BetterGrads

Starter-kit

Students who do BetterGrads are happy.

What is BetterGrads?

BetterGrads is a better way for students and alumni to connect. BetterGrads helps students succeed in college, career, and personally through online mentoring, information-sharing, and a college prep club. Started a student and alumni-led movement at Granada High School in the East Bay of the SF Bay Area in 2009, the BetterGrads mentoring program and College 101 Blog have grown to reach thousands of students throughout the country.

Connect with great alumni. Ask questions. Achieve your dreams and support your peers along the way. Transform your school's college going culture.

What will I learn?

As part of the BetterGrads program, students and alumni work through a modest curriculum that covers the ins-and-outs of college: SATs, financial aid, transitions, classes and majors, choosing a college, college essays and admissions, scholarship applications, study habits, parties and social live, clubs and activities, internships, careers, and more.

www.bettergrads.org

At the end of the program year, participants can answer at least 4 of the following 5 questions:
- Is it worthwhile for me to go to college?
- How can I afford a college education?
- How do I choose the college that is right for me?
- How can I make the most of my college experience?
- What is the meaning of life?

What is the commitment level?

It varies. Each mentor-mentee pair and chapter can establish its own expectations. Mentors and mentees engage each other online and offline through emails, phone calls, group meetings, and the occasional school site visit. We've found that mentor-mentee pairs that communicate at least 2-4 times a month get the most out of the program.

We have put together an activity log template which mentors and mentees can use to keep track of engagement and assess progress over the course of the program year: http://bit.ly/betterlogs. We suggest monthly group phone calls on the curriculum and Google Groups for mentors, mentees, and all participants to stay engaged.

Am I qualified to be a mentor?

If you are a college student, recent graduate, or young professional, then probably yes. We suggest that all mentors are given a basic training of the program's curriculum, expectations, and the material in this brochure. Mentors have access to a reference library of nearly 250 articles on all aspects of college, written by college students and young professionals and located on our website, bettergrads.org. And BetterGrads' volunteers and national team are available for advice.

Mentors are *not* expected to be experts on college admissions or financial aid. Students should consult college admissions and financial aid officers with specific questions. Mentors are college students and young professionals who went to the high school and/or live/work in the area. They are equipped to offer a valuable perspective to high school students based on their near-to-peer status. As such, the program curriculum is *loose* and the training is kept to a *minimum*.

What is the program structure?

Curriculum. The curriculum was designed by mentees, mentors, school officials, and our staff to reflect the college application and admission cycle and the academic calendar. The curriculum forms a loose structure to the program and guides mentor-mentee pairs. http://bit.ly/PAuTno

College Prep Club. Mentees should consider organizing a College Prep Club (CPC) on campus to discuss the program and curriculum, share progress, and brainstorm ways to share what they are learning with the wider campus. The students in our pilot mentoring program at Granada High School (Livermore, CA) did this, and made an impact in the college-going culture at their school. These mentees formed a club for the mentoring program, outlined expectations of

program participants in a constitution, elected officers, organized on-campus events, and held bi-monthly meetings. The club was called CPC2012, short for the College Prep Club 2012, with the year indicating when members will graduate from high school and enroll in college.

On-site program coordinator. Most schools require that clubs have an advisor, and we think this is important whether students form a CPC or not. The on-site program coordinator can be a college/career counselor, teacher, or administrator, and helps support the BetterGrads program.

Mentors. Each mentor should be assigned a mentee of the same gender if possible. Efforts should also be made to match pairs based on career goals, school, academic interests, and background. Ideally, every mentor-mentee relationship will last at least until the mentee enrolls in college, and thereafter encourage lifelong friendships.

How can we protect the privacy and safety of all participants?

The privacy and safety of our mentees and mentors is a top priority. All mentors must undergo mandatory online criminal background checks and identity checks before they are eligible to be paired with a mentee. Regular check-ins by the on-site program coordinator, agreement forms (mentor, mentee, and parent/guardian), and group activities are elements of our program intended to protect the privacy and safety of all program participants.

