Hello everyone, welcome to the Online Student Peer Mentoring Program pilot orientation. My name is Anthony Wheeler, I am the Online Student Mentor Specialist with Lehman College’s Office of Online Education, and I will be taking just a few minutes to walk us through the program, its purpose, and how we anticipate it functioning within your course throughout the term. A little about me: I am a Ph.D. Student of Urban Education at The Graduate Center, with a background in Digital Humanities, Interactive Technology and Pedagogy, and English Education.

To start, what is the Online Student Peer Mentoring Program? As you read briefly in the call for pilot participants: The program has been established to support Lehman’s large community of online students as you engage with both teaching & learning and campus resources remotely. Upon my joining the Lehman community, the Office of Online Ed conducted a series of campus-wide interviews/focus groups to collect data to learn more about where online students have been struggling, which led to identifying the need for additional assistance with communicating with proper campus support units.

We used the information collected from different networks throughout the college to scaffold the mentoring program in a way that streamlines the delivery of specific extensions of support to online students at appropriate points throughout the semester, in addition to offering technical support, directing you towards resources on study strategies, providing you with appropriate protocols for overcoming any obstacles you may encounter in an online setting. Secondly, I have crafted the first edition of Lehman College’s Online Student Handbook (2021-2022), which is a collection of information for students new to both Lehman and CUNY as you begin the process of preparing for their semester online. I’ll take us through the handbook quickly now.

*Handbook Viewing Begins*

This handbook was designed specifically for students participating in the mentoring program, but a public version is available on the Lehman Online site for students and faculty who might want a copy. It opens with a brief introductory letter to you, the participating students, outlining who I am, what the program is, and how it will be of service to them.
In looking at the Table of Contents, which will guide you through the rest of the orientation, after the mentoring program description, we begin describing what online learning looks like at Lehman, including a breakdown of the various modalities. It should be noted that the book is designed so that it flows sequentially through the enrollment process at Lehman and refers to resources as you begin checking off boxes. The handbook then guides you through navigating the claiming of their many CUNY accounts, reviewing university policies, and establishing their Financial Aid rewards.

The handbook also features sections on preparing specifically for online learning. It directs you to several videos/modules that the college and Office of Online Education have established to help prepare you for succeeding online, in addition to information on accessing the various materials and support for their course specifically. You will notice pointers that link to a campus catalog at the end of the document throughout the book. The catalog features a few community resources and academic support units, with a plethora of links for locating services efficiently.

Lastly, the book features two pages on the technological services and platforms at Lehman. This ranges from pointing students towards resources for ensuring their smooth access to class through obtaining wifi, accessing their email, and logging in to Lehman 360 to use campus features online. Blackboard has a page of its own, describing how to log into the platform, and how to log in through their mobile devices, for accessibility. To ensure you that you have swift technical support available, there is a message included about contacting the Academic IT Center for help. The book closes with the catalog and tips for succeeding online from students at various levels.

*Closing Paragraphs*

For the duration of the pilot, I will be acting as your peer mentor. If successful, we plan to bring on student peer mentors in the following term to reach a wider range of students. In order to support you, as previously mentioned, I will be sending out regular communication blasts that include blurbs/links to resources based on what point in the semester we are at and what might be occurring at that time— for example, delivering specific extensions of tutoring support during midterms and finals or registration information at the time of class registration. Communication will be conducted via email,
or by Blackboard announcement. The added benefit of having me in your Blackboard course section is the ability to check in on everybody’s activity so that I can contact you with resources if we feel you may need additional support.

Through scaffolding this additional support into online learning communities, we believe that we can improve both student retention and academic outcomes by fostering a bridge between remote student learners and their abundance of community support services available at both Lehman and CUNY. The program is still in its infancy, so any questions, comments, or feedback are all welcomed and encouraged. Lastly, as we prepare to begin the semester, please take just a couple of minutes to fill out our intake survey, so that we have a better idea of your experience with learning online prior to joining us. Thank you!