When you ask college graduates about their undergraduate experience, you usually get the same answer: “It was the best time of my life!” When you ask college graduates what the worst part of their undergraduate experience was, you also usually get the same answer: “The first day!” For IU School of Education Executive Associate Dean Patricia Rogan it was no different as she recalls her first day jitters as a freshman at the large (40,000+ students) University of Wisconsin-Madison.

“As a freshman, it was pretty big and intimidating. So my first objective was to get connected in some way,” she said.

“When you attend classes day in and day out and there is nobody you know in the classes, you can feel alone. [You are] wanting to build peer groups….I remember that pretty clearly early on. The separation from home, moving away, you know, tying to get connected during that day to day life on a large campus,” she said. She admitted that the feeling of loneliness can be a difficult challenge to overcome for college freshmen.

In addition, like many college freshmen, Rogan was unsure of exactly what she wanted to major in or what she wanted her future career to be.

“I thought initially I would be Jacques Cousteau the second, going into oceanography. [But I] soon realized that was not going to be such a great match for me.”

It didn’t take long, though, for Rogan to find her niche at school. In addition to joining the swim team, Rogan became connected with and influenced by an advisor, key professor, and college mentors and found a new passion for the field of education. It didn’t take long for her to switch majors and begin studying the field of that would impact her life and her future career as a special education teacher.

“I began to explore different pathways, and he [her professor] ended up being such a strong mentor that I continued into graduate work with him later.”

Rogan attests to the influence of her undergraduate years in shaping her career. She received a bachelor’s degree in special education, then a master’s, and then a doctorate. Now, she says, she is teaching in schools of education both here and at another university. It’s been a fabulous career for me.”

Though Rogan was fortunate to find a trusted advisor and mentor during her early years of college, she said that the feeling of loneliness can be a difficult challenge to overcome for college freshmen.

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Though Rogan was fortunate to find a trusted advisor and mentor during her early years of college, she acknowledged that having a unit like IUPUI’s University College would have helped her make the shift from high school student to college student a smoother and less stressful transition.

Rogan states that University College is “a wonderful liaison [that connects] to high schools, the broader community, and to all the schools within IUPUI.”

Rogan mentioned that when she started college there was no “bridge program, themed learning communities, or great orientation” at UW like University College provides for new students at IUPUI.

The most important advice Rogan says she can give to incoming students is the importance of making connections on campus with people who can impact their lives and serve as mentors in fields that they are interested in pursuing.

In addition to making connections on campus, Rogan believes that for freshmen to be successful students, they need to become familiar with all academic opportunities that the school offers.

 “[Freshmen] need to know how to navigate the services and supports at the university that they may need. They need to know what the pathway looks like for them to get where they want to go. [They also need to know] what courses they need to take and what sort of GPA they need to make and what are the time lines for applications.”

Rogan’s role and responsibility is to help not only advise students who are interested in education, but also to help other advisors in University College know the programs and services that the School of Education offers. She is also there to help make a smooth transition for students to move through their early years of college and apply to the School of Education, be accepted, help them get advising, and make those important connections.

“The biggest difference we can make is to help every student feel respected, valued, and supported,” Rogan said. She believes that a student’s time here should be filled with “learning, success, and good memories.”

By Samantha Thompson