



Jose Grimaldo (left), recipient of the ATMentor of the Year Award 2001, is one of over 380 mentors who guide students in making important decisions at Texas A&M University.

PHOTO BY P.J. MILLER

Groom the Next Leaders

Start a mentor program at your school

By Autumn Redmon

Almost everyone has had one. And whether you were aware of it or not, their words helped you succeed. They're the guiding light and the voice of reason that motivated you to reach beyond your limits. Now, as a student leader, it's your turn to be a mentor.

Although administrators typically initiate mentoring programs, student leaders can and should make it a priority to start a program if the school doesn't already have one. Not only does a mentoring program give student leaders the opportunity to hone their communication skills, but it's also an excellent method to further leadership development at your school. "Students can benefit from shared knowledge and lessons learned by others and avoid the potential pitfalls that might otherwise stand in the way as they work toward their career goals," says Christine Cremer, former career services coordinator for the George Bush School of Government and Public Service at **Texas A&M University**.

Some schools have long-established mentoring programs, but if your school doesn't, here are a few guidelines to start your own mentoring program.

Decide Who To Mentor

Although everyone can benefit from a mentoring relationship, it's important to assess who's most in need of guidance. Remember what it was like the first day of school and all you had was a schedule of your classes and a map? Freshmen, new

transfers, and international students are one of the best target groups with whom you can share knowledge. "It's a wonderful way, especially for people who are from different countries, to interact with others as well as to give a sound introduction to the university," says Brian Netter, president of the University Activities Center at the **University of Michigan**. Some schools also have integrated mentoring programs with their career opportunities center, multicultural affairs department, and alumni association.

At Texas A&M, students know that if they need anything they just have to look for the ATMentors sign. "Faculty and administration serve as mentors to anyone who has a question, no matter how big or how small," says Dan Altman, graduate assistant for ATMentors. "We have over 380 mentors who, instead of being paired up to one person, are there to help over 44,000 students."

Set Goals

Be specific about what you want to accomplish by setting goals that include time limits and who'll be responsible for certain actions. **Georgia State University** used to have a mentoring program, but, "it just died out due to lack of mentor and mentee participation," says Sarah Scharber Jarrett, leadership program advisor. "Because participants lost interest and because it took too much staff time [compared to the number of participants], we had to end the program." Time, money, and participation all must be taken into account.

Publicize the Program

Make sure to gauge your advertising to the number of people who are interested. If you're only looking for a 10-member program, then you shouldn't pass out 10,000 fliers around school.

Put an ad in the campus newspaper or try more creative methods such as asking your computing services department to set all the campus screen-savers to a message advertising the program.

Make a Match

To get the most out of the experience, it's important that the mentor and mentee have chemistry. "One of the best benefits of having a mentor is one person believes in you and is able to help you improve," says Diana Sharp, former director for the Academic Center for Excellence at the **University of Illinois at Chicago**. "Sometimes, they can applaud you, and other times, they're there to be brutally honest." No matter if your interests match, people must be able to get along, as in any relationship. "The mentors and mentees must trust each other to get the most out of the program," Sharp says.

Surveys can be used to help match similar interests, but the best way to match is to have the mentor and mentee meet casually several times before the relationship is forged. It's important to remain flexible when matching the two people together. A relationship that seems perfect on paper can turn out to be a disaster.

Evaluate Your Progress

Take a step back and evaluate your success. Surveys (written or oral) will help you understand what both the mentors and the mentees are getting from the program and how you may improve. Surveys tell you what relationships are working and which partnerships may need to change. This is the step most people fail to utilize.

Kelli Barbour, program director for Provo Youth Mentoring at **Brigham Young University**, coordinates 330 college students to mentor elementary, middle school, and high school youth. BYU students work with children weekly to help them with their academics and to share personal time. "The best part of mentoring is to see a smile, to see them happy, and to see them succeed," Barbour says.

You only get as much out of leadership as you put into it. Use your skills and influence as a student leader to create a program that will benefit the school long after you're gone. **SL**

Contact Altman at atmentors@tamu.edu, Jarrett at sscharber@gsu.edu, Sharp at dsharp@uic.edu, Netter at Bnetter@umich.edu, or Barbour at kdb34@email.byu.edu.

Benefits of Mentoring

- Facilitate communication.
- Retain students and get them involved.
- Increase skills and knowledge.
- Encourage growth as an individual.
- Network with valuable resources for the future.
- Develop a life-long friendship.