Student Experiences: Relationship with Mentor

Coming into Marquette, I was very sure of things. I was sure I was going to be a software engineer. I was sure I was going to graduate in less than four years. And I was sure I was going to keep my 4.0 from high school. And while it’s a great thing to have faith in yourself, I think it’s pretty evident that my expectations were a little bit high.

As it turns out, I ended up switching to civil engineering, participating in a work co-op program that extends my time here by a year, and losing my perfect GPA, all within my first semester of college. And while I was disappointed in myself for not living up to my lofty goals, I was able to realize what a strong support system I had surrounding me here at Marquette.

The first and most immediate means of support a student will come in contact with is other freshmen. Additionally, many students will come across an adviser, either academic or for a group they’re involved with, that can be utilized.

My biggest source of support, however, was neither my friends nor an adviser. It was a professor I had for Transportation Engineering, Dr. Drakopoulos. And while he taught me way more than I ever wanted to know about the superelevations of complex horizontal curves, he also proved to be a fantastic resource outside of class.

Dr. D embodies the Marquette ideal of cura personalis, or “care for the whole person.” It would be easy for him to focus only on teaching, without connecting with the students. However, Dr. D goes above and beyond the minimum requirements of being a professor. He went out of his way to get to know me, and when I presented him with a problem, he was able to offer advice that applied directly to me.

My most memorable moment with Dr. D came earlier this semester. I’m on the council of an engineering honor society and Dr. D was one of the faculty present at the most recent initiation ceremony. During the social time afterwards, he made a point to seek me out. After inquiring about my family and such, he asked what I was planning to do after I graduated. I gave the standard, “I’m not really sure if my co-op company will hire me, I’ll see where things take me.” His retort was, “do you actually enjoy working there?” And even though I gave another canned response, both he and I knew that it wasn’t something I really was passionate about.

Later that week I talked with Dr. D before class. After some small talk, he told me not to settle for something because it’s easier than taking a chance. “Looking back in 10 years, will you regret the risks you didn’t take?” he asked. And that concise, to the point question made me stop and think. I was planning on moving back home with my folks and looking for a job, an option that none of us were looking forward to. But with his advice, I began to consider taking a more of a business tract in the engineering world. His words of wisdom were extremely convincing, as neither of my parents were engineers. And while they were supportive, it was extremely helpful to have a person who knows the industry help me.
Overall, Dr. D, by exemplifying *cura personalis*, was able to help me with my career troubles. Chances are, your child will find his or her own Dr. D too. It’s vital that they’re active in looking though. Things like introducing yourself the first day of class and utilizing a professor’s office hours are necessary in building good relationships. By treating both faculty and staff with respect and integrity, your student will have a much easier time finding their own mentor here. And that ongoing support of everyone around here is just one more reason why it’s easy to call Marquette home.

Mike P., Senior in College of Engineering