

## **OLLI Reflection (continued)**

**by Matthew Crump, UNC Asheville senior**

By the time we'd broken the ice, out came a hand-crafted, wooden Scrabble board. Turns out Jacob is an expert at woodworking *and* triple word scores. Despite being totally engrossed in a high stress college environment, somehow my meetings with Jacob started to lift a little weight off my shoulders. I began to look forward to the Fridays where I could get up at 8 AM to go play word games with my OLLI mentor.

Those morning conversations were a great tool in helping me re-calibrate. It was extremely valuable to have someone to test the ideas bouncing around in my head and see if any of them should stick. Over time, I realized it was a more casual and fun form of academic counseling. Because, even though Jacob never told me directly what to do, he was always there and willing to talk through things with me until I knew what I needed to do.

This mentorship has helped build a bond between us that makes me feel better supported in every sphere of my life. Jacob's had my back in every possible way, whether giving me great professional advice about a new internship, or guiding me through a huge decision like studying abroad this fall. If you had told me in September when I got that e-mail that, in a year's time I would be boarding a plane to England, I wouldn't have believed you. Then, if you had told me a 68-year-old stranger would help me make that decision, I would have probably gotten a restraining order.

Joking aside, this mentorship has been a huge asset. As a first generation college student, I came to UNC Asheville with little to no support from my family-- not because they didn't support me; they just didn't know how. It can be a really scary experience: you're in a completely new environment, unsure of virtually every move you make.

Even now as a rising senior, I sometimes feel as unsure as I did three years ago when I first got here. That's why programs that support students early, like AVID, and the partnership between AVID and OLLI, are so crucial.

When I reflect on my last year, I have the deepest gratitude for giving me the support I needed in the form of a fast-talking Scrabble player named Jacob Cohen.

\*UNC Asheville's AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) for Higher Education program focuses on students who represent the first generation in their families to attend college.