

# KESSLER

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# SCHOLARS

## Peer Mentor Resource Guide

This resource guide is intended to support planning and development for Kessler Scholars Peer Mentoring. We encourage you to adapt and include campus-specific content as needed.

**Overview:** Kessler Scholars Peer Mentoring is designed to connect first-year Kessler Scholars with second-through fourth-year scholars as a way to support new students' transition to and navigation of the institution. At the same time, peer mentoring also can contribute to the engagement and leadership development of upper-level students. Peer mentors are not intended to replace formal campus support services, but mentors can use their personal experience and knowledge of the campus community to provide guidance, friendship, and resources. Through in-person meetings as well as virtual and digital conversations, peer mentors serve a significant role in helping empower and foster a strong sense of community, belonging, and self-efficacy among Kessler Scholars.

**Structure:** The mentor-to-mentee ratio may vary depending on various factors, particularly during the early formation of a Kessler Scholars Program. As the program expands and Kessler Scholars move past the first year, we recommend a 1:1 mentor/mentee pairing that connects upper-level Kessler Scholars with first-year scholars. When this is not feasible, we suggest mentors not be assigned more than three mentees to allow appropriate levels of support and engagement. Additionally, program staff may consider creating a peer leadership role to support the mentors, i.e. a senior mentor, and/or hire an alternate mentor in case a mentor needs to be replaced during the academic year.

**Recruitment:** Within established programs, Kessler Scholars in their sophomore through senior years are eligible to serve as mentors due to their familiarity with the program and as a way to provide a unique opportunity for upper-level students to give back to the program and develop their leadership skills. In early development of the Kessler Scholars Program, potential peer mentors include upper-level students from related campus programs who identify as first-generation college students and understand the experiences of students from lower-income families.

**Position Description & Application:** The position description for prospective peer mentors should outline all aspects of the mentor role, including objectives, goals, term limit, compensation (if applicable), expectations, time commitment, and supervisor.

[Example position description](#) - Syracuse University

[Example peer mentor and summer ambassador application](#) - University of Michigan

**Compensation:** Kessler Scholar Peer Mentors may be paid positions or program staff may choose to award community service hours for a mentor's time and service. If mentors receive federal work-study funding, program staff should explore if and how additional compensation, whether an hourly wage or stipend per semester, may impact the number of hours students may work and or their overall financial aid packages. We encourage you to work closely with HR on student hiring.

**Selection of Peer Mentors:** To identify strong peer mentors, we encourage program staff to design an application process that allows prospective peer mentors to highlight their best selves and understand the expectations of the role. Essay prompts, in-person or virtual interviews, recordings, or even collages are useful ways for students to demonstrate their interest in the peer mentor role and share more about themselves and their experiences. If interviews are used, allow ample time to build rapport with applicants and respond to any questions they may have. Program staff should aim to develop an application and interview timeline to hire and train mentors before the start of the academic year when they will serve in the mentorship role.

**Matching Mentors to First-Year Scholars:** Kessler Scholars staff should develop a system to pair mentors and mentees that considers personal attributes/characteristics, academic major, geography, and co-curricular interests. Staff should consider including questions from the Kessler Scholars Commitment form to gather additional information from mentees to assist with mentor/mentee matching. Additionally, staff should decide how to communicate responsibilities and expectations—including, for instance, how frequently first-year students should expect to engage with their peer mentor—to help frame the mentor/mentee relationships.

**Meeting Frequency:** During the first term of engagement, we recommend mentors interact (in-person, via text, and other methods) with their mentees weekly or bi-weekly. Frequent communication helps build rapport and contribute

to a supportive relationship. Interactions can occur over a meal, at a social event, while walking around campus, or a quick text to say good luck on an upcoming exam. The number of hours required varies anywhere from 2-10 hours per week, which include any activities associated with the role, i.e., completing paperwork, in-service, meeting with a supervisor, etc.

[Mentor/Mentee meetings](#) - St Francis College

**Training & Development:** Training for peer mentors can serve multiple purposes: to help set expectations, provide resources, build community, and support their engagement and leadership development. Training and development activities should occur in-person when possible and include additional development opportunities throughout the academic year as needed, or as part of regular supervision meetings.

[Training resource](#) - Florida Atlantic University

[Training slide deck](#) - Syracuse University

[Orientation slide deck](#) - Michigan University

**Potential mentor training and development topics:**

- Overview of the Kessler Scholars Collaborative and the campus-level program
- Strategies to initiate conversations and build rapport
- Setting boundaries and managing expectations
- Active Listening and giving feedback
- The do's and don'ts of mentoring
- Introducing students to campus resources
- Integration into the campus community
- Confidentiality and FERPA
- When and how to submit a critical incident report
- Dealing with students in distress or crisis situations
- Submitting timesheets (if applicable)
- Guidelines and expectations about appropriate behavior
- Navigating the hidden curriculum
- The cause and how to deal with imposter syndrome
- How to deal with bias, microaggressions, exclusive or oppressive situations/spaces on campus

**Manual:** We recommend developing a peer mentor manual or handbook to support Kessler Scholars Peer Mentoring. The peer mentor manual can be a living document to provide guidance, information, and resources to support the peer mentors.

[Example mentor booklet](#) - Blessing-Rieman College of Nursing

[Example mentor handbook](#) - The Mentoring Partnership of Southwestern PA

**Supporting Mentor Engagement and Reporting:** This term describes the systems that record all interactions between mentors and mentees. Due to the nature of the peer mentoring relationships, the peer mentors may learn of a student in distress and look to the program staff for guidance. Program staff must support peer mentors as they do the work; that includes guiding and supporting mentor-mentee interactions and assuring reporting—especially on critical incidents.

***Documenting regular Interactions:*** The purpose of an interaction form is for mentors to document their interactions with their mentees.

[Example interaction form](#) - Syracuse University

[Example monthly activity list](#) - Pinellas County Schools

***Reporting Critical Incidents:*** Critical incidents include any issues that may disrupt a student's academic performance, well-being, engagement, or retention. The program staff should develop an internal system for mentors and program staff to record and report critical incidents for staff to respond immediately. Examples include a Google form or flag in an institutional alert system. As part of training, review scenarios of incidents to report and when to notify staff directly and how.

#### **Additional Ideas and Considerations:**

- Offer funding to support mentor/mentee attendance at sporting events, campus activities, excursions off campus, meals, retreats, etc.
- Create opportunities to bring all mentors and mentees together for a welcome event or other events throughout the academic year.
- Spotlight mentors on the Kessler Scholars website.
- Celebrate mentors on mentor celebration day, October 27th, and through other initiatives throughout the academic year.
- Consider ways to engage returning peer mentors in the selection and training process for new mentors.