

Make a FastStart

A How-to Guide for Mentors and Students



Sponsored by the Division of Student Affairs
and the Penn State Alumni Association

Step One

FastStart was developed to help students adjust to Penn State and flourish in their new environment. The Faculty/Staff Alumni Student Triad offers two mentors to each participating student: a faculty/staff mentor and an alumni mentor. The faculty or staff mentor acts as a local resource and welcomes the student to the University and local community. The alumni mentors make it possible for first year students to begin career networking opportunities and gain greater insight to their intended field.

FastStart offers opportunities throughout the year for students to meet each other and for mentors to engage in activities with their students. Introducing yourself is the first and most important step.

Match Packets

Each student is matched with a faculty or staff mentor and an alumni mentor. The student then receives a match packet which provides FastStart program information and the contact information of each mentor. At the same time, the alumni and faculty/staff mentors receive a match packet containing the student's personal and contact information.

1. Introduce yourself

Send an introductory e-mail or make an introductory telephone call. While the match packet includes general information, you may want to tell your match a bit more about yourself. If you are unable to contact your match and must leave a message, suggest a good time to contact you. Is it best to reach you in the morning, afternoon, or evening? Do you prefer to be contacted by telephone or by e-mail? The more information you provide, the easier it will be to get connected.



2. Attend the welcome event

FastStart sponsors a welcome event. The welcome event is not only an opportunity to meet your match—it is an opportunity to meet other students, faculty, staff, and alumni involved in FastStart. If you are not able to attend the welcome event, schedule another time to meet face to face, talk on the phone, or have an instant message (IM) conversation



3. Stay connected

FastStart sponsors activities and events throughout the year. A schedule of activities and events is provided to each participant in the match packet. You may take advantage of these events and/or schedule your own. We encourage mentors and students to attend these activities together, when possible. We recognize that many mentors live far away and cannot return to campus—we hope that in these cases mentors and students will talk about campus and FastStart events through e-mail or phone.

4. Follow through

Now that your match has been made, it is up to you to manage this relationship. Those who get the most out of the program are those who maintain regular contact throughout the year. The smallest attempts at communicating go a very long way. If things are not working out or you need further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact:

FastStart Coordinator
Penn State Alumni Association
017 HUB-Robeson Center
University Park, PA 16802
814-863-6386

Visit us on-line at: www.alumni.psu.edu/faststart

Expectations

There are no demands or mandatory meetings built into the program. FastStart connects students to faculty and staff mentors and to alumni mentors. FastStart offers opportunities for participants to get to know each other. The FastStart Coordinator is available to provide support to mentors and students and to make new matches if existing matches are not working out. Here is what we expect of you:

Students

Please introduce yourself to the faculty or staff mentor and alumni mentor within a week or two of receiving your match packet. The introduction can be accomplished through an e-mail, a telephone call, a note or card. Tell your mentor about yourself: where you are from, a bit about your family, why you came to Penn State, your interests. By introducing yourself in this manner you demonstrate that you have a sincere interest in getting to know your mentor and in participating in FastStart.

Be sure to introduce yourself and return calls or e-mails to your mentor. Otherwise, your mentor may get discouraged and may not take future steps at communication.



Faculty and Staff

Faculty and staff mentors are asked to contact their student before he or she arrives at Penn State. Say hello, give a welcome, answer questions, provide a base for further contact as the semester begins. When your student arrives at University Park you may help make the University seem more manageable by providing advice, referring the student to available resources, and just being a friend.

Students are especially appreciative when they are included in activities with their mentors. Students have commented favorably on attending social events, lectures, athletic events, community meetings, job shadowing, and lunches with their faculty and staff mentors.

Alumni

Alumni mentors are the bridges between the young person's student life and his or her professional future. First year students may have a difficult time conceptualizing their career through textbook readings, homework, and lectures. Alumni mentors help make this picture clearer by talking to students about their careers.

Alumni mentors provide advice on careers, graduate school, leads for internships and summer jobs, and networking opportunities. Every attempt is made to match students with professionals who are close to their "hometown" to help facilitate communication and interaction during breaks.

Alumni mentors typically communicate with students through e-mail, occasional phone calls to ask how things are going, a couple of letters of encouragement, a personal visit if you happen to be in Happy Valley...maybe even a bite at a local restaurant.



Your Role as a FastStart Mentor

We have asked the student to introduce him/herself to you. The student is looking for your knowledge, wisdom, and feedback. Be honest and realistic. The following are suggestions to guide you:

- Try to include the student in as many activities that you enjoy as possible.
- Your relationship should be a personal time commitment and should not involve loaning funds, cars, or other personal items.
- Do whatever possible to brief the student on services available for problems that may occur on campus and in the community.
- If you or the student cannot resolve problems that develop in your relationship, contact the Program Coordinator at 814-863-6386.
- Discuss the student's interests and goals.
- Tell the student about your background.
- Talk about the field that the student is interested in.
- Talk about your career path and profession; how you got started; role of networking, etc.
- Invite the student to your office or to observe one of your class sections.
- Attend an on-campus sports, recreational, multicultural, or educational event.
- Grab a cup of coffee.
- Listen, let the student "talk out" situations.
- Discuss the student's semester, courses.
- Facilitate a shadowing experience.
- Send your student an e-mail.
- Discuss the importance of how majors and academic decisions relate to your work.
- Discuss career trends and opportunities within your field.



