Transform your peer career advising team

…and transform your whole career center.

A new model for peer mentor training at the University of Nevada, Reno
What to expect in today’s session

1. The “no appointments” experiment at the University of Nevada
2. Designing a training continuum to fit the needs of our Career Mentor Program
3. Our Career Mentor Method: what it is, why we needed it, and how we teach it (we’ll even let you try it)
4. How we know it’s working
5. Using the 4 Principles to train, evaluate, and support your mentor team
6. A framework for developing or transforming your career center’s career mentor program
7. Time to answer your questions
Our “flipped” career center at the University of Nevada, Reno
A quick glimpse into our background

2008: Career Center closed
- Economic recession led to state budget cuts
- Career Development Office closed at the University of Nevada, Reno

2013: Career Studio opens
- Student Services opened the central Nevada Career Studio with 2 professional staff
- We hired the first Career Mentor team of 8 undergraduate students

2016: Hitting our stride
- We operate with 3 professional staff, 1 admin assistant, and 20 student employees
- We moved into the brand new “Student Achievement Center”
- Peer mentors facilitate 1,500 drop-in visits each semester
- We serve thousands of students in 4 annual career fairs, dozens of partnered programs and workshops, and an award-winning internship grant program
Welcome to the Nevada Career Studio

Not Career Services.
Not the Career Center.
Not Career Counseling.
Not a Placement Office.
We put tools and strategies in your hands so you can manage your whole career with confidence and clarity.

...But we were 2 people serving 20,000 students. That’s a lot of hands to fill with tools and strategies.
Open our doors

Don’t use appointments

Train a team of students to help with career questions big and small

See what happens
A traditional model of career services wouldn’t be efficient or effective for our tiny office.

Student employees help fill in the gaps: promoting programs, helping with events, and maybe offering limited services to peers during set hours.

Career Center staff provides frontline services to students, often one-to-one advising, and also plans and develops programming.
...so we flipped the traditional model

Career Studio staff invest time in innovation and development: programming, events, external relations, and training our team

Student Career Mentors provide all frontline services to clients during drop-in hours
An overview of the Career Mentor program (today)

**Annual Timeline**

- Hiring
  - Application
  - 2 rounds of interviews
- Team Building
- Summer Training
  - 40 hours the week before school starts
- Ongoing Training
  - Weekly meetings all year
- Ongoing Evaluation

**A Typical Week**

- The Studio is open for drop-ins from 10 am to 8pm
- Each mentor has a schedule of 10 set hours weekly, plus a training meeting
- 2-3 mentors work each shift
- A mentor might work with multiple clients each shift
- Mentors help with resumes, cover letters, interviews, job search, LinkedIn, and more
- Mentors can grab “flex shifts” to work events
Career Mentors help with a lot more than just resumes.

What did you work on today?

- Resume: 44%
- Cover letter: 17%
- Mock interview: 10%
- Interview advice: 3%
- Personal statement: 2%
- CV: 2%
- Applying to grad school: 1%
- Applying to professional school: 1%
- Pack Internship Grant Program application: 1%
- Finding an internship: 1%
After 3 years of no appointment, all peer-led coaching, we had some perspective on the successes…and limitations…of our peer mentor experiment.
Designing a new Career Mentor training
Evaluating the Career Mentor Program after years 1-3

So much about the team was incredibly positive:

- Clients loved being able to drop in any time with no hassle
- We seemed to be hiring the right students: dedicated, positive, and natural teachers
- Our methods for teaching career skills like resume, cover letter, and interview techniques were a total success
- Mentors were eager for more

But some things weren’t working they way we intended:

- Too many gaps in training
- Some mentors ran to find staff if they got “stuck” with a client question, and others just made things up
- Mentors got stuck in comfortable patterns of advising, whether or not it was right for the client
- Team morale dipped during the busiest times each semester
We set new, big goals for our Career Mentor training

- Help the Career Mentors feel a part of something bigger than themselves
- Turn them into a team
- Introduce a wealth of perspectives and knowledge from many sources
- Don’t just teach new material – teach them how to teach someone else
- Teach them how to feel comfortable with not knowing the answer
- Give them the tools to be effective with any client, especially the most vulnerable or challenging clients
- Cultivate a growth mindset for the whole team
We identified four main components for the training curriculum...

