



Tips for Mentors Working with Commonwealth Campus students or Change of Location Students

A student at a Commonwealth Campus is a sophomore who is likely hoping to come to University Park and be in the Smeal College of Business in their junior year. A Change of Location (COL) student arrives at University Park (UP) at the beginning of their junior year. If you're working with a student at a campus other than UP or a student who has made the transition to UP, you will find that they face unique 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 will be managing and the value you bring to their transition to UP.

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

- **General Support (academic and job-hunting prep)** – strongly encourage your Protégé 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. Many campuses have a professional “closet” within their career office where students can get professional attire for free. Advise them to attend career fairs at either their campus or at University Park 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** – urge your Protégé to meet with the Smeal Business Career Center or their campus's Career Services department to learn about career resources (many of these resources are online) and talk through their resume, internship search, involvement options, tips for connecting with employers, and more.
- **Professional Sounding-board** – listen to your 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, even if it is only a quick 15 minutes to address a specific question or issue.

- **Value of Experiences:** students at Commonwealth Campuses and COL students have varying levels of involvement outside of classes. Some work as many as 30 hours per week year-round, while others take on a heavy credit load every semester. Emphasize the value of their part-time work (often customer service) and encourage those who have not done much outside of classes to seek opportunities to grow their leadership/teamwork skills through involvement on campus or in their community.
- **Peer Connections** – Remind your student that they can find a sense of community with other COL students. Encourage them to ask Smeal academic advising and the Business Career Center about resources and strategies for connecting with peers who can offer valuable perspective on the transition.