

The Sociology Peer Mentoring program is a unique approach to helping new sociology majors and minors transition successfully into the sociology department and the overall college experience.

Through this program, students are able to help one another through providing companionship, useful life and academic advice, and by encouraging each other to participate in community events.

There are two key aspects of the program structure: monthly events and the peer mentoring itself. Each month, the students meet up and attend events or discussions that either educate them about future opportunities or encourage them to socialize and make connections. In Spring 2024, events included a discussion of internships, student-employment opportunities within the Sociology Department, and a Faculty-Student mixer. In regard to peer mentoring, each mentor-mentee pairing is given food vouchers and prompt cards each month. The themes of the prompt cards change monthly, ranging from approaches to classes and lessons they've learned while taking courses, to mental health and how to balance social and academic life. The idea is to encourage students to have meaningful discussions in a casual setting.

The structure of the program fosters a student-led environment. Dr. Stykes, the program supervisor commented that this is a crucial aspect of the program, noting "it's really important for students to help one another navigate these waters, there's something really special about it [being given advice on how to be a good student] when it comes from a peer rather than a professor." Not only does this type of environment provide students with academic advice, but it also encourages them to communicate better with each other, which was important to the founder of the program, Dr. Cabaniss. After the quarantine for the global Covid-19 pandemic was lifted, Dr. Cabaniss noticed that students were having a difficult time communicating and interacting with one another in a classroom setting. Today, through this program, Professor Cabaniss and Stykes aim to create "a sense of community along students" and to "get them to enjoy being students together, not alone." After interviewing a mentor-mentee pairing, it seems that the program has been successful in creating this dynamic.

Mentor Trinity Smith, a sophomore majoring in Sociology, stated that the program really allows students to "foster deeper and more meaningful relationships." Since joining the program, she felt that she improved her communication skills, as "it's easier to step up

and make directions and it's easier to connect to professors when it's for someone else [her mentee]." This emphasizes how fostering a sense of community within students not only benefits the mentees, but also the mentors who also get to form connections with faculty through their mentees. Not only did Smith "enjoy the one-on-one interaction and ability to foster relationships" that she experienced through this program, but she also applauded the program's ability to help her gain connections as she "made many connections especially with mentors." She finished by saying that "the program makes you more comfortable with the students around you."

Smith's mentee, sociology major Terralyn De La Porte, also had many positive things to say about the peer mentoring program. She joined the program knowing that "it would be a good opportunity to meet people and grow more comfortable within the department she'll be spending time in for the next four years." So far, she's "enjoyed getting to hang out with her mentors" as "it's really helpful being able to get so much information even while not knowing what questions to ask." When asked about her mentor, who she now considers a good friend, she talked about how useful it had been to be able to gain insight on "things sociology and life related." She also mentioned that through her mentor, she was able to meet new people who she could also learn and get advice from. Other than the ability to form connections, one skill that De La Porte stated that she obtained from the program was a strengthened sense of how to interact with professors. Because of this program, De La Porte says that she looks forward to participating in more events and opportunities Sociology-related in the future, such as joining Sociology club and working with professors. She ended the interview by talking about how joining the peer mentoring program lessened her academic stress, as she was now better educated on future opportunities to help her on her academic and career journey.

The Sociology Peer Mentoring program is incredibly beneficial for all students involved, as they are able to develop skills, such as communication and study habits, that will help them in their futures. The program also creates a sense of community between students, allowing them to be surrounded by a positive environment while pursuing their studies. As the program continues to grow, there is no doubt that students will come out of it more confident about their futures and academic abilities.