- **Mentoring Method**
  - Appreciate the Client
  - Co-exploration
  - Small Loops
  - Own Your Walkaways

- **Technical Knowledge**
  - Resume and cover letter
  - Interviewing
  - Job search
  - LinkedIn
  - Personal statements

- **Career Development Theory and Context**
  - NACE Journal required readings
  - Guided discussions
  - Event planning

- **Outside Perspectives**
  - Hiring Manager Panel
  - Reno City Councilman
  - UNR Development Director
  - Student Affairs Professionals
...and developed a continuum of professional development to extend training year-round.
We added a client exit survey to give us real-time data about how things were going.

The Career Mentor answers these questions:

- Who did you work with?
- How long were you here?
- What did you work on?

Then hands the iPad to the client, who answers these questions:

- How confident do you feel?
- Do you know your next steps?
- Would you refer a friend?
- How do you identify? (optional!)
- Anything we should know?
We mapped our training goals onto a new, four-part method to put the “mentor” back in Career Mentor Team.

- Part of something bigger than themselves
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- Appreciate the client
- Use small loops
- Co-explore
- Own your walkaways
This became what we call the Studio Method: 4 core principles of peer mentoring.

- **Appreciate the client**
  - Acknowledge and embrace your client’s unique point of view and values

- **Use small loops**
  - Establish a back-and-forth rapport with lots of checks for understanding

- **Co-explore**
  - Take off your “expert” jacket, roll up your sleeves and get to work alongside your client

- **Own your walkaways**
  - Plan backward from what you want the client to walk away with – and own it!
Welcome to Career Mentor Training!

4 short bursts to let you experience our method
Career Mentor Training!
A quick instructional burst
Pick one. Jot down some of the challenges that this student might encounter as they plan a career.

Flip the paper over. Write down some of the areas of strength, opportunity, or advantage in career planning.

student veteran | first-generation
LGBTQIA+ | non-traditional age
visible disability | invisible disability
punk/goth/alternative | international
minority race | from a rural community
Appreciate the Client

- You welcome each client with a smile and warm introduction
- You learn the client’s name and introduce yourself by name
- You use your client’s name at the beginning and end of your session
- You ask open-ended questions to get to know the client
- You adapt your mentoring style according to each client’s stated and implied preferences
- You avoid pre-judgments about a client based on their observed characteristics
- You accept your client’s point of view without argument or judgment
- You operate from a place of awareness and compassion for the various and unique challenges that may face clients because of their identity as first-generation, nontraditionally-aged, international, LGBTQ, with visible or invisible disability, veterans, racial minorities, and other
- The client feels that this is the right place to get help: their question is neither too big, too small, nor too silly
- The client feels that they are welcome, respected, and fully accepted
Career Mentor Training!

Another quick instructional burst
You can’t speak or write. Just look at each other. Mirror your partner’s facial expression and body language.
Co-Explore

- You ask open-ended questions to encourage the client to lead you through their thinking on a relevant topic
- You find out what your client knows, thinks, or believes before offering new instruction
- You allow the client to choose a path or process for your session together
- You avoid claiming expertise in any subject the client proposes
- You use language that invites collaboration, such as “let’s see what we can find out together”
- You demonstrate the use of key resources rather than simply recommend them
- The client embraces the process of figuring things out instead of feeling the pressure of needing the answers
Career Mentor Training!
Yes! ONE MORE quick instructional burst
Pair up as mentor and client. Mentor, teach your client how to write a resume bullet point.

