At first glance, I do not fit the mold of a mentor to first generation college students at a highly diverse university. After all, I am from the Midwest, my father has a Ph.D., four of my siblings attended college before me and two went after me. However, despite the family support I received, I found many aspects of university life challenging: identifying good teachers, overcoming my fear of office hours, dealing with financial aid when studying abroad and building a support system.

In this role as a mentor, I am very lucky in that I have encountered a number of talented, motivated students who want to embrace the college experience and make the most out of their years here. We meet as a group on a regular basis for pizza in one of the classrooms or lunch at the Chartroom. Students stop by my office in smaller groups or for one-on-one meetings. This semester we also hope to gather at some CSULB sporting events, since many were surprised to hear they are free for students.

At our meetings, I am able to act as a single point of contact for many of the most common questions about articulation from the community colleges, financial aid and enrollment issues. My weird fascination with planning and scheduling (my thesis topic in graduate school) means that I actually enjoy reading the course catalog and mapping out different courses of action for graduation. Better still, the students are also learning to turn to each other, particularly for scheduling advice.

My students feel that they can turn to me about academic problems, but they also come to talk about jobs, resumes, their personal lives, a bad day at work, etc. Because of my age, they often expect me to see everything from the side of the student; albeit part of this job is to also help them look at their circumstances from the perspective of the professor. While all of this interaction may seem outside the typical job description to them, it is a great way for me to remember the importance of balancing my own life.

Since a large percentage of my teaching time is spent with freshmen, I enjoy the fact that my Partners for Success group is more diverse, ranging from freshmen to seniors. The Partners program allows me to form longer-lasting relationships that go beyond one semester. These relationships have been invaluable to me as I help shape department policies. While meeting with several transfer students...
Alex Guirguis

I am a first generation, Greek-American student and the youngest in the family. I am on a four-year plan and graduating in May 2005 with a B.S. in finance, real estate and law. Soon after starting my freshman year, I got a part-time job in the office of Student Life and Development (SLD). It was a wonderful position through which I met lots of people as well as developed my communication, organizational and leadership skills. Through SLD, I learned of the Partners for Success Program. With great interest, I joined and was matched with a faculty mentor, Dr. Judy Strauss, Assistant Professor, Management and Human Resources Management. During my sophomore year, I declared the finance, real estate and law major after taking a few finance classes with inspiring professors.

I feel fortunate to have had Dr. Strauss as a mentor for two years, since she helped me in so many ways. She gave me advice on my career, introduced me to other students pursuing the same major, and kept me informed of professional special events that would be of interest to me. She is not only a mentor but also a friend. When making a decision on whether or not to further my education through graduate school, Dr. Strauss was able to help me decide which would be my best option. Currently, I am waiting for responses from several law schools to begin my career path of corporate law. ♦

Joseph Pino

I transferred to CSULB from Cypress College as a communications major in spring 2003. After an Odyssey class with Dr. Kristine Zentgraf, Associate Professor, Sociology, I was informed about an opportunity to join Partners for Success. As a first-generation student and with interest in the program, Dr. Zentgraf became my formal mentor, even though she was an instructor outside of my major. She became a valuable resource and an extremely positive role model. Dr. Zentgraf met with me over lunch or coffee to catch up on my progress at CSULB, proofread my papers and provided suggestions on presentations. Most importantly, she was someone to talk with since we all know that college can be extremely overwhelming at times. It was nice to have someone like Dr. Zentgraf in my corner cheering me on. I am looking forward to graduation in May 2005 with a bachelor of arts degree in communications, option in interpersonal communication and a peace studies certificate. I will pursue post-graduate work at CSULB by entering the single subject teaching credential program in fall 2005. My career goal is to become a high school English or speech teacher. I am so thankful for finally achieving my dream of earning a bachelor’s degree with the help and support of people like Dr. Zentgraf and programs like Partners for Success. ♦

Partners for Success

Acknowledgments

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Mentoring: A Seed of Confidence

By Tamura Howard-Chavez
CSULB Alumna, Political Science
Ph.D. Student at UCLA

One seed of confidence is all it took.

The Partners program has been an essential part of my life for several years now and has allowed me to flourish beyond what I ever dreamed possible. I met my mentor, Dr. Ron Schmidt, while taking one of his political science courses. Frequently, I would talk with him during office hours about my academic progress and my plans after graduation. Amidst the responsibilities of raising my daughter, attending classes and working part time, for me, graduating was not guaranteed. However, even more detrimental to my finishing my bachelor’s degree was my own insecurity as a first-generation college student. I wasn’t quite sure of the choices and options that were available, nor had I realized the entirety of my capabilities and potential.

A seed is nourished.

Dr. Schmidt planted a seed of confidence and aspiration that instilled in me not only the possibility that I could achieve whatever I put my mind to but also invaluable knowledge of the numerous educational and career alternatives. I was given the opportunity to travel to academic conferences, meet and talk with other political science professors, get advice from students already in graduate programs and spend a summer with a prominent civil rights attorney.

Mentoring with a Passion

students, I have incorporated some of their suggestions into our four-year plan for graduation.

