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SUMMER 2015

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The first cohort of Peer Mentors, spring 2015 (pictured), is ready to support new students in their transition into the UT Health Science Center community.

Mentors help maneuver new students to success

Student achievement and retention is the aim of the Student Success Center in the School of Nursing (SON) at the UT Health Science Center San Antonio. In an effort to academically support more students and advance their goals, the Student Success Center leaders launched their new Peer Mentoring Program this past spring semester.

Peer Mentoring Program mentors serve as the friendly faces who welcome and support incoming first-semester students as they transition into the UT Health Science Center community. Peer mentors help familiarize new students with and guide them to student organizations, academic programs and resources, and co-curricular activities.

Nine current accelerated nursing students were selected to work with the newly admitted summer 2015 student cohort and 15 new peer mentors have been selected to work with incoming fall 2015

students. The Student Success Center staff provides new mentors with training and meetings as requested to better meet the needs of first-semester students.

Each mentor is assigned to a small group of between 10 and 13 mentees they will support throughout the semester. Mentors play an active role in new-student orientation where they meet with the new members of their learning community for the first time. Throughout the semester, mentors schedule individual or small-group meetings on a monthly basis and plan events for their group. These meetings allow the students to make connections with other students, resources and services throughout campus.

Vanessa Meling, Ed.D., director for academic enhancement for the Student Success Center, said research has indicated that mentoring programs increase student satisfaction and overall student experience.

“What I have seen with the Peer Mentor Program is that it has not only been beneficial to new students, but it has also engaged our current students with their peers, which benefits both groups,” Dr. Meling said.

The Student Success Center application process requires students to apply and interview for a peer mentor position. Candidates must be full-time students in good academic and conduct standing. Strong interpersonal, organizational, communication and team-building skills are also necessary.

SON Peer Mentor, Rica Pino, described her experience last semester as very rewarding. “Peer mentoring gave me the opportunity to become an indispensable resource for our new nursing students,” she said. “It was incredibly satisfying to lend a helping hand in turning what could be a stressful transition for new students into a comfortable and successful experience.”

Dr. Meling said the Student Success Center staff plans to collect data, based on the number of contact hours mentors have with mentees, to evaluate the program’s effectiveness in achieving student success and retention.

For more information about the Student Success Center and its programs, contact Dr. Meling at 210-567-5851 or meling@uthscsa.edu.

To donate to and support needed resources in the center, contact Gwen Notestine, director of development in the School of Nursing, at 210-567-5313 or at notestine@uthscsa.edu.