

# **Creating a Peer Advising Program to Increase Engagement with Pre-major Engineering Students (GIFTS)**

This GIFTS paper will describe how the Engineering Advising Center (EAC) within the College of Engineering at a large mid-Atlantic university is actively creating a Peer Advising Program. The Peer Advising Program will serve as an innovative advising approach to increase engagement of pre-major students within the College. Once admitted, Engineering students go through an entrance-to-major process and generally declare a specific major at the end of their second year.

The Peer Advising Program will meet the students' need for information and provide a peer system for this exchange. Peer Advisors will offer technical and low-level advising support to promote academic excellence for student success. Participating students will grow through the realization of enhanced self-advocacy skills.

In our development, we used several similar existing programs to benchmark and assess our plans. We also reached out to other institutions within National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) and explored the academic advising literature on the role that peer advisors play in the undergraduate experience. To guide our program, we utilized the NACADA Core Values as well as the College of Engineering and University values and mission statements.

In Fall 2018, a Graduate Assistant was hired into the EAC to lead the development efforts of the program and to supervise the Peer Advisors in the first year of implementation. In Spring 2019, we interviewed, hired, and trained Peer Advisors. Training consisted of several formal sessions focusing on available resources, academic timelines, role boundaries, diversity/inclusion, and technical knowledge of online student platforms such as Starfish, Canvas, and the University registration system. We will implement the Peer Advisor program in Fall 2019 with a cohort of 9 rising Junior-level Peer Advisors in varying Engineering majors. In year two of the program, we plan on recruiting several Peer Advisors from the first cohort to serve as lead Peer Advisors.

By presenting at FYEE, we will share with colleagues our experience regarding all aspects of creating our program. At the time of this conference, we will have completed the training sessions and can present on the successes and opportunities for improvement. We would welcome thoughts and suggestions on our plan for implementation in Fall 2019. At this point, each Peer Advisor will hold 4 walk-in hours a week in the EAC. Students would have access to the Peer Advisors' schedule and could self-select with whom they would like to meet based on their availability. We will hold on going workshops and trainings to provide Peer Advisors with professional development opportunities. We will also structure individual touchpoints with the Peer Advisors to ensure they are experiencing successful student interactions and feel supported in their role.