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Helping Disconnected College Students Find their Niche: Implementing a Peer Ambassador Program on Co

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David Denison
April 22nd, 2013

Personal Statement

For my Honors Project I developed a new service at the BGSU Counseling Center that will provide internship opportunities to outstanding undergraduate psychology students. These psychology students will become “Peer Ambassadors” in the Counseling Center and will meet with other BGSU students as a compliment to regular counseling. The Peer Ambassador service within the Counseling Center is designed to serve students who are already seeking counseling services but would like to discuss their college experience with a “peer” expert on campus life. The Peer Ambassador will work with other students who feel disengaged or disconnected from campus, students who lack community or those who do not have meaningful outlets for their passions AND as a peer, help those students get involved with the right activities, join the right organizations, build relationships and develop community and suggest tips on how to fill their college years with intentional purpose filled time. I have currently been interning at the BGSU Counseling Center in this role as the first “Peer Ambassador” for the past academic year (Fall and Spring semesters).

An initial proposal for this position was presented to Dr. Craig Vickio, Coordinator of Undergraduate Psychology Internships, in April of 2012 for approval. Since this initial draft, the necessary documentation for the Peer Ambassador Service to be fully implemented has been developed, finalized and approved by Dr. Garrett Gilmer, the Director of the Counseling Center. These five documents (the Peer Ambassador FAQ for CC Staff, the Peer Ambassador Informed Consent Form, the Peer Ambassador Referral Form and Student Contact Documentation Forms and a Peer Ambassador External Release document), have been developed and implemented since the start of the semester; once in place, the first Peer Ambassador (me) began meeting with

students and delivering presentations about the service to Counseling Center staff in both one-on-one and group contexts.

Bellow I have included brief descriptions of the six documents mentioned above:

- ❖ The **first** document is the initial Peer Ambassador Internship Proposal that provided an overview of what I envisioned the Peer Ambassador's role to be and established the foundation for the development of all other documentation.
- ❖ The **second** document attached is the Peer Ambassador FAQ for CC Staff document which contains important information regarding: when a referral to the Peer Ambassador is appropriate, when it is not appropriate, what is the Peer Ambassador's role, what is not the Peer Ambassador's role, procedural information on what to say and steps on how to schedule. There is also a checklist on the very last page of the document so that counselors can double check that everything that needed to be done was in fact completed.
- ❖ The **third** document is the Peer Ambassador Informed Consent Form which a student will have the opportunity to read over and sign before a referral is made and a Referral Form is completed.
- ❖ The **fourth** and **fifth** documents attached are the Peer Ambassador Referral Form (which a counseling staff member will fill out with a student before they are to meet with me) and the Student Contact Documentation Forms. After the counselor and the student (together) have completed the Referral Form, the counselor will place this in the to-be-scanned folder at their earliest convenience. The second page of the attached document contains copies of the Student Contact Documentation Forms. These half-sheet contact slips are completed by me for each contact I have with a student; these will be placed in the to-be-scanned folder immediately following the particular contact with a student and will be uploaded to the student's Titanium account so that the counselor will be aware of what information was exchanged between the student and me as well as a general overview of the topics discussed in meetings with the students and how things went overall.
- ❖ The **sixth** document is the Peer Ambassador External Release Form and will only be used by me in rare situations where a student would like me to personally contact an individual, department, office or organization to lay the initial groundwork for initiating a connection.

At this point, since the Peer Ambassador Service had already been developed and received positively, the next steps were to develop a Peer Ambassador Application process for future students seeking the position; and to develop a "Peer Ambassador Guide" that addresses procedural matters relevant to the position and cites resources available across campus, documenting the "culture" of various student groups, organizations and communities.

In addition to the development of documents essential to the sustainability of the Peer Ambassador service, a publication in the "On the Campus" section of the Journal of College Student Development is currently in the works. This write-up about the Peer Ambassador

Program and will discuss the purpose of developing the program, limitations of the program, future directions for the Counseling Center's Peer Ambassador Program, a brief overview of other Universities and Colleges that have similar peer mentor/advisor type programs and how to implement a Peer Ambassador Program into a University culture that may or may not be similar to that of BGSU. A discussion of how a Peer Ambassador Program could be utilized on other college campuses to compliment other programs already offered whose goals are student retention and success.

The Peer Ambassador Internship (summary of what I have done since starting my internship as the Peer Ambassador in August 2012):

- ❖ Proposed, designed and implemented The Peer Ambassador undergraduate internship position at the BGSU Counseling Center, to serve BGSU students by helping students to connect with campus, establish relationships and build community in Bowling Green.
- ❖ Spoke with students in one-on-one meetings for the purpose of: familiarizing students with the University's offerings and appropriate opportunities; identifying potential barriers to students' developing community and finding a niche on campus; encouraging students' passionate and authentic self expression
- ❖ Suggested to students: activities to attend, leaders with whom they might wish to connect, student organizations to consider and tips on how to fill their college career with intentional, purpose-filled time.
- ❖ Empowered students who lacked meaningful outlets for their personal, social, or career aspirations, were disconnected from campus, had little sense of belonging or community, or felt lonely or alienated to be proactive in their search for meaning, belonging and purpose during their collegiate experience.
- ❖ Drafted individualized "Action Plans" for each student, providing a summary of the variety of recommended resources (people, organizations, offices) and contact information.
- ❖ Maintained appropriate student confidentiality, adhering to HIPAA ethics and confidentiality regulations.
- ❖ Networked with advisors, student leaders and general members of different organizations on campus so as to better understand the various opportunities for students to be engaged and get involved on campus.
- ❖ Developed and revised all formal documentation associated with the position, including the Peer Ambassador Informed Consent Form, Referral and Student Contact Forms, a Peer Ambassador F&Q document for Counseling Center staff, an External Release document, and the initial Peer Ambassador Internship Proposal.
- ❖ Created the Peer Ambassador Application Form and assisted in the interviewing and selection of the applicants for the Peer Ambassador position for the next academic year.
- ❖ Developed the "Peer Ambassador Guide," that addresses procedural matters relevant to the position and cites resources available across campus, documenting the "culture" of various student groups, organizations and communities, is to be created that will be utilized by future Peer Ambassadors.