52 Ideas

one for each week of the year

1. Set your mentoring goals together.
2. Tackle some homework.
3. Make dinner together.
4. Go out for dinner together.
5. Make popcorn and talk.
6. Go to a movie.
7. Go to a concert.
8. Shoot some hoops.
9. Go to the library together.
10. Just hang out.
11. Figure out how to program your VCR.
12. Learn about pop music.
13. Talk about life.
14. Give a tour of your current job.
15. Talk about your very first job.
16. Talk about planning a career.
17. Plan a career.
18. Get together with friends from work.
19. Take tours of friends' jobs.
20. Visit a local technical school.
21. Visit a community college.
22. Talk about college.
23. Talk with colleagues about college.
24. Sit in on some evening classes.
25. Work on applications together.
26. Explore financial aid options.
27. Work on a resume.
28. Talk about dressing for success.
29. Do a pretend job interview.
30. Talk about how to look for a job.
31. Talk about where to find a job.
32. Find a summer job.
33. Set up a work internship.
34. Talk about networking.
35. Talk about what it takes to get ahead.
36. Talk about health insurance.
37. Talk about taxes.
38. Talk about balancing work and life.
39. Talk about balancing a checkbook.
40. Talk about balancing a budget.
41. Talk about living within one's means.
42. Talk about credit cards.
43. Go bargain hunting.
44. Plan a week's worth of meals.
45. Do a week's grocery shopping together.
46. Go holiday shopping.
47. Write "thank you" notes.
48. Go to a house of worship.
49. Celebrate a friend's religious holiday.
50. Talk about relationships.
51. Talk about personal values.
52. Talk about the future.



Tips for Students

1. Maintain regular contact

Keep the momentum going by maintaining regular contact. Otherwise the relationship will dwindle. Set a regular schedule if possible. For example, you may want to meet for lunch or send your mentor an e-mail every third Friday. You should also try to attend FastStart events together and try to connect with your alumni mentors during vacations

2. Respect your mentor's time

Most mentors are very busy people with a lot of demands on their time. Make the most of your meetings together. Do not take additional time or call at a late hour without your mentor's permission.

3. Internalize what you apply and learn

You can learn a great deal from your mentor. He or she may offer suggestions or advice. Try out the suggestions. Take the advice to heart. Let the mentor know what the outcome was. Mentors like to see the results of their efforts.

4. Follow through

Follow through with what you say you're going to do. This means returning phone calls, showing up for meetings, replying to e-mail messages, and so forth. **Nothing is more discouraging to a mentor than a protégé who does not follow through.** If you cannot keep a commitment, let your mentor know as soon as possible. Try to make alternative arrangements.

5. Show appreciation

Let your mentor know how much you appreciate him or her. A "thank you" will go a long way toward nurturing your relationship. You can show your appreciation in person, over the phone, or in writing. A handwritten note is especially impressive because you took the time to write it and your mentor can keep and remember it. Be specific in your positive feedback. Let your mentor know what you liked about what he or she did and how it helped you.

6. Give back

Think of ways you could provide assistance to your mentor. Maybe you have an hour or two to help your mentor out with a big project. By giving back you build a mutually beneficial relationship.



Tips for Mentors

- 1. Make your mentoring relationship a priority**

Research shows that effective mentoring can be done in as little as two hours a month. Making time to mentor someone is worthwhile.
- 2. Meet over breakfast or lunch**

You have to eat anyway, so why not meet over lunch. You can make better use of your time by combining these activities. You can enjoy a meal and discuss important issues with your student.
- 3. Talk with your student about your profession**

Discuss your projects at work. Do you have a meeting that could be a valuable learning experience for your student? Why not invite him or her along? Just take a few minutes to prep the student before the meeting and debrief him or her afterwards to make the experience mutually satisfying. Even if your student cannot attend a meeting, sharing information about what you are doing at work is a great thing to do with your student.
- 4. Have your student help you on a project**

Consider having your student help you on an important project. The help you receive will make up for the time you invest in instructing your student. A project can be a great learning tool.
- 5. Help your student network**

Introduce your student to others in the organization that can help him or her. Perhaps there are friends, colleagues, or others in the community your student would benefit from meeting. Your only time investment will be making a few introductions. These introductions can happen in person or through e-mail.
- 6. Help your student prepare for a summer job or internship**

Offer to review your student's resume or cover letter. You might also make suggestions on good work experiences to help prepare them for work after college.