Mentor, hang onto one end of the yarn. Each time you switch who is speaking, pass the ball of yarn. Create “loops” of yarn back and forth between the mentor and the client.
You teach new material as appropriate to a client’s needs
You give feedback in small, discrete “chunks”
The client has opportunities to articulate their understanding of new material that you teach
You and the client spend roughly equal time talking throughout a session
You pause frequently to check whether your client understands new material
You ask the client to explain things back to you in their own words
You ask open ended-questions to check for understanding, rather than just “got it?” and “does that make sense?”
You vary your checks for understanding to elicit authentic responses from the client
The client appears engaged when you are talking
The client nods, smiles, and uses other body language to indicate understanding and engagement
The client is able to work independently with confidence
You periodically return to your client to “touch base” while they work independently
Career Mentor Training!

A final, very quick instructional burst
Can you name the 4 principles of the Studio Method? Jot them down.

At the end of this session, what do you hope to walk away with? Tell someone sitting next to you.
• You find out how much time your client has at the beginning of a session
• You ask your client what he or she hopes to accomplish during a session
• You set specific, actionable goals with your client at the beginning of a session
• You talk to your client about their long-term goals
• You can correctly identify your client’s mood at any point in a session
• You ask, “do you know what your next step is?” before the client leaves
• You and the client work together to write and send an email recap highlighting next steps
• You have a face-to-face interaction with the client as you do the exit survey together
• You can articulate what your client has learned by the end of a session
• The client can articulate what he or she has learned or accomplished by the end of a session
• The client perceives a clear connection between their next steps and their long-term goals
Co-exploring

Practicing small loops

Project planning in teams

Taking turns as client and mentor

Mirroring activity

Mirroring activity
“Appreciate the client” activity

Diversity panel from Student Services

Mentors with Reno City Councilman

Hiring Manager panel
How do we know that the Studio Method is working?
We asked mentors to reflect and share feedback at the end of summer training.

- 16 out of 16 strongly agreed with the statement “I feel excited to start my job as a Career Mentor.”
- 16 out of 16 agreed that they felt like “part of a cohesive, inclusive, positive team.”
- 16 out of 16 felt confident (9) or very confident (7) about their ability to use the 4 principles of the Studio Method.
- 15 out of 16 found that training “challenged me to explore my knowledge and beliefs about myself” (1 was neutral).
- 15 out of 16 found that training “challenged me to explore my knowledge and beliefs about others” (1 was neutral).
Later on, we asked them to define the 4 principles in their own words

- “Appreciating the client” means acknowledging that each person is unique with diverse goals, strengths, weaknesses, and hurdles they must overcome. We must find these things out within the capacity of our job duties and proceed our work with them with these things in mind, always remembering to treat them with the utmost respect.”

- “When it comes to appreciating the client” you are trying to understand the client and where they are coming from. By doing so you learn to understand and build up their strengths and recognize their weaknesses. This comes together as you provide a positive and safe guide to accomplishing their goals at the studio.”

- “Co-exploring” is going along with the client to make sure they understand how and not just being a robot and giving the client examples or just straight answers so they can just leave right away. Giving them the tools to success, not just handing them other people's answers.”

- “Co-exploring” happens in a positively reinforcing manner where the client feels as if they are making their own choices with the support of a mentor's resources.”
Before they had helped a single client, our mentors could articulate what it meant to be mentors.

- “Small loops help the client and mentor understand if they are on the same page of the process of working with one another.”
- “By using small loops you are able to break down big concepts and ideas into smaller chunks. This really helps a client recollect where or what they don't understand in the bigger picture. This method also allows the mentor to connect back anything they might have missed in explaining something or check back with a client to make sure they understand what is going on.”
- “Owning your walkaways means to make sure that the client is comfortable in the knowledge you gave them and that they know exactly what their next steps are. They feel confident walking out of the door.”
- “The client walks away from their session here feeling more confident, having learned valuable skills, and knowing what their next steps are. Mentors should be proud of the work they've done for each client.”
The 4 principles shape every moment of a client’s visit to the Studio.

