

Parent Orientation Guide

Program for Advancement of Learning

Welcome to PAL!

Over the years we have had the pleasure of working with thousands of bright, talented students with ADHD, language-based LDs, and 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 20% of each entering class participates in PAL, and many Curry faculty are familiar with students' learning differences. Curry provides quality and broadp based caring.

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).

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.

Students' Role

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.

Parents' Role

The parents' role in supporting independence is to allow students 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 Dr. Janis Peters, PAL Student and Parent Coordinator.

PAL Professors' Role

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 them 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 styles, 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 "early alerts" sent from faculty and overseen by the Academic Dean's Office, students will receive feedback on each class through their Midterm Progress Report. This is accessible via the Curry Web Information System (CWIS) by the student and academic advisor who is often the PAL professor. Students receive an "S" for satisfactory, a "U" for unsatisfactory" or "F" for failing to 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, 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 first-year 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, Dr. Janis Peters, PAL Student and Parent Coordinator, can often help.

Q: *Can a student fail PAL?*

A: Yes. Attendance is essential to success and 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: *How can PAL help with motivation?*

A: Some students appear unmotivated due to fear of failure from the past. Some have a mindset of “learned helplessness.” We enter into learning conversations to develop goals, feel hope, and experience caring and respect. Engaged learning can change lives. Often success is itself a motivator. We believe strongly in the importance of the mentor who validates students and makes success seem possible.

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 at the Academic Enrichment Center and most typical college support programs.

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: *Is more time possible?*

A: Professors have office hours for additional assistance. On a regular basis, the Academic Enrichment Center, with professional and trained peer content area tutors, or additional paid PAL sessions are recommended. Please consult with Dr. Peters about additional hours.

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

A: PAL 1190 and PAL 1200 are the 1.5 credit courses that all first year PAL students are required to take. Grades of "P" and "F" are earned and can impact the grade point average. Courses beyond the first year are non-credit, earn, a "P" or "F" grade, but do not impact the GPA. Full-time or part-time PAL are options that can be repeated beyond the first year.

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: *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 performance, make wake-up calls, send reminders about homework, supervise medication, or act in loco parentis. Fostering student growth in these is 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!

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

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