

## **For thousands, path at UWO smoother with support of PALs**

**by Alex Hummel - Monday, December 16, 2013**

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/30876/for-thousands-path-at-uwo-smoother-with-support-of-pals/>

Each year at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, a special corps of students steps up to help their peers plot a course through the sometimes obstacle and challenge-laden path to a degree. These peers are responsible for helping, on average, 3,000 students make sure their educational journey is as on-track and progressing as smoothly as possible.

They call these student sentinels, “PALs,” or Peer Advising Liaisons.

And as their ranks grow, this approximately 20-student team of peer advisers’ and navigators’ successes mount.

Housed in the UW Oshkosh Undergraduate Advising Resource Center (UARC), the PALs and their program were recently featured as an “Exemplary Practice” in a national article for the National Academic Advising Association’s (NACADA) Peer Advising and Mentoring Monogram.

The program continues to experience success – described by UW Oshkosh Assistant Director of Advising and PALs director, Cindy Fruhwirth, as a specially trained and mobilized team of peers who “answer questions about registration, campus policies, degree audits, general education requirements, campus resources, major or career exploration resources and a host of other topics.”

PALs “help with pre- and post-advising and are available as a drop-in, phone or email resource in two locations during week days and four nights each week.” They are also keen listeners when frustrated or confused students need a peer to talk to.

For the PALs themselves, the program has, no question about it, two-way benefits.

“I have learned so much about myself and my fellow students from being a PAL over these two years,” said UW Oshkosh nursing major and PAL Hannah Forcey. “I have learned a great deal about communication, whether it be between other PALS, the advisers, students, parents or professors. I have also learned a great deal about patience and troubleshooting.”

Sometimes, the wait for a UW Oshkosh UARC adviser can be longer than hoped, perhaps two to three weeks for an appointment. The PAL program “was developed in 2004 to be able to address student’s general questions to allow them to have an immediate answer to many of their short term concerns,” Fruhwirth said.

Twenty PALs serves the entire undergraduate population. The team is prepared to help freshmen, sophomores and transfer students (including traditional, non-traditional and underrepresented groups) in the UARC, in a satellite office in Scott Hall, a campus residence halls.

On average, in the last several years, the support has reached 3,000 students a year—students who, thanks to the PALs guidance, did not subsequently need to see an adviser. Last year, PALs scheduled nearly 9,500 student-adviser appointments.

PALs members are amassing incredible educational and career-skill-building experiences while working on the UARC team.

“I think I've developed my emotional intelligence; I can relate to students while helping them figure out their dilemmas in a professional manner using these skills and my acquired knowledge in advising and its processes,” UW Oshkosh business and marketing major Nickolas Boylan said, citing work helping students decipher and command degree requirements, campus student-Web portals, class registration systems and other campus resources.

“Also, this job with the UARC has helped me obtain a customer service internship at Nature's Way in Green Bay,” Boylan said. “I'm fortunate I could market my skills as a PAL to help get a summer job where I may move into another internship related to my field.”

Forcey credits her PALs experience with the strengthening of her leadership and problem solving talents. Her team is tight-knit given their shared experiences.

“I also enjoy seeing students take a sigh of relief after coming into the UARC,” she said. “It is an extremely rewarding position. I told my PAL evaluator that graduating in May will be bittersweet. While I am ready to get out in the world and start my big-kid life, I am sad to leave such awesome co-workers, supervisors and advisers.”

UW Oshkosh human resources management major and a student assistant in the University's “Professional Counseling 201” course, Brenda Fredenhagen has been a PAL for a year. She credits her PALs experience with helping sharpen her crucial listening skills.

“When a student comes in, it is never the same situation as the student before them,” Fredenhagen said. “Each student is different and therefore has different needs. Listening is so important because a lot of times, the issue that the student really needs resolved is not the one they are initially telling you. In order to fully help the student we rely a lot on listening to what they don't say, and asking students to bring to light those tough issues.”

Fredenhagen said, ultimately, the PALs “wins”—for the PALs themselves—are in witnessing what many might perceive as minor victories for students tapping into the program. They are anything but, Fredenhagen suggested.

“Sometimes the most victorious seems to be the student who just gets in all their classes,” she said. “My most successful student was a student who I worked alongside during the summer. This student and I set up their entire fall schedule (it was the first time since coming back to school after active duty in the Army) and the student expressed a lot of nervousness going back into the classroom. I showed the student a lot of resources and where they were located. It was after seeing the student come out of a classroom -- the student recognized me and thanked me and told me how well he was doing. That one student sticks in my mind.”

Learn more:

- [UW Oshkosh Undergraduate Advising Resource Center](#)