

Tips for Mentors Working with Change of Location Students

Change of Location (COL) students typically arrive at University Park (**UP**) at the beginning of their junior year. They face important challenges, including adjusting to a new environment, making new friends, learning the layout of the town and campus, as well as determining how to secure an internship and define a career path.

It's important to recognize and support these new experiences your Protégé(s) will be managing and the value you bring to their transition to UP.

Proactively discuss the topics below, which COL students have identified as an important part of the transition process:

- **COL Connections** – COL students can and should learn from other COL students. **ATUP** is a student-run club whose purpose is to help students transition to the UP campus. This club is a great place to connect, network and support each other. Another option is EDUC 397A, a 3-credit course for juniors who have transitioned from a Commonwealth campus. The class offers a high level of engagement and interaction with other COL students.
- **General Support (academic and job-hunting prep)** – strongly encourage your COL protégés to use the free on-campus support resources available to strengthen academic success and landing a job. This includes advisors, other professionals and teams that help and guide students. Details provided on the Mentor website.
- **Networking** – define networking, discuss its importance, simplify how to network – making it a less stressful experience. Emphasize the benefits: expanded opportunities, connections, career advice and helping others.
- **Professionalism** – discuss the importance of professionalism and how to demonstrate it, especially when interacting with recruiters, professionals at PSU, and the student organizations they engage with. Consider: communications, dressing for success, preparedness, timeliness, and proactively identifying and securing job opportunities. Advise them to attend the first career fair, at a minimum, to observe the dress code and event process. If needed, help them develop professional attire (given their existing wardrobe and/or budget).
- **Managing Struggles** – *it is important that they realize they are not alone in this.* Students who succeed learn how to recognize issues and get support – e.g.: many COL students' GPA will dip in their first semester at UP. Students should recognize this could happen. They are not alone - they should not get discouraged but *they should seek support early* and persevere. Advise them to use on-campus resources and YOU to help with the challenges they face – such as academics, study habits, campus life, decision making, etc.
- **“The Stigma”** – many students attach a stigma to being a COL student or feel it from others. Help them overcome this by recognizing the advantage of gaining ‘change’ experience so early in life. Their COL experience includes overcoming adversity, building resilience, demonstrating willingness to make a change and developing the ability to adapt to new circumstances – all of which are valued in the workplace and should be communicated in interviews.
- **Career Paths** – review how career paths unfold and how to approach career planning.
- **Professional Sounding-board** – listen to your COL protégé(s) needs and concerns, then offer independent, experienced professional advice. Discuss areas to consider, trade-offs and guidance on how to proceed. The Mentoring Program is not another club, it is a support system around all that the student is doing. Take the time needed to support your protégé(s), even if it is only a quick 15 minutes to address a specific question or issue.