One of the greatest sources of pride I get from being a member of Partners is the number of female engineering students with whom I interact. As an undergraduate, I never had a female professor and was the only female computer science major in my class (at a school of approximately 26,000). I wish I could say that I had a mentor in my undergraduate career, but I cannot. My hope is that I am being that mentor to someone now. While the gender divide between students majoring in the sciences is shrinking, the number of full-time female faculty members remains extremely low. I hope that I can show students that being a scientist does not mean giving up a family or social life.

As I finish my first year of mentoring, I feel that this was definitely the right choice. Starting over in a new environment is always a challenge, whether it is a new school, job, relationship or semester. My students and I have managed to explore the campus and its policies together. And as they point out, after 10 years of college, I must have learned something about the system.◆
Partners Alumnus: Driven to Succeed

By Angel Chiriboga
CSULB Alumnus

I came to the United States in 1994 and I did not speak any English. It took me a year to learn the language, and soon after that I went to West Los Angeles College to get my associate of arts degree. It took me three years to get the A.A. since I was working as a driver. I transferred to CSULB as a full-time, first-generation student in summer 1998, at which time Dr. Jack Hou, Assistant Professor, Economics, introduced me to Partners for Success. Dr. Hou was ready to answer questions and provide guidance relating to economics. He gave positive input, support and advice, especially when I was negative about my environment. He was the person who gave me hope, reminded me of options and challenged me regarding graduate school. Dr. Hou and the program were of great inspiration to me; I grew as an individual and as a professional. I learned to realize my potential in all areas of my life. I graduated with a bachelor's degree in economics in May 2000 and earned a health care administration certificate. I went on to graduate school, and I presently hold a master of arts in economics and finance. I am still in touch with my mentor and friend, who is still making a difference in my life.

Mentoring and Advising: Then and Now

By Mike Hostetler
Associate Vice President, Dean of Students

Mentoring and advising of college students by faculty have been key components of the educational experience for two centuries. Faculty were expected to be experts in their field, fine classroom teachers, and active in mentoring and advising their students outside the classroom. American higher education adopted the English collegiate model of education which extolled maximum contact for faculty as instructor/guides of young scholars. Pervasive societal pressures converged and changed the milieu between 1860 and 1945. The Civil War, industrial revolution, land grant colleges, World War I, the Great Depression and World War II altered the higher education enterprise. From a small, student friendly, high faculty contact atmosphere, campuses emerged in the 1960s driven by massively expanded college-going populations, technical, business and career education and research as the new focus for many faculty members.

Since World War II’s end, the federal government’s drive for scientific and technological leadership has tempted higher education to require a greater emphasis on research by faculty for promotion and tenure. At many state institutions of higher education research, teaching and service are the paths to faculty promotion, income and security. Unfortunately, at too many universities it is student mentoring, academic advising and faculty interaction with students outside the classroom that have suffered.

Partners for Success is an example of California State University, Long Beach’s commitment to continuing the tradition of faculty mentoring of students as a primary role for instructors. However, until faculty promotion and tenure decisions give equal consideration to teaching, research, mentoring and advising, it will only be natural for some faculty members to concentrate their effort on teaching and research alone.
I consider myself very fortunate. For the last eight years, I have had the opportunity to serve as a mentor in the Partners for Success mentoring program. Serving as a mentor has been a tremendously satisfying and rewarding experience for me because I have been able to do what I like best, which is working with students and assisting them when they need help. I continue to maintain contact with my former mentees and am impressed with what they are doing in their personal and professional lives.

I feel very passionately about my role as a mentor: to influence and shape the lives of so many minority and international, first-generation college students. My motto in life is “to encourage my students and mentees to live by example.” I impress upon my mentees that I have succeeded through hard work and commitment and they too can do the same.

I myself was an international student 20 years ago and know from personal experience how difficult the college experience can be for some students. I am fortunate to have traveled to many countries and have great respect and appreciation for other cultures. I can readily understand the problems that students encounter in cultural adaptation and assimilation.

I will always remember and treasure my association with my student, mentee and friend Aiko Temura. Aiko is an international student from Japan who came to CSULB six years ago to pursue a bachelor’s of arts in family and consumer sciences with an option in child development and family studies. Graduating was a hard and arduous process for her. She had to overcome many barriers and obstacles. With a little encouragement and assistance, she struggled, persisted and overcame adversity. I admire Aiko’s strength and determination. She will be returning to Japan to become a preschool teacher. From Aiko I learned, “Never give up, perseverance and determination pay off.”

Another meaningful mentoring relationship has been my association and friendship with Haydee Flores. I knew her first as an advisee and later as an undergraduate student. We discussed career paths and graduate school options and presented papers together. Haydee is pursuing a master’s degree in social work and is also working full-time as a program coordinator at a social service agency in Los Angeles. She also is a regular guest speaker in my class every semester where we discuss internship opportunities with my students. Mentoring Haydee is a joy and privilege. Haydee taught me to be respectful and helpful to others and to always place family as a priority.

