it helps to build friendships throughout the different cohorts.