- **Client welcome**
- **Goal setting**
- **Get to work**
- **Notes for next actions**

- **Co-explore**
- **Use small loops**

- **Appreciate the client**
- **Independent work**
- **Guided practice through conversation**

- **Own your walkaways**
- **Introduction to new material**
Client exit surveys help us to own our walkaways in real time.

**Are you leaving the Studio more confident than when you came in?**

- Yes, absolutely
- Yes, somewhat
- About the same as when I came in
- Not really
- Not at all

**Do you know what your next steps are?**

- Yes
- No
The Studio Model empowers us to have a greater impact across campus and the community.

So far in Fall 2016, the Career Studio Team has:

- Helped 800 clients at 1,200 drop-in visits
- Reached 1,200 students through workshops
- Hosted 30 employer events, including networking receptions, panels, and on-campus recruiting
- Connected 200 employers and 2,000 students at 2 career expos, a graduate school fair, and a startup business showcase
- Partnered with local startups, nonprofits, and agencies to create 55 paid internships through the Pack Internship Grant Program (750 students applied last month)
Professional staff are mentors, too: how we use the Studio Method to support our mentors
We applied the 4 Principles to our professional development continuum.
We try to appreciate our student employees the way we ask them to appreciate their clients

- Identify individual areas of strength
- Invite mentors to teach their peers and lead topics at training meetings
- Peer observations and follow-up conversations invite mentors to reflect upon and build strengths
- Leave room for fun team-building (we did an “escape the room” experience to kick off training)
- Celebrate successes
- Have parties!
- Give them space to make the Studio a home away from home, even when they’re not working
**We co-explore through shared goal-setting and reflection**

- Mentors set individual goals for growth at post-observation conversations with a supervisor.
- Scenario-based training sessions that feature real examples of what they’re working on with clients.
- Set new group goals each week based on what’s working and not in the week’s sessions.
We employ small loops through continuous cycles of feedback and reflection.

- It’s all about the conversations: staff to mentor, mentor to mentor.
- Mentors observe one another: they set goals beforehand, record feedback aligned to the 4 principles, and meet afterward to share notes and make recommendations.
- We also have a formal observation cycle in which each mentor is observed by their supervisor.
- Staff teach and lead by example whenever possible, pitching in to help with clients when the Studio gets busy.
We all own the walkaways: our growth and success in the Career Studio is a vision we all share

- Our aim is to have the mentors invested in the professional development process
- Openly discuss the purpose of the observation cycle and growth-focused feedback before it happens
- Foster an environment of growth and critical learning
- Hire mentors who can accept and use critical feedback
- Develop a shared language among the whole team
- Use real-time client exit data to identify every point of weakness as it happens
Field Notes for setting up a Career Mentor program at your school
• We pay Career Mentors $10/hour and ask them to work about 10 hours a week, with the flexibility to take on extra hours as needed
• We recruit in February, accept applications in March, interview in April, and hire in May
• We make an effort to hire a diverse group of students: all years, all majors, all levels of involvement on campus
• The interview process is intentionally formal, demanding, and quite competitive
• We keep in mind that we know how to teach technical skills like resume-writing: it would be much harder to teach interpersonal skills like working effectively with a team
Notes about training Career Mentors

- We hold our 40-hour training the week before school starts
- We added a spring mini-training and team-building to capture the energy of the new team before everyone left for the summer
- We hold two weekly training meetings, with half of the team attending at a time
- “Summer school” assignments give mentors a chance to engage with the content independently, so they are primed for a productive week of training
- All training is paid time
We invested in 5 iPads that we use all day, every day in the Studio (and at every career fair and event)

Clients sign in with their student ID using the Symplicity kiosk on an iPad

Every client completes a quick, anonymous exit survey before they leave

The exit survey facilitates a final “co-exploration” conversation between mentor and client, and is a continuous reminder to “own our walkaways” with every client

We use a live feed of exit survey responses to shape weekly training goals

Mentors take digital notes as they work with a client, using the Notability app. They save the file to dropbox and email the notes to the client before the client leaves
Answering your questions
We love talking about our Career Mentors…

Get in touch!

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