

ASC Quarterly

Academic Support Center

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Mentoring

“Research shows that a student connecting with a committed adult makes all the difference in the motivation and success of the student.”

Dr. Albert Simone, RIT President, and Manuel Rivera, Superintendent of Rochester City School District

“When the mentoring experience is consciously and conscientiously grounded in learning, the likelihood that the mentoring relationship will become a satisfactory learning relationship for both mentoring partners dramatically improves.”

Lois J. Zachary, The Mentor's Guide.

Mentoring can be a powerful influence in shaping lives. It takes many forms – personal, educational, physical, professional. Mentoring also occurs in many different contexts. The Rochester community has many successful volunteer mentoring projects: Big Brothers and Sisters, Women Helping Girls, Literacy Volunteers. President Simone and Rochester City School District Superintendent Manuel Rivera are supporting a “Call to Arms” to enlist 10,000 volunteers to mentor students in the city schools. Likewise, the RIT community has mentoring programs in the North Star Center, the Women’s Center, and in fraternities and sororities. In the Academic Support Center, mentoring is a significant component of academic support programs and services. Even in this focused environment, the forms of mentoring vary depending on situations, goals, and timelines. In this issue of *ASC Quarterly*, we give an overview of the ways we incorporate mentoring into our programs. We have also included First Year Enrichment, since the FYE coaching component is a unique aspect of the course and represents a well-defined relationship that is closely aligned with mentoring.

On a continuum somewhere between professional counseling and well-intended advice from a friend lies mentoring, a term that can also include coaching, advocacy, service provision, and tutoring. Making distinctions among the terms is difficult, since they often are used interchangeably, and one term can be used for situations that vary in purpose, duration, and intensity. The following definition is useful in identifying common characteristics of the various mentoring relationships:

Mentoring is a caring, sharing, and helping relationship where one person invests time, know-how, and effort in enhancing another person's growth, knowledge, and skills, and responds to critical needs in the life of that person in ways that prepare the individual for greater productivity or achievement in the future. (Shea 13)

The best mentoring relationships and programs are developed and sustained by the following practices:

- **Training** – Mentors need to be clear on the goals of the relationship. They also need to be equipped with skills, such as active listening and reflection, and they need to have knowledge of referral sources. The mentee also must be prepared for the relationship with information about his/her obligations.
- **Guidelines** – Setting boundaries protects the mentee and the mentor, and ensures the integrity of the program itself. Agreement on details such as frequency and length of meetings, acceptable behaviors, and topics to be addressed set the tone for the relationship.
- **On-going support and supervision** – Since mentoring is a learning process for both mentor and mentee, and since human relationships are unpredictable, on-going training and support strengthens the mentor's understanding and ability to respond to the mentee. Support and supervision also maintain consistency within a program.
- **Celebration of milestones** – If mentoring is about growth, then stages of growth will be apparent and recognized. A mentor has an intimate appreciation for the mentee's successes, and can initiate a meaningful celebration that will encourage continued growth.
- **Closure** – A "caring, sharing, and helping relationship" is likely to create close personal ties, but mentoring relationships often cannot continue because of time and program constraints. In addition, the mentee's accomplishment of goals may be a signal that the time has come for the mentoring to end or at least change form. Preparing for closure with discussions about next steps or with a formal celebration can ease the inevitable sadness that comes with the farewells.

Our students have been quite articulate in expressing the value of mentoring, and you will read their words in other articles in this newsletter. Why does mentoring work so well, especially as an element of academic support? In general, students value the personal connection with an adult who understands them and cares about them. They appreciate a safe place where they can express their hopes, confront their fears, and explore their options. They don't want to be told what to do, but they generally recognize the benefit of having someone "travel the path" with them as they figure out for themselves what kind of adults they want to be.

Mentors also benefit. For some, the cliché of "giving back" rings true, and others see a way to share all the hard lessons they have learned in their own lives. They continue to accept mentoring assignments because of the rich rewards in seeing a young adult grow and flourish.

Mentoring of CRP students has always been a key component of the College Restoration Program. In fact, student program evaluations consistently note the significance of the mentoring relationship with over 93% of students rating their mentor relationship as excellent (71%) or good (23%).

