Online Instructional Mentoring Guidelines

An instructional mentor uses their knowledge and experience to help learners identify short-term and long-term educational goals, set learning expectations, and establish realistic timelines. An instructional mentor also provides guidance, lends support, and encourages their learners. Being a mentor can be both challenging and rewarding. The following guidelines give mentors a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

Instructional Mentors are expected to:

- stay up-to-date on new adult education resources and online mentoring practices;
- know their content area subjects and how to teach them;
- be knowledgeable about online educational resources for their learners;
- be flexible and willing to embrace change;
- manage and monitor students' academic progress to ensure success;
- be able to utilize effective motivational techniques to keep learners active and progressing toward their stated educational goals;
- encourage and support learners in setting short-term and long-term educational goals, as well as in developing realistic timelines for testing and career goal attainment;
- assist learners' self-directedness and self-sufficiency through the communication of clear and challenging expectations, clear and concise instructions based on these expectations, and support for learners in meeting those expectations;
- make use of each adult education program's offerings by recommending a diversity of lessons, modules, and practice tests for learners in accordance with their skill-levels and goals; and
- devote a minimum of one hour per week for mentoring assigned online learners.

Instructional Approach

Another often overlooked but important issue for online teachers is that the delivery of web-based courses is not restricted to a specific time or schedule. Because instruction does not start and stop at the same time for all students, time-management skills are extremely important - not only for the online teacher, but also for students. The lack of these skills is a major reason why some students drop their online courses.

(Parts of this section were adapted from the Southern Regional Education Board's *Standards for Teaching Online*)

The online instructor has the prerequisite technology skills required to effectively facilitate online learning and strives to:

- incorporate instructional strategies to encourage active learning and participation in an online environment;
- seek out and take advantage of opportunities to participate in online learning for professional development;
- understand and respond to students with special needs in the online environment;
- deliver assessments and online assignments that meet educational and assessment standards; and
- demonstrate competencies in using research and instructional data, as well as findings from assessments and assignment data to modify instructional methods and guide the learners' progress toward their goals.

Communication with students

Effective online teachers must also possess the ability to prepare quality written communications. Appropriate and effective writing not only conveys information, it also encourages and supports students. Words and body language that traditional classroom teachers use must be effectively translated to the online environment for online teachers to be successful. Mentors will communicate in a timely and professional manner with each of their assigned online students.

- Demonstrate responsiveness to learners by responding to emails and phone calls within a reasonable and timely amount of time.
- Encourage and support learners becoming comfortable using electronic communications.
- Establish and observe specific time periods when learners may reach their mentor by email, or in certain cases, by telephone, for technical troubleshooting and academic or job counseling.
- Regularly monitor each learner's completion of assignments and use of online programs, responding in a timely way with suggestions and.
- Contact learners, via text, phone, email, or a preferred mobile app,, who have been inactive for a week or more.

Helpful Tips

Here are a few tips to help define mentor/mentee roles and responsibilities and to create learning opportunities for mentors.

- Create an online learning contract. This contract will help students understand what is expected of them and what they can expect from their mentor. Each party's commitments should be clear and concise. (See the example below.)
- Create certificates of achievement. These certificates can acknowledge both short- and long-term accomplishments or even acknowledge a personal triumph. (See the example below.)
- Create a mentor personal learning community (PLC). A PLC can help mentors work collaboratively to share expertise, improve teaching skills and knowledge, and achieve goals. A PLC provides mentors with a shared responsibility that can motivate mentors and help overcome feelings of isolation.

Example: Online Learning Contract

Their Commitments

[ ] I agree to devote a minimum of __ hours each week to follow my learning plan and complete my assigned lessons.

[ ] I agree to make achieving my educational goals a priority in my life.

[ ] I agree to establish regular, weekly communication with my mentor by responding promptly to my mentor's communications, contacting my mentor when I have questions or need help, and notifying my mentor if any circumstances affect my participation in the program.

[ ] I agree to form my own educational support system by sharing my educational goals and enrollment in a distance education program with supportive family members, coworkers, teachers and/or friends.

Our Commitments

As an enrolled student in a distance education program, we agree to support you in accomplishing your educational goals by:

- helping you make a timeline for achieving your goals,
- creating a learning plan based on your goals and educational needs,
- providing you with regular feedback about your academic progress,
- challenging and encouraging you to do your best and achieve your goals,
- responding to all of your emails in a timely manner, and
- helping you identify and access appropriate study materials and online resources.

Example: Certificate

THE VIRGINIA
ADULT LEARNING
RESOURCE CENTER
Virginia Commonwealth University

Certificate of Achievement

This certifies that

_____

Has successfully completed

Achievement Title

Date   Mentor

_____   _____