

You've Got a Friend in Me

Queer Mentorship Program Takes Root

by Kate Rockwood

"I'm so proud that it actually happened," says Anne Pizzi, "I mean, I'm grateful that it didn't get swept away like all the other great ideas I've stumbled upon. This time Kathy [Forde] and I talked about it and figured out how to make it happen and, well, it happened." If Anne Pizzi seems slightly amazed at the success of the LGBTQ Mentoring Program, she has a right to be. Initiated just last January, the Mentoring Program started smoothly and has more than doubled its numbers of mentees in the short time it's been operating.

Like many of the resources geared towards queer students at the UofC, the Mentoring Program arose to fill a recognized gap between student needs and existing programs. "I think people rely on [Queers and Associates] Q&A for all of their support," said Kathy Forde, a mentee and founder of the program. "Q&A has a lot of responsibility and they should just have to do what they want to do. They're a student group." The Mentorship Program seeks to compliment Q&A, connecting students with queer faculty in an effort to help "students navigate their way through a (mostly) straight world" and freeing Q&A from the burden of being one of the few resources on campus.

At a meeting between Q&A co-presidents Anne Pizzi and Bryce Corrigan and queer faculty Kathy Forde and Jim Howley, it was clear that students wanted more interaction with queer faculty. "We'd been kicking around the idea of a mentorship program for years," says Kathy Forde, "and suddenly everything started clicking. We met with Nancy Stone of student counseling and drafted a letter to queer faculty to see if they were interested in participating. We got a great reaction from everyone we contacted." Helping to kick off the program, Q&A hosted a tea for interested undergrads with roughly fifteen students

initially signing on to be paired with ten mentors.

Students are paired with mentors by filling out a survey that asks the basics of how often a student would like to meet as well as what they're seeking from the program. "Individual mentor/mentee relationships vary tremendously, depending in large part on what each student needs, but many students have used their mentors as sounding boards on a variety of issues," explained Yvonne Zipter, a mentor within the program. Once paired, students and faculty meet at least once a quarter for lunch or coffee, though most mentees kept in contact with their mentors weekly through email and the telephone. "We'll get together for coffee or to swim," says Arline Welty, a mentee within the program, "But more than anything, we get together to talk."

Aside from individual meetings between mentors and mentees, the group as a whole meets once each quarter for a group event. "We went bowling last year and it was fantastic," remarks Kathy Forde, "Everyone made up bowling names and whenever we would see each other on campus, we would refer to one another by our bowling names." The entire program also comes together for informal dinners, ensuring that the Mentorship Program involves getting to know other queer students as well. "I thought all the events I attended were a good chance to talk with other queer kids who I might not otherwise have seen at Q&A events or other on-campus events," said a mentee within the program.

"We [my mentor and I] had lunch for the first time last week, and it went really well. It was a lot of fun; it was cool to see someone just a couple years from me doing their thing," commented another mentee. It is a sentiment oft repeated and a major goal of the program: to show stu-

dents by example that it is possible to be successful, happy and queer. "Among the goals of the program are simply to give students a sense of the larger community out there and to give students living, breathing examples of what kind of lives they might lead after they leave school. And from those standpoints, I think the program has touched every student," commented Yvonne Zipter. "Also, as a staff person, I know it's made me feel more connected to the university as a whole, so it really has been valuable on a number of levels."

It is this value, this effectiveness, which is the most difficult to pinpoint yet the most fiercely defended. "Is the program effective?" asked Anne Pizzi, "It's a lot of fun and, because that's a main goal of the program, I'd say it must be successful. I mean, how can you measure the effectiveness of having a good time? Of having someone to talk to?" If having a direct connection to queer faculty, a chance to interact with other queer students, a plethora of role models and a full range of opportunities means effectiveness, than the Mentoring Program has got it in spades. "Although we won't really be able to measure the full value of the mentoring program for some time to come," points out Yvonne Zipter, "After, for instance, the current batch of students has graduated and started finding their place in the world." FP

Kate Rockwood is a Gender Studies concentrator who spends her days making espresso drinks and her nights reading Giovanni. Her personal crusades include changing the world and changing her name to Blossom.

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Get to Know Thy Neighbor

Springboards to Get You Involved

*Queer UofC 101: An Introduction to Queer Life on Campus

Friday 9/21

4-5pm in the South Lounge (2nd floor Reynold's Club)

A panel discussion about what it's like to be queer at the UofC. The panelists include current students, faculty, university staff and recent alumni to answer any questions incoming students may have.

*Resources Fair

Tuesday 9/18

6:45-8:15 in the Reynold's Club

Look for booths set up by a variety of queer groups, including the Mentorship Program.

*Queers & Associates meeting

Thursday 9/27 (first meeting)

6-7pm in the South Lounge (2nd floor Reynold's Club)

Weekly meetings/activities/events are held at this time in this spot. Get to know other queer students, watch movies, sip tea and write angry letters to politicians.