The ASC's College Restoration Program is a single-quarter academic intervention program for students facing academic suspension or probation. CRP provides the most acute level of academic support through instruction in skills, career exploration, and personal development. In addition, the program assigns each student to a trained faculty/staff mentor with whom they meet on a weekly basis. The purpose of mentoring in CRP is to provide each student the opportunity to establish a meaningful relationship with a mentor who serves primarily as an academic advisor and advocate. Often personal issues will impact academic performance and the mentor may recommend that the student access additional support services, such as the Counseling Center. Every other week, the CRP mentors meet to case their students. Observations about student behavior, and suggestions for improvement along with referrals for additional resources are shared.

Mentoring in CRP combines trust and guidance with tough love. Because CRP is a short-term intensive academic intervention program, students are told that their experience may feel like "academic boot camp." CRP asks students to change or adjust their behaviors in order to succeed in the RIT academic environment. This is not an easy thing to do. The mentor acts as a coach, noting small successes each step of the way. However, many students start out strong only to experience a dip in performance around mid-quarter. Some wait until the end of the quarter to fall back into old harmful habits.

Relationship dynamics can have a power impact on struggling individuals. The key is connection—not isolation or punishment. CRP mentors are trained to be aware of certain behaviors and attitudes that impede academic success. Their job is to establish trust and provide guidance while not enabling old habits. The proximity of the mentoring relationship helps keep the student connected to the program as s/he copes with the inevitable challenges as the quarter unfolds.

The mentor keeps it real. As an academic advocate, s/he can provide to the student valuable guidance and personal encouragement that surpass what a teacher or parent or peer can provide. Students are urged to take advantage of this unique relationship that is grounded in personal respect, honesty, and genuine care for the student's growth and development.

Here's what past CRP students have said about their mentoring relationship:

- *"Since I was really open with my mentor, I found it to be really useful to me. I took advantage of having a mentor and talked to her about a lot of things -- academically and personally."*
- *"[She] was very effective in helping me stay focused. I enjoyed talking with her about my concerns and progress thus far."*
- *"Talking each week about performance made me feel comfortable about both my strengths and weaknesses."*
- *"My mentor relationship was useful to me because it provided me with valuable feedback to help keep me on track with academic goals."*
- *"It helped having a one on one conversation to personally address my individual problems."*
- *"My mentor helped me a lot during CRP. We had a relationship that was friendly and also productive. My mentor made me feel comfortable about discussing my academics and my problems."*

Concerns about academic performance are the driving force that brings students to the Academic Assessment Program. These concerns may be the student's concerns or the concerns of faculty, advisors or parents. There is no typical student profile. We see first year through graduate students, full-time and part-time students, as well as students with impeccable academic records to those who struggle to meet the Institute's academic standards.

The student meets with a faculty member for an extensive two-hour interview. At this interview we ask for detailed information about the student's educational background, learning preferences, career choice, health, family/peer situation and personal interests. At the conclusion, the student and interviewer discuss options and recommendations. Tests, inventories, surveys are available to the student, if deemed appropriate. We also help students sort through the process of obtaining documentation and accessing disability services if they do not have current or adequate documentation of a learning disability.

We live in a diverse and complex world, and our students reflect that diversity and complexity. Students often arrive at our offices with a multitude of interfering problems. For example, reading concerns may exist in conjunction with other skill concerns as well as alcohol abuse, roommate problems, credit card debt, and eating disorders. We encourage students to view their academic concerns holistically and to seek assistance from the many talented and caring professionals on campus or in the community.

By the time most students seek out help in identifying factors that are interfering with their academic success, often they are frustrated, overwhelmed, and experiencing significant doubt regarding their ability to succeed at RIT. A comprehensive, caring, and realistic analysis of their situation is warranted. A list of concrete recommendations and follow-up meetings plays a critical role in their future academic success.

New People at ASC...



Susan Ackerman, Coordinator of Disabilities Services, is originally from Tonawanda, New York, a suburb of Buffalo. She attended Canisius College and then D'Youville College, where she received a bachelor's degree in psychology and teaching certification in special education and elementary education. Her master's degree in special education is from Buffalo State College. She taught in special education classrooms for 20 years. She joined RIT in 2002 as a First Year Enrichment (FYE) instructor.

As Coordinator of Disability Services, Sue works with students and faculty/staff with disabilities who would like to make use of their accommodations. One of the main goals for the Disability Services Office for this year is to increase institute awareness about disabilities by supplying information for students, faculty and staff about how to provide an inclusive environment for everyone in the RIT community. In order to disseminate information, a new web site will go live soon, and we will continue to offer information sessions.

