

Been There, Done That

What a mentor can do for you

By Teresa Beard, former editor

Just as your big brother or perhaps an older cousin showed you the ropes as a kid, so can an upperclassman, professor, or community leader when you get to college. Hooking up with someone who's older, wiser, and more experienced can help you find your way around campus, pick the right classes, get involved in activities, and even choose a career. Read on as Florida college students involved in mentoring programs pass on their advice to you.

At the University of West Florida in Pensacola, freshmen match up with one of 25 upper-division peers during orientation each June, helping recent high school graduates make new friends before they even start fall classes. UWF's Nicole Huie kept in touch with her mentor over the summer. "We talked a lot while I was back home, and we e-mailed back and forth," says Huie, whose mentor encouraged her to join the SGA Freshman Committee. "She had a big part in getting me involved. I got to meet more people through her, I asked her a lot about classes and organizations, and I can also confide in her. It was comforting just knowing that there was somebody here that I did know coming in as a freshman." *Contact Huie at nikki146@hotmail.com or visit www.uwf.edu.*

In Melbourne, members of Florida Institute of Technology's chapter of Phi Eta Sigma, a freshman honor society, pioneered a program that matches five upperclassmen with five mentees each. "The primary contact is through e-mail," says Rudy Coelho, Phi Eta Sigma president. "They send out one e-mail a week at least and find out what's going on, what problems the students are encountering, if they need information as far as what to do on campus, and where to

go. A lot of students don't know enough about the university their first semester, and there are tons of activities they're just not aware of. All the mentors are at least sophomore level—they relate to the students more, because they know what they faced their first year and have pointers to help out." *Contact Coelho at rcoelho@fit.edu or visit www.fit.edu.*



New students at Florida International University in Miami can team up with faculty, staff, or alumni mentors for advice. FIU junior Chen Wang joined the Mentoring Partnerships Program three years ago. "The program has worked really well for me, because my mentor was an exact match for my personality," Wang says. "There's an information sheet with your interests, and they'll match you with someone in your major." 24 FIU students

are involved in the program, which is organized by The Women's Center and the Office of Alumni Relations. Wang says she frequently visits her mentor's office and contacts her by e-mail and phone. "Our program also has monthly get-togethers," Wang says. "Not only do you get academic advice, you also get a friend. So any time I have personal problems, she's someone I can talk to, and we just enjoy each other's company." *Contact Wang at cwang01@fiu.edu or visit www.fiu.edu.*

Jacksonville University's Dawn Adin is a peer mentor for 15 students enrolled in "JU 101," a class for freshmen to learn more about themselves, their campus, and the local community. "It's a big change for students to make that jump from high school to college, and it's nice to know someone who's been there before," she says. "The important thing is to be open-minded and remember that you're going to have things in common and things that are not in common with everybody else."

Adin says she modeled her involvement in campus life after her mentor, a sorority member and JU tour guide, and she encourages freshmen to seek out students on their own for advice. "Look for people who are interested in the same things you are or maybe even different things," Adin says. "If there's a leadership position that you're interested in, for example, Student Government president or the editor of the school newspaper, go meet them. Go be a senator or a writer, and try to get to know them. If that's where you want to be, they can help you and guide you."

Most campus leaders are willing to help incoming students find their niche, because they view the opportunity as a way to return the favor to their own mentors, Adin says. "I have never seen anyone who hasn't said, 'I'm willing to help you and get you where you want to be,'" she says. "We're all so excited to give them chances and opportunities to succeed. We've all been there. I don't think any of us would be where we are today without someone lending a hand and saying, 'This is how you can succeed here.'" *Contact Adin at dusk78@aol.com or visit www.ju.edu.*

How to Find a Mentor

If your college doesn't have a formal mentoring program in place, take the initiative to find your own. Here's how:

- Build a rapport with a professor in your area of study who can advise you on classes and careers.
- Approach officers of student organizations you've joined to inquire about how they became campus leaders.

- Visit the alumni association to locate graduates in your field, and start writing your new pen-pals to discover how they made it.
- Let your fingers do the walking through the yellow pages. Search for a local business in the industry of your choice, and contact an executive to ask for an opportunity to shadow her for a day.
- Invite an adult you respect to lunch, describe your future plans, and ask for feedback. Look to church leaders, politicians, former teachers or coaches, and volunteers in civic groups for ideas.

- Stop by your school's career services center and ask to spend a couple hours with a visiting recruiter in your field.
- Explore fraternity or sorority membership. Often, these groups organize their own Big Sibling/Little Sibling activities. Plus, going Greek almost guarantees you opportunities to become more involved in campus life.
- Check out www.mentoring.org to search for community partnerships in your local area and to find out more about what an advisor can do for you.