

Column: College Community Connection

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Mentoring for Success

By Dr. Al Roberts

Audrey Williams June, writing in the October 2018 issue of *Chronicle of Higher Education*, reported, "Having a mentor can make a big difference in student's academic success—particularly for members of underrepresented groups." Her comments were based on the result of a Strada-Gallup Alumni survey of more than 5,000 recent college graduates.

The National Mentoring Partnership explains that mentoring “guarantees young people that there is someone who cares about them, assures them that they are not alone in dealing with day-to-day challenges, and makes them feel like they matter.” Statistics reveal that young adults who were at-risk for falling off track but had a mentor were 55% more likely to enroll in college, 78% more likely to volunteer regularly, and 130% more likely to hold leadership positions.

According to the Strada-Gallup Alumni survey, nearly two-thirds of alumni who had a mentor during college said that person was a professor. College staff members were next on the list. Students benefited from mentors’ guidance regarding their educational studies, career plans, personal issues, and physical and mental health.

While the benefits of mentoring are well documented, the survey also pointed to national inequalities in access to mentors. It noted that although 72% of white alumni reported having been mentored by a faculty member, only 47% of alumni of color described the same experience.

At Southside Virginia Community College, faculty and staff work together to ensure that all students have the opportunity to receive guidance and encouragement. SVCC programs based on mentoring relationships include Make It Happen, Women in Search of Excellence, and Great Expectations.

Make It Happen (MIH) focuses on the academic success of rural young men of color, a group that often lags behind its white and urban peers. One cause is the lack of socioeconomic support, which can promote workforce entry over college. MIH provides an institutional climate supportive of the success of African-American males by providing mentoring, ensuring academic support services, and promoting academic achievement.

Women in Search of Excellence (WISE), a new program just entering its second year, has already amassed significant achievements. WISE participants receive coaching for success, work on building academic skills, explore career options, and plan for their futures. They also participate in team building activities and assist others through community service opportunities.

Great Expectations serves current and former foster youth. Participating young people receive active support as they explore career possibilities, locate sources of financial aid, and succeed in college.

SVCC faculty and staff give generously of themselves to enrich the lives of students—in and out of the classroom. If you'd like more information about mentoring programs or other student support services, please contact Bernadette Battle, Dean for Student Success, at 434-949-1063.

Dr. Al Roberts is president of Southside Virginia Community College, an institution of higher learning that provides a wide variety of education opportunities to a diverse student population within a service area that spans ten counties and the city of Emporia. He can be reached via email at [al.roberts@southside.edu](mailto:al.roberts@southside.edu).