From college to career:

Making connections

Alumni mentor program enhances alumni engagement and student success

by Michelle Marrone

A shared interest in global service provided an immediate connection for alumna Linda Johnson ‘81 (B.S. Paralegal Studies) and her student mentee Tia Strong ‘15 (B.A. in Sociology). Believers in the power of mentoring, Johnson, an attorney and director with the McLane Law Firm, has had several mentors throughout her academic and professional career, and Strong was a peer mentor herself.

Designed to prepare students for the transition from college to career and to provide meaningful engagement for alumni with their alma mater, the Alumni Mentor Program was launched this past January with an orientation session for alumni and students. “The program has been very well received by our alumni,” says Mary Bollinger, Director of Alumni Relations and Special Events. “They are grateful for the opportunity to help Rivier’s next generation.
of students prepare to make their mark on the world.”

Sponsored by the Alumni Council in partnership with the Office of University Advancement and Alumni Relations and the Career Development Center, the program builds substantial connections between the alumni mentors and their student mentees. “A common theme among the partnerships is a focus on success in academics, current internships, and an exploration of graduate education,” says Marie Sullivan, Director of the Career Development Center.

A global traveler and advocate, Strong’s first experience abroad was so successful that upon her return, she worked for the University’s Office of Global Engagement. Strong entered the Alumni Mentor Program as a senior with a plan already in place to live and work overseas upon graduation. “Linda has been an incredible help to me as I’ve planned my life after graduation,” she says. “She has helped me to clarify my goals and suggested ways in which I might meet them.”

As the result of a conversation with Johnson and her daughter, who teaches abroad, Strong considers teaching English in China as a viable career option. “They helped me see exciting options for my future and the paths to pursue them,” says Strong.

Johnson’s enthusiasm for her student mentee and the mentor experience is apparent. “Tia is a remarkable, talented, compassionate, and energetic young lady. We have spent time discussing her career options and setting short- and longer-term job goals. We’ll soon be talking about how to manage the payback of college loans,” says Johnson. “I believe in the value of a mentor-mentee relationship, and have been fortunate to have had mentors in my life. It gives me great pleasure to help Tia in the same way that others have helped me.”

Drawing from their professional experiences, mentors are providing student mentees with networking opportunities in their fields of interest, assistance with resume development, and support in crafting their ‘elevator pitch’ for interviews based on what employers are looking for in job candidates.

“Most recently the University hosted a Speed Networking event where students were given the opportunity to utilize their elevator pitch in meeting with other alumni mentors,” says Sullivan. “The room came alive as students had only three minutes to impress each mentor. The mentors were quite amazed with the students’ maturity and focus, and the students walked away feeling more confident and connected.”

Connections formed between mentors and mentees add depth to the experience, making participation personally and professionally rewarding. Energetic and enthusiastic Holly DeCarteret ’13, RN (B.S. Nursing), a maternity ward nurse at the Elliot Hospital in Manchester, was matched with three student mentees—Brooke Anderson ’17, Alyssa Cummings ’16, and Nicole Henri ’16—all pursing their bachelor’s degree in nursing. A recent graduate, DeCarteret is pleased to be reconnected to Rivier. “Honestly, I was having ‘Riv withdrawals,’” she shares. “I was part of the Peer Mentor Program while I completed my undergraduate education. I loved sharing my experiences as a peer mentor, and thought that I could continue to do that with Rivier students.”

DeCarteret’s student mentees appreciate her willingness to help them with their current academic challenges, as well as preparation for entering the workforce. “It has turned out to be an awesome experience,” says Nicole Henri ’16. “Holly recently graduated from Riv and is working as a nurse. She has helped me study for exams, draft my resume, and provided guidance on building my nursing capstone binder. I am so grateful that I have someone to go to for help and advice, someone who understands what I am going through.”

Anderson, Cummings, and Henri will each spend a day “shadowing” DeCarteret in the maternity ward at Elliot Hospital. With her sponsorship, these student mentees will receive an insider’s view to hospital nursing care. Real-world experiences like this provide valuable exposure to job opportunities and help guide students’ career choices.

“I have loved being a part of the program and have benefited just as much if not more than the students,” says DeCarteret. “Helping future nurses and giving my time to benefit these students is a joy for me.”

Become a Mentor—Join the Program!

Volunteer to become an Alumni Mentor and provide career coaching to a motivated Rivier student. Mentoring a current student keeps alumni connected to the University community in a meaningful way and continues the mission to ‘transform hearts and minds to serve the world.’

Visit www.rivier.edu/alumnicares to learn how you can become an Alumni Mentor.