However, the BetterGrads national staff is not responsible for the safety and privacy of your chapter's program participants. We encourage students and alumni speak with school administrators to discuss how to create a safe and respectful program.

We offer the following suggestions to help ensure the comfort and well-being of all program participants and to provide recourse should any inappropriate behavior occur:

- Mentors and mentees should not meet outside of the school-site without the supervision of school staff or the permission of school staff and at least one other program participant present. All off-campus meetings must occur in a public location (restaurant, cafe, etc.).

- We expect mentors and mentees to behave appropriately and use common sense in all interactions, in-person and online, via text, telephone call, email, instant message, and video chat. Participants in this program may request that some of their personal contact information not be shared with their mentor/mentee (sharing an email address is necessary).

- Mentors must agree to release background check status to BetterGrads and its affiliates. We maintain confidentiality of the results. By signing and returning the Mentor Agreement Form, mentors indicate that they agree to submit to all safety standards to be considered for this program, including additional interviews and reference checks as requested.

- Mentees must submit the online Mentee Agreement Form and their parent / legal guardian must return or submit the Parent / Legal Guardian Consent Form to participate in this program.

- All program participants are required to follow the Emergency Protocols and Non-Emergency Protocols to handle serious and life-threatening situations. Furthermore, any situation or behavior that is inappropriate or questionable should be reported immediately to the on-site program coordinator and the directors of BetterGrads.

- Program coordinators reserve the right to refuse any applicant for this program. We strongly suggest a zero tolerance policy: any program participant that initiates or engages in inappropriate or objectionable behavior deemed unfitting of a mentor or mentee is subject to expulsion from the program, and possible further disciplinary action.

What are suggested good practice protocols for emergency and non-emergency situations?

In general, mentors **must** notify authorities if:
- A mentee is being harmed in any way;
- A mentee is harming others in any way;
- A mentee is going to harm him or herself in any way.

We advise mentors and mentees to use common sense on how to respond to a situation and determine its severity. For example: a mentee's idle chat about being frustrated with a parent would probably not be a reason to call for help; a mentee's idle chat about contemplating suicide due to their frustration would be a reason to report the incident and take further actions as appropriate to the situation. If in doubt, the mentor or mentee should error on the side of caution by asking for help, reporting the incident, and/or contacting the authorities. Confidentiality and trust are important, but the health and safety of program participants are the top priorities.

In the following section, the terms "Emergency" and "Non-Emergency" refer to whether the matter is of *immediate urgency* or not, and is to be used as a rough guide only. Non-Emergency situations can be very serious and potentially life-threatening, and should be dealt with swiftly.

Protocol for Emergency Situations:
Examples: suicide attempt / threats, alcohol / drug overdose, imminent life-threatening situation
Step 1: Call 911 (if necessary).
Step 2: Contact the relevant emergency contact organization:
- The US National Suicide and Crisis Hotlines
    - o http://suicidehotlines.com/national.html (helpful list of crisis support hotlines)
    - o 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433) – toll-free, 24 / 7
    - o 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255) – toll-free, 24 / 7
- (*record information on local suicide and crisis intervention hotlines / centers here*)
    - o

Step 3: Report the incident as soon as possible to the on-site program coordinator and the BetterGrads national staff.

Protocol for Non-Emergency Situations:
Examples: suicide talk / ideation, anything to do with abuse, depression, alcohol / drug problem
Step 1: Listen empathically to the person and help them feel reassured.
Step 2: Ask questions to gain intelligence about the situation (who, where, what circumstances).
Step 3: Make contact with a counseling service:
- *(record information on the counseling service numbers at the partner high school here)*
    - o
- *(record information on local family and teenage counseling hotlines / centers here)*
    - o
Step 4: Ask the person to contact the counseling service provider directly.
Step 5: Report the incident as soon as possible to the on-site program coordinator and the BetterGrads national staff.

