

2023-2024

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*Peer Mentor Handbook*

**THE BRIDGE**

An inclusive support program  
for students with autism

\*Revisions may be ongoing throughout the year. The current handbook may be found live on the School of Education homepage <https://education.olemiss.edu/>

## PREFACE

This handbook clarifies policies, expectations, and guidelines for individuals involved in The Bridge Program mentoring process at The University of Mississippi School of Education.

**The Bridge program office is located in Guyton 231. Communication concerning experiences should be directed to:**

### **The Bridge Program Office**

Guyton 231

662-915-6507

Email: [soebridge@olemiss.edu](mailto:soebridge@olemiss.edu)

The University of Mississippi does not discriminate against any student protected by law based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, age, veteran status, sexual orientation, or genetic information.

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# **The Bridge Program**

## **Welcome**

The staff of the Bridge program at Ole Miss are delighted that you have chosen to be a mentor. As a mentor, you will finish your time with this program with a basic understanding of disabilities and an awareness of the challenges those with disabilities might face. Your time as a mentor will help not only you and your mentee but also teach others how to embrace and include students with disabilities. Your goal is to make the transition to college easier for students with autism.

You will be part of a larger network that these students can count on when they need a hand. Mentors will help increase their mentee's self-advocacy skills and expand their academic, functional, and social skills so they become part of a larger community.

## **Vision**

We work to empower students with disabilities, so they become successful, independent, self-advocating members of society.

## **Mission**

The mission of the Bridge program is to create an inclusive environment for students with autism, and to uplift and support them so they can develop the social and functional skills needed to transition into adulthood.

## Program Contacts

If you are unable to attend a scheduled meeting, class, or event please give as much notice as possible so an alternative arrangement can be made for the student you are assigned to. You must email the professor or supervisor involved and copy the following team members to the email.

**Whitney Drewrey**

Program Coordinator, Clinical Instructor of Special Education

662-915-6507

Guyton 231

[wndrewre@olemiss.edu](mailto:wndrewre@olemiss.edu)

**Dr. Denise Soares**

Assistant Dean, Director of Graduate Studies, Professor of Special Education, and

Interim Director of the National Center for School-University Partnerships

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Guyton 228

[dasoares@olemiss.edu](mailto:dasoares@olemiss.edu)

**Mary Bramlett**

Program Manager

662-915-5986

Guyton 229

[mgram@olemiss.edu](mailto:mgram@olemiss.edu)

## Peer Mentor Expectations

### ◆ **Commit**

When creating your schedule with the program manager, be sure to commit to hours and activities you will be able to attend. If you are unable to attend a meeting, class, or event you have signed up for be sure to let your mentee and/or program coordinator aware.

### ◆ **Be on time**

You are a role model, and punctuality is a trait to teach your mentee. It is important to be at your designated meeting area or event on time in case the student needs assistance prior to.

### ◆ **Keep a log of hours and notes**

Keep a log to document your time spent together along with notes. These will help when meeting with the program coordinator to solve issues and work through any adjustments that need to be made within the program. There is a sample time sheet located on page 11 in this manual. Please email your notes weekly to The Bridge Program. [soebridge@olemiss.edu](mailto:soebridge@olemiss.edu).

### ◆ **Follow classroom and campus rules** (*refer to University of Mississippi M book*)

You should be a positive role model for your mentee. Follow the University handbook and specific classroom rules. Set appropriate examples of what a college student should and should not do.

### ◆ **Confidentiality**

Any paperwork regarding disabilities and private information regarding your mentee that you may see should not be discussed with others without the student's permission.

### ◆ **Termination**

The Bridge program reserves the right to terminate any mentor whose behavior is not consistent with these expectations. The Program Director, Program Manager, and Assistant Dean are responsible for making this determination. The mentor has the right to appeal the decision to the Dean of the School of Education

## Peer Mentor Etiquette

### Tips to avoid basic etiquette errors:

- ◆ It is okay to ask to assist a student that looks like they may need help. Ask and then follow the students' directions on how to help. If they decline assistance, do not take it personally. Politely move on.
- ◆ Talk directly to the student, making eye contact to reinforce this skill that can sometimes be uncomfortable for a student with autism.
- ◆ Do not speak to a fellow mentor, professor, or supervisor about the student or on behalf of the student if the student is present. Involve them in the conversation and allow them to answer questions for themselves unless they ask for your help.
- ◆ Use your normal speech tone and pattern. The student will let you know if you need to slow down, speak up, or repeat something.
- ◆ Be mindful that not all disabilities are visible.
- ◆ If a student needs extra time completing a task, no matter how minor that may be, be mindful of that instead of rushing them.
- ◆ Allow wait time for a student that has difficulty communicating. Don't assume you know what they are going to say. Be patient and clarify that you understand the message they are trying to communicate.
- ◆ Praise the student for accomplishments and goals met like you would any other student your age, so you are not perceived as patronizing.
- ◆ Allow the student to discuss their disability when they are ready. Remember the *person-first* concept? Get to know them as a person first.
- ◆ Avoid the term *handicapped*. Use *disability* and *special needs* instead.

## **Are you an effective mentor?**

- ◆ Do you maintain eye contact and give your student full attention when they are talking?
- ◆ Do you use effective listening skills, like nodding, to ensure you understood what you were told?
- ◆ Do you help the student reach their goals in academic, social, and/or career areas?
- ◆ Do you give advice about organization, goal setting, and prioritizing?
- ◆ Do you use your own life experiences to help the student avoid errors in decision-making?
- ◆ Do you point out good decisions that the student has made?
- ◆ Do you make suggestions in areas of improvement by giving constructive criticism without trying to change their personal character?
- ◆ Do you encourage, regardless of the situation?
- ◆ Do you genuinely care about the well-being of your student?



