First-Generation College Students:

Digital Peer MentorshiP via Social Media

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# Abstract

First-generation college students are the first in their families to go to college. Since they are the first in their families, they are often left to figure out the complicated higher education system in the United States of America on their own. Without proper guidance, students can feel overwhelmed by filling out complex applications such as the FASFA and scholarship application and, among other unfamiliar tasks, to enroll and stay in college. They need help understanding college 101 terminology such as prerequisites, capstone, or hybrid. A lack of understanding of Student Success strategies such as time management, Habits of Mind, or navigating several digital tools can be detrimental to their college success. Because of such complicated and unfamiliar higher education territory, students can feel alone and as if they don’t belong in an institution of higher learning. They may also be unfamiliar with the college resources available, such as the Wellness Center, Tutoring Services, Offices of Accessibility, or the Ombudsman Office. This can cause students to get stressed, have anxiety, and, unfortunately, drop out of college.

*Peer Mentorship via Social Media* digital project aims to provide peer mentorship through platforms where students would most effectively receive information, such as social media platforms like Instagram or Tic Tok. This content would be created and curated by a team of mentorship experts, mentors, and mentees. The goal is for First Generation students to learn and be prepared to succeed in college regardless of the hurdles they may face.

# List of Participants / Staff

* Peer Mentors
* Mentees
* Video Content Creator
* Social Media Manager
* College Peer Mentor Experts
  + Student Success Mentor Program
  + Peer Advisor Academy
  + CUNY Peer Leaders
  + America Needs You
  + CREAR Futuros
  + CUNY Black Male Initiative

# Narrative

## Enhancing the Humanities

In a TEDx Talk by Taylor Schad titled “Prevent teen suicide with peer-to-peer mentoring”, Taylor said the following:

‘Change your approach from student troubles being the issue to students being the solution. No successful initiative can strive without the direct incorporation of those facing the hardest obstacles because, as a student, it’s hard to see the finish line when there are so many hurdles blocking your view.’ (Schad)

Students have the solutions for most of the hurdles they are facing. However, more is needed to listen to their solutions or ideas. Therefore, when creating this project, their voice must be incorporated throughout the process.

### Activities

* Activity 1) Create a Mentorship Committee across CUNY and perhaps colleges across NYC to learn about what is taking place at their respective campuses related to Peer Mentorship and plan an event for Mentors and Mentees.
* Activity 2) Learn from First Generation students about their college needs through a CUNYwide event where mentors and mentees will be invited to brainstorm, collaborate, and speak about their experience as college students. Alumni could also be asked to learn how mentorship played a crucial role in their success. Also, this will be an opportunity to learn from students their choice of social media platform that they mostly use.
* Activity 3) Gather with the Mentorship Committee to review what was learned and begin the creation of content for the social media platform of a student's choice.

### Deliverables

* A social media account that would be dedicated to Peer Mentorship for First Generation College Students. The ideal content would be general, so students from the United States could benefit from the information.
* The social media content can include but is not limited to the following:
  + Story Telling: Videos of Peer Mentors or Mentee about their experience of having a mentors
  + Post related to the following:
    - Tips for Succeeding in College
    - Defined College Terminology
    - Tips for applying to college and the other higher education complex applications

### Innovation & Value

* This innovative digital project will support the underrepresented student population, especially in colleges with limited resources for First Generation students or needing more peer mentorship programs. This project contributes to humanities because it seeks to support the growth of human development by using a tool such as social media to inspire, inform, and educate students about essential information for college success.

## Environmental Scan

Below, are three different initiatives related to peer mentorship. Two of which related to high school students and digital platforms. The third one relates to the importance of peer mentorship for students dealing with difficult life circumstances.

### Initiative 1: [The Experiment Digital Youth Leadership & Community Service](https://youtu.be/0t1qvZxkEdc)

Experiment Digital is a virtual exchange program for students who are in high school around the world. The goal of this program is to help students develop and practice leadership skills and civic engagement. They focus on STEAM, Social Justice, and climate change themes. Student leaders within the program can become [Digital Facilitators.](https://www.experiment.org/become-a-digital-facilitator/) Digital Facilitator Alumni of the program can then become Digital Peer Mentors. The role of the facilitator is to lead students into asynchronous and synchronous discussions online. High School students worldwide can learn from one another through these discussions that student leaders facilitate surrounding the focus topic.

(The Experiment )

### initiative 2: [Students at Independence peer mentor Chicago students using social media sites.](https://youtu.be/yNOVYgCzVxE)

Independence High School students in California mentor students in Chicago through a social media-like platform called Digital Youth Network. It’s a peer editing mentoring program where seniors from California mentor middle school students in Illinois. Both the mentor and mentor gain from being part of the program because they sharpen their writing skills.

(23 ABC News | KERO)

### initiative 3: [Prevent teen suicide with peer-to-peer mentoring](https://youtu.be/iw72a1EWcMQ)

Taylor Schad Teds Talks “Prevent teen suicide with peer-to-peer mentoring” speaks about the importance of peer mentoring to prevent suicide. Between 2007 and 2011, eight students at her high school committed suicide. A peer mentorship program called Cobbler and Cobbler was created at her former high school to connect students with mentors to get the guidance and support they need to prevent suicide at the high school. The idea was that students would support one another through the different hurdles they faced. Eventually, this program was the foundation for which the Networks of Support program was created.

(Schad)

## Work Plan

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Phases | Task | Staff |
| Phase 1 | **Task 1 -3** |  |
| Create Peer Mentorship Committee and Brainstorm | * Create a Peer Mentorship Program committee with staff * Brainstorm an event that will bring mentors and mentors across CUNY together * Collectively and strategically share data that has been gather by each respective programs related to peer mentorship | Staff from the following Peer Mentorship Program   * Student Success Mentor Program * Peer Advisor Academy * CUNY Peer Leaders * America Needs You * CREAR Futuros * CUNY Black Male Initiative |
| Phase 2 | **Task 4 - 8** |  |
| Mentor/Mentee Event to Gather Insights | * The purpose of this event is to create a space for mentors/mentees speak about their needs as college students * Expose them to other peer mentorships program available * Create a space where they can speak about their own Mentorship success stories * Brainstorm content that can be developed for social media * Learn from students what social media platform is best suited for this project | Peer Mentors and Mentees will be invited to this event from across CUNY campuses. While the aim is to make these resource available to a wider audience, the targeted audience will be for students across CUNY. |
| Phase 3 | **Task 9 – 10** |  |
| Create Peer Mentor Content for Peer Mentorship social media | * Gather Data that was generated at the Mentor/Mentee Event. * Categorize data and generate topics for social media * Authorization Letter from Mentors/Mentees to appear on media * Create social media calendar for the whole academic year * Create content | * Peer Mentors/Mentees to appear on social media videos * Social Media Content Creators * Social Media Manager |

|  |
| --- |
| Final Product and Dissemination |
| The final project will be a social media account and a carefully crafted social media calendar planned for a full academic year. Social media content creators will create the content. The content creators can be Mentors who are given a stipend for this work. The account can be promoted through the networks connected to the committee and fellow people who can see the value of the work. |

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# Works Cited

23 ABC News | KERO. *Students at Independence peer mentor Chicago students using social media site*. News report. Indepdance High School. Bakerfield : 23 ABC News , 2013.

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