Hearing the word coach typically makes us think directly of a “sport” coach; the person who directs individual athletes or a group of athletes better known as a team. This “coach” teaches, trains, and advises all aspects of the sport and sometimes personal lives. The coach encourages when things are going well, provides direction when things are going wrong, and many times ends up providing moral support when the individual or team is really down and out.

The “coaching” in Learning Support Services is really not much different from the above definition. The LSS “coach” teaches, directs, the student to all available resources on campus. She will train the students how to set goals for himself and apply all of the strategies learned to his academic life. The LSS coach can offer advice in almost every aspect of a student’s life. If the coach feels the student needs assistance apart from what she can offer, the training continues as a referral process.

The Learning Support Services Department offers a program called Structured Monitoring. This is a fee-based program where students work with a learning support specialist on a weekly basis. At the end of the quarter, the student and learning specialist decide if the student needs to remain in the program or is ready to tackle the system on his or her own.

The coaching offered in Learning Support Services is a critical piece to many students success at RIT. While numerous students can navigate the RIT system entirely on their own and be aware of when they might need help, many can not. A “coach”, an individual on campus that meets with a student on a regular basis and is familiar with the ins and outs of the Institute, can help put the pieces together for a student who is struggling. This same coach is also there for the student who is already seeing academic success and wants to ensure they stay on that path. Win or lose, in many instances it is a good coach that keeps the team in good spirits and a student on a winning course.

Lynne Mazadoorian has joined the ASC as a Reading and Study Skills Instructor and FYE Liaison for a one-year appointment. Her responsibilities include teaching and mentoring in the College Restoration Program, providing reading and study skills instruction, and teaching First Year Enrichment. Lynne came to RIT in 2000, when she joined the First Year Enrichment team. She came to the ASC in 2002, as an instructor and mentor in CRP. Lynne has a strong background in learning assistance and skills instruction. She is a member of College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA). Lynne earned her BA in English from Simmons College, and her MS in Counselor Education: Student Development in Higher Education from Central Connecticut State University. On weekends, Lynne can be found in the garden, cross-country skiing, or traveling to see her family in Connecticut.

Andrew Perry began at RIT in 2000 as an Extended Part Time Instructor of the *Writing & Literature* sequence in the Department of Language & Literature, College of Liberal Arts. He became a fulltime Lecturer in the fall of 2001. In 2000, Andrew was hired as an adjunct instructor in the ASC’s Writing Lab, he has taught the Writing component of HEOP’s summer program, and he is a mentor in the College Restoration Program. In 2003-04, he was nominated for an Exemplary On-Line Teaching Award, and was also a Finalist for the Richard & Virginia Eisenhart Provost’s Award for Excellence in Teaching. Andrew has participated in pilots for the Learning Communities and for RIT’s On-line Writing Lab (OWL). This year he has been co-organizing COLA faculty workshops for the new *Writing* seminar. He is serving as the This year, he was asked to be the Interim Coordinator of the ASC Writing Lab. He holds a BA in English from SUNY Oswego, an MA in American Lit from SUNY

Brockport and has completed the coursework towards a Ph.D. in American Lit from the University of Cincinnati.

Tutoring at RIT . . .

Julie Cammeron

What is tutoring? Some would say it's a form of individualized instruction whereby a faculty member or peer tutor provides special academic help to a student or group of students who need it. Sounds simple, doesn't it? And yet, tutoring is one of the most complicated and complex interactions on a college campus, given the diversity and needs of the students needing tutoring and the individual differences of the tutors who work with them.

It is a well-known fact that some students come to college unexposed to or unprepared for the rigors of academic life. Knowing this, and with retention one of the driving forces of RIT's Strategic Plan, it only makes good sense to provide students help in succeeding in their content courses.

Ruth Jones, Chairperson for the Academic Support Center Math Department says, "the purpose of tutoring may be to further clarify a concept in the course, prerequisite concept, or to help the student process the material. Good tutoring uses skilled diagnostic questioning to determine what the student knows and does not know and, through a step-by-step individualized approach, aids the student in the process of learning the material. The ultimate goal in good tutoring is to assist the student in becoming an independent learner."

Besides the Academic Support Center, two additional academic support programs in the Division of Student Affairs offer tutoring to special populations within RIT: TRiO Student Support Services and the Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP).

TRiO provides tutorial support for a select number of students who satisfy this federal program's criteria: first generation college student, OR low income student, OR student with a documented disability. TRiO students must also be full-time undergraduate students, and United States citizens or international students with a green card.