## Mentoring Ineffectively

**You are not playing the role of a:**

◆ **Parent**

The student you are assigned to is an adult just like you. They are learning to navigate life after high school and gain independence. Be there to assist and help develop the skills necessary. Think of yourself more as a friend, big brother, or big sister instead of a parent.

◆ **Professional counselor or therapist**

The student will likely discuss sensitive issues with you, and it is okay to talk and give advice. If it is something that is dominating time and resources or may be deemed dangerous, be sure to communicate with one of the program contacts or refer the student to an appropriate professional. See Resources Page 12.

◆ **Social worker**

You are here for the student academically, socially, and vocationally. Do not get involved in any domestic situations. Contact one of the program contacts for the appropriate protocol if an emergency arises. Links to campus counseling centers are below should your mentee need help finding resources.

◆ **Bank**

Students are responsible for all their own supplies and equipment for classes and events. You are not responsible monetarily, in any way, for the students. (We all forget money from time to time and may ask to borrow money for a snack, etc.) If a student asks to borrow money and you decide to lend it, it is your responsibility to make arrangements for the return of the money. The Bridge does not advocate for the exchange of money between students and mentors.

## Peer Mentor Settings

You may be working with a student in any of the following settings during your mentorship. You will work with your program coordinator and manager to determine the best fit for you.

### ◆ **Classroom**

If you are a classroom mentor you can be a support by teaching organizational skills, meeting deadlines, communication techniques with the professor, following a syllabus, note taking, and preparing for exams and assignments. You are not there to complete work for your mentee, but to guide them. You can help rephrase information so they may understand it better. You can study together, but they will be expected to take exams or quizzes on their own. They may have accommodations that are provided by the professor through Student Disability Services (SDS).

They are responsible for contacting SDS to obtain those. You are more than welcome to help guide them through the process at SDS if they need assistance. Teach them appropriate classroom etiquette (looking at the professor, no cellphone use during class, no food or drink if that is the classroom rule).

### ◆ **Social**

You may have the opportunity to mentor a student at a social event on campus. The student you are assigned to will complete an interest inventory when they arrive on campus but take the time to get to know them and their specific interests. Search campus for activities, clubs, events, games, and/or extra-curricular classes that you might like to participate in together. Introduce them to your friends and others. You are a bridge for them. You may need to practice conversational skills with them before you go to an event.

### ◆ **Dorm**

Dorm buddies can serve as the student's point of contact for help navigating dorm life. Check on them frequently. Help them with things like organization, routines, using microwaves, washing clothes, grabbing a snack at night, how to occupy idle time, safety, evacuation procedures, etc. Introduce them to people around them. Again, you are a bridge to help them expand their network. Make sure to introduce them to others that have their best interest at heart.

### ◆ **Workplace**

As a workplace or internship mentor, you may support the student and assist in teaching the duties they are assigned. Also, teach social skills and good workmanship skills (punctuality, procedures, how to respond to the supervisor, and accept critique or direction appropriately).

## Time Log and Notes

As a mentor it is important to document the time you spend with your mentee for several reasons. Documentation helps us reflect on the effectiveness of the program and make any adjustments to programming or goals for our students. Notes help you grow as an effective mentor by picking up on trends and characteristics from visit to visit to make needed modifications. We use the notes for program and event planning based on interests picked up through conversations you both have. A sample is provided below. The link for the form can be located on the program page or in the resources section of this handbook.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Member Name</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Notes</b>
11/1/23	Whitney Drewrey	Met for yogurt at YaYa's on the square	This was a new experience for Whitney. She has never traveled off campus so I was proud of her for trying something new. She met me there. We practiced using the parking meters. Last week when we met to study at the Union, I noticed she gets very anxious when a new person joins the conversation so today we talked about some good ways to start a conversation. I modeled it and we practiced.

**Time/Notes Log**

**Mentor Name**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Member Name</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Notes</b>

<b>Date</b>	<b>Member Name</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Notes</b>

## Resources

<b>University of Mississippi M Book</b>	<a href="https://olemiss.edu/info/2023-2024_Accessible_MBook_1.0_Aug_2023.pdf">https://olemiss.edu/info/2023-2024_Accessible_MBook_1.0_Aug_2023.pdf</a>
<b>Counseling services on campus</b>	<b>COPE</b> <a href="http://cope.olemiss.edu/">http://cope.olemiss.edu/</a>  <b>University Counseling</b> <a href="https://counseling.olemiss.edu/">https://counseling.olemiss.edu/</a>  <b>William Magee Center</b> <a href="https://magee-center.olemiss.edu/">https://magee-center.olemiss.edu/</a>  <b>Student Health Center</b> <a href="https://healthcenter.olemiss.edu/">https://healthcenter.olemiss.edu/</a>  <b>UMatter</b> <a href="https://umatter.olemiss.edu/">https://umatter.olemiss.edu/</a>
<b>Student Disability Services</b>	<a href="https://sds.olemiss.edu/">https://sds.olemiss.edu/</a>
<b>The Writing Center</b>	<a href="https://writingcenter.olemiss.edu/">https://writingcenter.olemiss.edu/</a>