

Building relationships

MENTOR PROGRAM OFFERS CONNECTION

The School of Law's mentoring program launched in August 2016, and it is already yielding great results. In addition to pairing first-year students with a Georgia Law graduate or legal professional, the law school has also linked them with an upper-level student, a faculty member and a career development officer so each student has a strong foundation of people upon which he or she can rely.

"Our innovative mentorship program was created to capitalize on one of the law school's key strengths – its people," Dean Peter B. "Bo" Rutledge said. "We are very proud of the authentic connections that exist between the various communities within the law school's greater family. This program really jump starts the building of relationships for our first-year students."

Associate Director of Student Affairs Alex D. Sklut (J.D.'11), who oversees the initiative, said the mentorship program provides students with multiple sources of support throughout their time in law school. "Whether it be questions about academics, careers or personal situations, mentees have a mentor to turn to for advice."

The mentor matching process uses surveys filled out by the mentees and mentors; and in the future, the program will be expanded to all students – regardless of their year in law school – so that every law student has at minimum a mentor network of four individuals.

Most of the matching for mentors and mentees is based on interests and hobbies or other common areas such as undergraduate school/degree, hometowns or location of practice. Thus, the program gives students a chance to connect and network with those who can also be a general resource about both life and law school concerns.

"After being out of school for a few years, I really had no idea what to expect going into my 1L year. Georgia Law created a welcoming atmosphere for me to not only ask a range of questions, but also feel at home before classes even started," first-year student Lauren B. Wallace said about her experience with the mentor program. "Since starting in August [2016], I was able to establish relationships with my mentors who had experiences and backgrounds that looked similar to my own."



Lauren Wallace (center) poses with her mentor team, which is comprised of Hosch Professor Elizabeth Weeks (J.D.'99) (far left), Career Development Associate Director Laura Woodson (J.D.'90), 2013 alumnus Rory Weeks and second-year student Harris Mason (far right).

Having gone through and graduated from law school, most mentors know the stressful times of year and can support their students when needed. This fall, one mentor sent his mentee coffee gift cards before memos were due. Another mentor and mentee held a weekly Sunday check-in to discuss their lives and law school. Yet another mentor offered home-cooked meals and a place to stay when a student suffered a personal loss.

The relationships grown from the mentorship program are making a difference in the lives and law school experiences of students.

"I don't know if my first semester experience would have been the same without the help from my team," Wallace said. "In general, I feel very supported and know that I'm not in this alone."

The goal of the mentor program is to encourage a genuine connection between students and their mentors that will last and be fruitful for the three years a student is in law school – and beyond.

There are no time requirements or meeting commitments for mentors or mentees, and the communication method is what works for each pair. However, a few mentor/mentee events are held throughout the year to provide an additional connection time for those who are interested.

If you would like to serve as a mentor to one of the law school's students, please contact Sklut at asklut@uga.edu.