Judy Bernhart, the Academic Coordinator for TRiO, describes tutoring as an endeavor that "engages the participant in human contact and communication around bodies of thought. In a positive experience, both participants expand their academic horizons, build conceptual structures, and explore intellectual relationships; in essence, they 'learn stuff.'" HEOP is funded by both New York State and RIT. HEOP provides additional academic and financial support, including tutoring, to select students enrolled at RIT for the first time.

Although tutoring can take many unique forms, including one-to-one sessions, study groups, workshops, and supplemental instruction, all tutors make it their mission to ascertain what a student does not grasp and stand ready to explain concepts over and over again until understanding and comprehension truly take place.

During the past year, the Tutor Training Program in the Academic Support Center has worked to centralize information on tutoring and tutor training availability on campus with a website that lists all pertinent information. To access this information, visit www.rit.edu/tutoring. Students and faculty alike can look for tutoring information either by department or by college. In addition, the website lists all major tutorial centers on campus. This year, a tutor training curriculum is being developed in order to equip student tutors with the skills for their important instructional responsibilities. Peer tutors on campus can also find the tutor training schedule on this website.

In short, tutoring is an important staple of a college environment. Students benefit immeasurably by working with a tutor, and tutors themselves learn the material better by "explaining" it to others. Tutoring is a win-win situation for all who participate. RIT students are fortunate to have tutoring available in so many areas of the university.

Instructors in First Year Enrichment (FYE) meet weekly with their classes and at least once a quarter with each individual student. The teaching/coaching model sets RIT's program apart from other first year programs. *ASC Quarterly* asked FYE instructors/coaches to respond to questions about coaching and its relationship to academic support.

1) What do you consider coaching to be?

Coaching in FYE is the process in which the instructor and student discuss strategies in striving for a successful academic and personal life at RIT. (*Dan Hickey*)

Coaching is a 1:1 opportunity to explore, discuss, and support student's current goals and intentions as they relate to academic and personal success here at RIT. (*Josh Bauroth*)

2) How is that a critical element of academic support?

It is critical in academic support because coaching can again, help clarify for students what their academic goals and needs are as they enter RIT and continue each quarter at RIT. It is an essential piece to supporting the goals set by the student and guiding students through accountability to those goals and the revision/evaluation process of those goals throughout the quarter. A coach is also very important in being aware of student academic progress and can connect students to appropriate academic resources on campus when the student might be struggling in a course. When the quarter is complete, coaching also is essential in working with students who may be struggling overall academically (low GPA's for fall) and assist those students in creating a plan of action and new goals for winter quarter academic success. (*Karen Violanti*)

We support them academically to set goals and brainstorm on the barriers they may encounter along the way that may prevent them from being successful. (*Michelle Schrouder*)

It is critical to academic success for a couple of reasons. First, the individual contact can provide an early identification of students who are not doing well, or have the potential to get tripped up in the future. This is what makes them an essential part of the university retention goals. Also, it supports and challenges the student who is doing well. An athletic coach doesn't just attend to the players who are having problems, but also works with the successful players to challenge and improve their skills for further success. The athletic coach applies to students' college success. Through coaching, students normally passed over because of their ability to succeed are provided with the individual attention to challenge themselves. (*Daniele Conners*)

Several FYE students were surveyed and asked to comment on their coaching experience:

"I like the informal atmosphere and it was nice to get to know my teacher outside of class."

"In the middle of the session, I realized how effective and useful it was."

"My coach was very easy to talk to and a pleasure to hold a conversation with."

"Everything went very smoothly and the setting was just right in order to talk and feel more comfortable. This year is going to run much more smoothly since I have someone to talk to about my problems."

"All the topics I wanted to talk about were covered."

"It was a very well balanced casual conversation that was refreshing and informative."

Ecologists tell us that a tree planted in a clearing of an old forest will grow more successfully than one planted in an open field. The reason, it seems, is that the roots of the forest tree are able to follow the intricate pathways created by former trees and thus embed themselves more deeply. Indeed, over time, the roots of many trees may actually graft themselves to one another, creating an interdependent mat of life hidden beneath the earth. This literally enables the stronger trees to share resources with the weaker so the whole forest becomes healthier.

Similarly, human beings thrive best when we grow in the presence of those who have gone before. Our roots may not follow every available pathway, but we are able to become more fully ourselves because of the presence of others. "I am who I am because we are," goes the saying, and mentors are a vital part of the often invisible mat of our lives.

Lois J. Zachary, *The Mentor's Guide*. Jossey-Bass, 2000. p. xiii

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