

Renewing the promise of the Chicago Quarter program

Student success is everyone's responsibility when you work in higher education, but is it obvious exactly how one person in a particular role affects student success? Toni Fitzpatrick, Associate Director in New Student and Family Engagement, knew that key staff members in the Chicago Quarter program, part of the First Year Program, understood their role in working with new students, but also wanted to help them better understand how important their roles can be in supporting students through a critical transition.

"Training didn't highlight how much influence [Chicago Quarter mentors and staff professionals] have on student success, both through the Common Hour classroom and outside of class interactions," Fitzpatrick stated in an interview. Fitzpatrick and others in New Student and Family Engagement are responsible for training the Chicago Quarter mentors and staff professionals.

Research has found that first year experience programs, like the Chicago Quarter program, play an important role in students' transition and connection to their college or university during their first year, and that, in turn, affects whether or not they persist to their second and subsequent years and succeed in college, overall.

"Sharing this research with those who work in the program is important, because knowing the potential they have to influence student success could inspire the mentors and staff professionals to contribute their very best to the new students in their class," Fitzpatrick said.

Sydney Sewell, a Chicago Quarter mentor, stated in an email that she was shocked by information she learned in training about risk factors around college students' lack of informal knowledge about being a student, as well as uneven formal academic knowledge and skill among students. "That information opened my eyes as a Chicago Quarter mentor—I learned that I have to pay attention to the fact that not every student is the same, and not every student came from the same high school or had similar experiences," Sewell stated in her email.

Fitzpatrick updated the mentor and staff professional training sessions and the two required courses for mentors to include research and current literature around student development, success and retention that would help them better understand their role in student success. One decision made was to share DePaul's enrollment and retention data with the mentors and staff professionals during their training last spring.



"Many staff, and probably more so, the students, don't have a reason to seek out and understand enrollment and retention data as part of their day-to-day responsibilities," Fitzpatrick said. But something as simple as sharing the number of students who leave DePaul each year can have an impact on how mentors and staff professionals see their role in the Chicago Quarter program.

But, what is student success, and how do particular aspects of the Chicago Quarter program support student success? To address these questions, Fitzpatrick's team incorporated research from Robert J. Sternberg on retention risk factors, as well as Vincent Tinto's conditions for student success into mentor and staff professional training. It was important for them to not only understand the numbers, but also why students might leave DePaul and how the right conditions in the educational setting can influence their experience.

New Student and Family Engagement also introduced the 4P's of Student Retention (profile, progress, process and promise), which outlines a strategic approach to student retention and was defined and described by DePaul's David Kalsbeek, Vice President of Enrollment Management and Marketing. Fitzpatrick focused on 'promise' because the Chicago Quarter program is one way to deliver on some of the promises that DePaul makes to incoming students.

"Receiving this new information directly impacted how I worked with the students in my class," Lindsay Ritenbaugh, a program coordinator in the Office of Student Involvement and a staff professional in the Chicago Quarter program, stated in an email. "The 4Ps, Sternberg, and Tinto's studies provided a framework for our teaching team to guide students throughout their first quarter at DePaul."

For more information on the Chicago Quarter mentors and staff professionals, contact Toni Fitzpatrick of New Student and Family Engagement at 773.325.2273.