



PARENT ORIENTATION GUIDE



Program for Advancement of Learning (PAL)

Welcome to PAL!

Over the years we have had the pleasure of working with thousands of bright, talented students with Specific Learning Disorders (SLD) or ADHD or Executive Function weakness who have come to recognize their academic potential. Although many students come to us with histories of academic difficulty, we are continually amazed by the brilliance that they can demonstrate. We look for it.

What is unique about PAL?

The professors making up the PAL faculty are learning specialists with advanced degrees who are an integral part of the college. Approximately 15% - 20% of each entering class participates in PAL, and many Curry faculty are familiar with students' learning differences.

PAL was the first to offer this unique program focusing on strengths and the whole person. Students earn credit the first year. Highly individualized instruction addresses coursework, strategies, and related challenges. Based on research*, the process involves honest problem-solving learning conversations on how each student learns best (metacognition is the heart of the process).

CURRY COLLEGE

We believe in the power of mentoring, reflecting, self-understanding, and self-advocacy. Learning relationships are collaborative. Instruction is embedded in coursework challenges so that it is practical and meaningful.

The Role of Students

Students make a commitment to attend PAL regularly and report truthfully about their performance in classes. Attendance is critical. They are asked to engage in meaningful reflection on their learning and be willing to explore new habits or mindsets.

The Role of Parents

Parents can support independence by allowing their children to advocate for themselves. This is sometimes a difficult transition for parents who have been strong successful advocates. Parents can help by encouraging the use of PAL for assistance and guidance. If there is difficulty communicating with a PAL professor, parents should encourage the student to contact the PAL Student and Parent Coordinator.

The Role of PAL Professors

PAL professors operate from a strength-based focus, guiding students to choose strategies based on their unique learning style. Together, they assess challenges and strategies. Other learning conversations might address issues of motivation, keeping engaged in learning, and career interest. PAL professors help to develop self-advocacy and other individualized goals set collaboratively. Course material serves as the springboard for PAL work.

Questions Commonly Asked

Q: What is the nature of the support offered by PAL?

A: Students meet regularly (2 or 3 times per week) with a PAL professor in a combination of individual and/or small group sessions and are helped to understand their learning, strengths, difficulties, habits, and mindset. Based on that understanding, strategies are chosen and reviewed for effectiveness. Student self-understanding and empowerment are at the core of the highly personalized process. Practical instruction using coursework is meaningful and builds confidence.

Q: Will PAL professors regularly contact classroom professors to monitor progress?

A: Generally, no. We rely heavily on student reporting of their needs so that they are in control. Accurate reporting about attendance in class and other matters is critical. If there is

reason to suspect that a student's report is untrue, we may seek additional information; however, it is the student's responsibility to report truthfully about their grades, attendance, and performance. We include students in conversations about them. Our goal is to develop students' ownership of learning.

Q: *What kind of feedback do students get about their performance in classes?*

A: In addition to grades on homework, papers, and exams, as well as electronic Academic Alerts sent from faculty, students will receive feedback on each class through Canvas and their Midterm Grade Report which will guide their work for the second half of the term.

Q: *My son/daughter doesn't always detect academic trouble. How will PAL help if students say that everything is fine?*

A: By requiring that students attend PAL on a regular basis, students are faced with "reality checks" and asked to address issues that they may otherwise avoid. Discussions about coursework are designed to uncover realistic reflection on their progress. This might be a priority goal for a semester if it has been a problem in the past.

Q: *Will parents receive regular communication from PAL professors?*

A: It is central to our philosophy that we empower students as they develop responsibility. In college, students will serve as point people for all conversations about them. We limit conversation "about" them and encourage it "with" them. You may initiate contact with the PAL professor, but please note that, depending on circumstances, a return contact may be made once the student is present. According to federal law, written permission to speak to parents is needed for any conversations relating to student performance. General conversations about PAL and our expectations are welcome! At the end of the first three weeks of the semester, parents of students who are not attending regularly receive an email from the program indicating this and expressing concern. Students must sign the *PAL Consent for Release of Information* form before parents can receive this information. Contact the PAL office for information about this form.

Q: *What should I do if my son/daughter expresses unhappiness with PAL?*

A: Please have them speak to the PAL professor about any dissatisfaction. The program is based on student input, so we encourage feedback. If additional assistance is needed, the PAL Student and Parent Coordinator can often help.

Q: *Can a student fail PAL?*

A: Yes. Attendance is essential to success, is not optional, and constitutes a significant part of a PAL final grade. Student participation and cooperation are also important elements of PAL grading.

Q: *Why might a student struggle academically even with PAL support?*

A: There are several reasons why this might occur. The most common is poor attendance. Another is misrepresenting performance and attendance in other classes. We rely heavily on student report and expect truthful responses. A third reason is psychological, substance abuse, or personal issues that are not being addressed by appropriate professionals outside of PAL. Another reason is the desire to be independent and choosing to withhold information or commitment.

Q: *Is course tutorial provided?*

A: Instruction is embedded in coursework materials brought to PAL. Classwork challenges initiate discussions about strategies and related issues. PAL goes beyond the classic tutoring that is offered via Curry's academic tutoring services and most typical college support programs.

Q: *Do PAL courses offer credit? Are they graded?*

A: PAL 1190 and PAL 1200 are the 1.5 credit courses that all first year students in PAL are required to take. Grades of "P" and "F" are earned and can impact the grade point average. Credit-bearing full-time or part-time PAL options are available. Both Summer PAL (for entering students)(4 credits) and Connections for Learning (PAL 1195)(3 credits) are offered outside of the regular academic year; students earn letter grades.

Q: *What helpful questions might I ask my son or daughter?*

A: Here are some suggestions:

- (1) Have you missed classes? Are you attending PAL regularly?

Attendance is critical to success at Curry.

- (2) What did you get for midterm grades?

This allows some independence but provides a reality check for the rest of the term.

Q: *How often do students meet with PAL professors?*

A: PAL meetings usually occur twice or three times per week in combinations of one-to-one, group, or pairs depending on individual needs and arrangements.

Q: *What should I know that PAL professors don't do?*

A: We don't write or rewrite papers, do research for students, provide answers to take-home exams, give extensive content tutoring, directly monitor classroom attendance or performance, make wake-up calls, send reminders about homework, supervise medication, or act in loco parentis. Fostering student growth and an internal locus of control in these are core to our philosophy.

Final thoughts...

We are always happy to address your concerns and provide guidance that might be helpful.

Best Wishes from PAL!

Janis Peters, Ed.D.

PAL Student and Parent Coordinator

jpeters@curry.edu

617.333.2035

* Key Research Foundations:

Transformation & Adult Learning; Metacognition, Reflective Practice; Mentoring; Emotions & Learning; Educational Therapy; Compensatory Strategies; Attention & Self-Regulation & Executive Functioning