Do you have a group facilitator outline to provide me with ideas for how I can lead an effective discussion?

Sure do!

Facilitator's main tasks:
- (1) Set Agenda for call
    - o Based on curriculum (link…)
    - o Based on solicited feedback from emails (announcements, topics)
- (2) Communicate conference call information
    - o Send emails to groups
        - ▪ When meeting is scheduled
            - • Link/phone number
            - • Date, time, length
            - • Curriculum topic; solicit additional agenda items & announcements (e.g. scholarships…)
        - ▪ One week ahead of time
            - • Link/phone number
            - • Date, time, length
            - • Curriculum topic; solicit additional agenda items & announcements (e.g. scholarships…)
        - ▪ One day ahead of time
            - • Link/phone number
            - • Date, time, length
            - • Agenda outline
        - ▪ Day of

- Link/phone number
- Date, time, length
- Agenda outline
- (3) Facilitate call
  - Phone call introduction (5 minutes)
    - Record participants as they enter
    - Begin meeting (roughly 2-3 minutes after the start time so that no time is wasted)
    - Thank everyone for being on the call; introduce self as facilitator for the call
  - State agenda (try to keep simple, 2-3 main items) (1-3 minutes)
    - Announcements (based on solicitations; e.g. scholarships, recruitment, etc.)
    - Review last meeting and last activity (brief)
      - Solicit feedback; Ask mentee/mentor by name to share experience.)
    - Curriculum topic of the day – X
    - Activity for next month
    - Recruit next facilitator (brief)
      - Identify interest and then follow-up after conference call. (Objective: don't need to prolong the call with these details.)
    - Wrap up
      - Summarize announcement, curriculum, action item for next month, new facilitator
    - Thank everyone for participating and look forward to next meeting. Invite additional comments online.
  - Facilitate transitioning from topic to topic (20 minutes)
    - Open topic: curriculum
      - Invite participants to comment (ask everyone to ID self when talking)
    - During call
      - Invite final comments on a topic
      - Wrap up topics if they are taking a long time (need to keep on schedule)
      - Recognize lulls; invite more comments; if nothing said, move onto next topic
    - Discussion of curriculum item
    - Suggest activities for following month
    - Recruit new facilitator for next meeting
      - Arrange email or phone communication with next facilitator. Arrange to share facilitator document. The next facilitator then takes ownership of the document, revises and recruits next facilitator.

▪ Wrap up meeting accomplishments; next steps
- (4) After meeting
  ○ Email group meeting minutes; post meeting minutes to google group
  ○ Follow-up with new facilitator to see if any questions about how to facilitate.

How should we make matches between mentors and mentees?

We suggest you make a list of 5-10 alumni who you were connected with while they were students, who are older siblings or friends of older siblings, or who the career counselors and teachers remember. Ask them to be mentors and help find other alumni participants.

Here's what we did:
- In Year 1, we recruited friends as mentors, and asked them to fill out a comprehensive survey noting which colleges/grad schools they attended, their activities/sports in college, and their majors. Mentees took a similar survey about their prospective colleges, activities, and majors. We attempted to align the mentees' prospects with mentors' experiences, and also made sure to pair people by gender as well.
- In Year 2, all mentors for this class were alumni of the same high school, who filled out a survey similar to the previous year's mentors. This time, students selected their own matches, based on college, career, common interests. Final matches were made directly by the program's administrator. BG's role was to introduce the final pairs to each other, providing brief bios and outlining expectations of the program.

How can technology be used to connect and facilitate relationships between mentees and mentors?

- Google Groups mailing lists
  - All Mentors + All Mentees; Just Mentors; Just Mentees
- Free conference calls (most important... freeconference.net
- Skype group calls or Google Hangouts
- Mentor-mentee 1-on-1 communications occur via personal email addresses and phone numbers, including text messages (up to each mentee to decide whether or not to give personal cell phone number)

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