I can truly say that I have learned as much from my mentees as they have from me. Mentoring is about touching the lives of so many students in a positive way and making a difference in their lives.
CSULB posted a remarkable 4.6% increase in the most recent freshman graduation rate, topping off a 17% total increase over a seven-year period. Of course, some students take longer than six years to graduate and some transfer and graduate elsewhere. The Chancellor’s Office has estimated that about 13% eventually graduate in one of these two ways. If applied to the 1998 cohort, our total freshman graduation rate can be estimated at nearly 60%!

This improvement was a key factor in U.S. News and World Report’s recognition of the campus as among “America’s Best Colleges and Universities.” Improvement was the result of a decade of sustained effort on the part of many people across the campus. In the university’s most recent Strategic Priorities and Goals document, CSULB’s university vice presidents, working with the Senate chair and Staff Council chair, made “Student Success” a formal campus strategic priority (http://www.csulb.edu/divisions/aa/planning_enrollment/). By 2008, CSULB aims to raise already-improving graduation rates to a leading position among comparable universities in California and in the nation—numerous initiatives are underway in support of this goal.

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CSULB Six-Year Freshman Cohort Graduation Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Graduation Rate</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>30</td>
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<td>1994</td>
<td>35</td>
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<td>1997</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Source: CSULB Institutional Research
additional advising opportunity for freshmen. Kudos are due to Margie Merryfield and the academic college advising coordinators as well as Academic Advising staff for launching this spring initiative.

“Graduation Greenlight” is the brainchild of Susan Black in Academic Advising. This project worked with students who were denied graduation to attempt to resolve problems. Black teamed with Sue Stanley, chair of Family and Consumer Sciences, to develop a more proactive “greenlight.” In this project, students near graduation have their transcripts analyzed to spot problems ahead of time. Academic Advising or Family and Consumer Sciences then work with students to resolve the issues. Early results have been very successful and it is hoped that the project can be expanded to other majors in the near future.

Director of Institutional Research Van Novack and his staff recently developed reports on graduation rates and units earned for each department and college that will be very valuable in helping academic departments to spot bottlenecks in student progress. Assistant Vice President Tom Enders and the staff in Enrollment Services developed reports that enable undergraduates to run their own degree progress reports and view their transfer credit and test results. Other reports assist advisors in being proactive with students and support the timely coding of advisor agreements.

Associate Vice President Cecile Lindsay and her staff are rewriting the CSULB Catalog for clarity. A group from the Advising Council is assisting with this task. She also is leading in efforts to bring articulation agreements up to date, a move that got applause from community college advisors.

These are just some of the graduation/retention initiatives underway this year on the CSULB campus. There is a lot of activity afoot!

George Kuh, a well-known higher education scholar, recently completed a new study (not yet published) that examines campuses with unusual success in graduating students. A key conclusion is that successful campuses are permeated by an ethos of student success. On these successful campuses, top administrators, department chairs, staff, academic advisors and faculty are consistently proactive in their efforts to support the success of each student. It is difficult to create this atmosphere on a large commuter campus, but CSULB is moving in the right direction.

I graduated with a bachelor’s of science degree in political science with honors in June 2001. My mentoring relationship with Dr. Schmidt and his other mentees is vital to my continued success and achievement. I look forward to our yearly barbeque at his home for the graduating Partners. The gatherings provide a wonderful occasion for us to catch up on each other’s trials and tribulations. It’s like coming home.

Time to grow
With the opportunities and experiences I gained with Partners for Success, matched with my hard work and desire to succeed, I was awarded the Cota Robles scholarship to the Ph.D. program at UCLA. My dissertation committee is being headed by Dr. Frank Gilliam, assistant dean at UCLA, who I met at a conference I attended with Dr. Schmidt. My ultimate goal is to teach at the university level. I enjoy tremendously the satisfaction and pleasure that comes from teaching. In the future, I would like to return to the discouraged—but quite capable—youth in my community and plant the same seed of confidence and ability in them that Dr. Schmidt and the Partners program planted in me.

Thank you for showing me how!
The National Career Opportunities in Research Colloquium (COR) sponsored by the National Institute of Mental Health was held November 10-14 in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Partners students, Tessie Puentes and Veronica Sanchez, joined their mentor and psychology Professor, John Jung at the annual research conference. Puentes, a senior psychology major, presented her research on “Psychological Distresses of Age, Race and Financial Strain.” According to Puentes, “It’s an incredible opportunity to learn about new research, network for summer research sites and talk to graduating seniors regarding post-graduate schools.” In regards to her mentor, “Jung provides advice regarding papers, research and career goals. I have learned from him that if you work hard and stay motivated, you can succeed.”

Sanchez is graduating Summa Cum Laude in May 2005 with a bachelor of arts degree in psychology. This was Sanchez’ second presentation at COR for her research work on “Emotional Impact of Ultraviolet Photographs: Differences as a Function of Ethnicity, Gender, Sunbathing History and Appearance Concern.” Sanchez has benefited from the COR and mentorship experience, “I have practiced, learned and feel more professionally prepared for post-graduate research work due to the challenge and support which created a nurturing environment.” Sanchez currently is awaiting responses from masters and doctorate schools to continue her research work and pursue a career in social/health psychology.◆