Successful students have a mentor. This may be an adviser, a professor, or another professional that you can talk to about classes, the future, or life in general. You have many professors and may have several advisers, but you are encouraged to develop a relationship with at least one mentor. Still not sure why or how? Click here for ten reasons to find a mentor and some suggestions to make it happen.

Top Ten Reasons to Find a Mentor

10. S/he can double-check your progress toward your degree and make sure you are on the way to timely graduation. (You have the primary responsibility for your degree.)

9. Professionals have access to information. (which course will not be offered next term because the professor will be on sabbatical, or who needs a research assistant)

8. Advisers are trained to refer you to other sources of information. (where to go for assistance in a tough class or what to do if you are sick and miss class)

7. They know about the field in which you want to be employed, and even better, they know people currently working in that field. (think job shadowing, internships, scholarships, letters of reference)

6. Advisers and professors know about some really cool Study Abroad opportunities, and can help you get the credit applied to your degree.

5. Professionals (particularly advisers) know about policies like Academic Probation, Academic Bankruptcy, when you should repeat a course, or what is required to make the Dean’s List. They can even help you see the rationale for required courses you do not see a reason to take.

4. Mentors are good sounding boards for your educational or career planning. The conversations can help you clarify your goals.

3. They have knowledge, experience and training you do not have.

2. They want you to succeed.

1. Their professional advice is FREE.

Once you have decided it might be a good idea to have a mentor, how do you find one? Start by introducing yourself to your adviser and professors. At the very least they will begin to put your face with your name. The more these people know you, the more help they will be. Remember it is not all about what they can do for you. Show that you are interested in them and their work. This is a relationship you are building with a professional. Respect their time and be respectful in your communication.

Think about courses and topics that interest you. Then see if there is a match with a professor's courses and research interests. Attend or volunteer at department events. Make an appointment; talk about your interest in the area and take some questions to ask. If you have trouble narrowing down your interests, you may want to start with a conversation with an adviser or career services counselor about matching your interests with majors and careers. They may recommend professors for you to interview and help you put together questions. In the end remember that professionals are people, with a world of interests outside the discipline that you may share. Sometimes people in other fields can be great mentors. The real goal is to get to know a professional who can help you look from outside your experience.

Put yourself in positions where you are more likely to meet professionals. Attend optional lectures on topics that interest you. You can find professionals who share your interests. Participate in student organizations in your discipline. They can be a good way to meet faculty advisers and guest speakers. Introduce yourself again when you see them on campus—or downtown. Some of us are slower to remember names.