Improved GPAs and Higher Rates of Course Completion

By Linda Love

Studies have shown that beginning college students are helped greatly by having a one-on-one relationship with a mentor. In addition to personal growth, students also earn on average half a grade higher in their courses as a result of engaging with a mentor, according to Mark Minglin, director of the Bepko Learning Center.

Minglin graduated from Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana, with an undergraduate degree in business and a graduate degree in student personnel in higher education. While attending college he was heavily involved as a volunteer student tutor two days per week with a program called Motivate Our Minds. He also tutored students weekly at the Soldiers and Sailors Home in Knightstown, Indiana. During that time he became involved in a program called Student Volunteering Services and discovered he had a passion for service and academic achievement.

After receiving his master’s, he worked at Defiance College in Ohio with Service Learning and Mentoring. A Hoosier at heart and very family oriented, Mark was glad to return to his home state when his parents needed a little extra care, allowing him also to spend a great deal of time with his nieces and nephews. Minglin is all about kindness and likes to make people laugh. When asked about his cheerful demeanor, Mark replied that we can make a choice to be happy or grumpy, and he chooses happiness.

Once back in Indiana, Mark followed his passion and began working at IUPUI’s Bepko Learning Center as the only staff member along with six student tutors. As he observed the various challenges students had with their academics and school life, he began developing new components to grow the program to meet more student needs and foster academic and personal success.

Today, there are typically eighty to eighty-five mentors per semester, and they work with approximately three hundred mentors from other departments across campus.

Bepko is a place where peers help peers, a place where students come for help from other students. When looking for mentors and tutors, Bepko looks at how these students engage people. They need to not only know the academic material but also have a way of reaching out to other students in a manner that is friendly and non-threatening.

The best mentors and tutors are usually those students who can empathize with their peers because they have had the same struggles. Potential mentors and tutors go through an intense interview process that includes individual and group interviews. They must have a 3.0 GPA, and they must have taken the course they want to mentor and have earned a B+ or better in that class. The course instructor’s approval is also needed.

The Bepko Learning Center has three offices with varied learning programs under each office. The Office of Academic Mentoring encompasses Supplemental Instruction (SI) and Structured Learning Assistance (SLA). Supplemental Instruction is a program in which tutors hold sessions outside of class, offering one-on-one academic support related to the concepts and theories of the class, and participation is voluntary. Students in the Structured Learning Assistance program are required to participate as deemed necessary by a course instructor in order to gain assistance with the course material; thus, the tutors for SLA have a very strong connection with the course instructor.

The main focus of the Office of Academic Enrichment is the Student Resource Desk. The mentors in this office work with student athletes, students in the STAR program, and students who are identified via the Flag system, a program through OneCourse in which an instructor will “flag” a student whom he or she sees as having some difficulty in class. It may be that the student is having a problem understanding some of the course material, needs help with study skills, or needs help with test-taking skills.

The resource desk mentors also help students with general academic skills. They may give the student an inventory to help identify their challenges in order to focus on the problem area such as study skills or time management or how to read a textbook.

Thirdly, the Office of Tutorial Support is comprised of a variety of programs. It is heavily involved with student athletes. It includes a biology resource center that is staffed with tutors and mentors, and it works closely with veterans, who are eligible for a designated amount of free tutoring. A large component of this office is the Tutor Matching Service, an online service growing in popularity that matches a student with an appropriate tutor.

Objectives are set for all the mentoring and tutoring sessions and reviewed to see if they are met. If the student feels that his or her objectives are not being reached, the student and mentor/tutor discuss what they can each do differently to reach those objectives.

Minglin would love to see a mentor for every student and also works with the STAR students who are identified via the Flag system, a program through OneCourse in which an instructor will “flag” a student whom he or she sees as having some difficulty in class. It may be that the student is having a problem understanding some of the course material, needs help with study skills, or needs help with test-taking skills.

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Opportunities for Giving

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