

FROM A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

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Many Rivier students say that the best part of their degree program is the chance to work with mentors to gain hands-on experience. It's no surprise that some are inspired to become mentors themselves.



Karen Vittoria '09 and Lisa Armstrong '01 both learned from Vittoria's student teaching experience. (PHOTO BY JODIE ANDRUSKEVICH)

Lisa Armstrong '01 says student teaching in Margaret Sinclair's fourth grade class in Londonderry was a great experience. "She's a phenomenal teacher—I loved working with her," Armstrong says. "She's a very good mentor. I'd go home at night and reflect on so many wonderful things she did."

So when Karen Vittoria '09, Armstrong's student teacher at Hudson's H.O. Smith School, commented on how well-behaved her third grade class was, Armstrong asked Vittoria to reflect on the students' behavior.

"She was a fantastic example for me," Vittoria says. "I feel after this whole experience I have a friend in her, too—someone who will always be a mentor for me." She was impressed with Armstrong's ability to help students make real-world connections by giving them examples from their own lives that could help

them grasp concepts. Vittoria also appreciated the way Armstrong allows students to explore and enjoy learning.

Armstrong says having a student teacher was a learning experience for both women. "Hopefully I'm mentoring her, but I'm getting ideas she's bringing into the classroom as well," she says. "When mentoring, you have to reflect on your own teaching as well."

Nursing preceptor Bill Carbonneau '97G agrees that working with a student offers an important opportunity to examine his own practice. "I learn something about my practice every time I have a student," Carbonneau says. Reviewing each patient's case allows him to understand what his students are learning in the classroom while updating his own practice or reminding him of information he may have forgotten. "I have also found observing students' interactions with patients allow me to develop or refine my own techniques for building patient relationships," he says.

In Carbonneau's job on the overnight shift in Emergency Department at Health Alliance Hospital's Leominster, Massachusetts campus, he spends the first half of his shift caring for patients with a variety of minor injuries and illness from sprained ankles and sore throats to broken bones and lacerations. He moves to the main ER for the rest of his shift, where he's "peppered with patients that have psychiatric and substance abuse issues, abdominal pain, atypical chest pain and usually something else that is unusual, interesting and completely unexpected."

Carbonneau enjoys seeing students become more comfortable and confident applying classroom knowledge in clinical settings. “Students without ER experience may find it daunting at first, but when they find a level of comfort in the ER, it gives them confidence that they can be comfortable in almost any setting,” he says.

Family nurse practitioner Peg DiTulio '95G says, “Seeing former students in their own roles, it’s rewarding to feel like you were part of helping them get there.” Initially, however, DiTulio was nervous about serving as a mentor. When she graduated from Rivier, there weren’t many nurse practitioners around, making it difficult for students to secure clinical placements. Nursing faculty asked DiTulio and some of her classmates if they’d be willing to work with current students. “The faculty told us they wouldn’t ask us to take on students if they didn’t think we were competent,” DiTulio recalls.

“I wanted to do mentoring in a quality fashion,” she says. Soon she realized that students have so much to learn, “you don’t have to be an expert in everything to be a good teacher.” Students who work with DiTulio at Rockingham County Healthcare, the family practice she established in 1998, get a view of nursing they might not see in a more traditional primary care practice. “We’re truly a nurse practitioner practice in that we only see 15 patients or less a day—I have time to do that education piece that’s so important,” she says.

DiTulio takes time with the students she mentors as well, making sure they understand all the duties they’ll handle in addition to seeing patients. “I want to provide the student a good experience; I also want to get home before 11 at night,” she says. Working with students is part of DiTulio’s commitment to her profession—she’s found it well worth the sacrifices and additional demands on her time. Mentoring helped her fill a part-time position: Regina Keating '08 spent one day a week at RCHC for two semesters; once she graduated, DiTulio hired her.

Students say it’s helpful to work with Rivier alumni because they’ve gone through the same programs—they’re familiar with faculty expectations and understand what students need to get out of their field experiences. Matt Blair '09, a human development major with a social work minor, says when he told Sally Booth, Director of the Social Work program, that he wanted an internship working with people with disabilities, Booth told him he should contact Mindy Pond '02, a Rivier alumna working as a family support services coordinator at Gateways Community Services.

Blair appreciated getting to work with someone who understands the goals and requirements of Rivier’s program, as well as the skills and knowledge he’d need in the field. “If Mindy had a coworker doing something she thought was valuable for me to learn, she’d send me off with them to get that experience,” Blair says.

“It’s unique—we have the same exact degree, with the same classes,” says Pond. “Matt will come in and tell me what the next assignment is, what the goals are, and what he wants to learn.” Pond says her own internship at Gateways helped her map out her future; she wants to make sure current students have the same opportunity to find the right fit.

Carol Gorelick '99/'05G sees working with future teachers as a chance to carry on good teaching practices. “Long after I’m gone, they’ll still be teaching—hopefully they’ll mentor someone in the same fashion,” she says. She says that mentoring was part of her class’ charge at graduation. She took that charge seriously—she’s had 18 students work with her through the years.

Gorelick says she enjoys modeling the excitement she believes should go into teaching. “Even if I’ve done something for the seven thousandth time, I’ll still put forth excitement because it’s the students’ first time...I think it’s important to show that.”



Carol Gorelick '99/'05G (left) modeled organization and enthusiasm for student teacher Brittany Fulton '09. (PHOTO BY JODIE ANDRUSKEVICH)

Brittany Fulton '09 says students respond well to Gorelick's enthusiasm and the way she moves from subject to subject. Based on her student-teaching experience in Gorelick's third grade class at Nashua's Birch Hill Elementary School, Fulton has tried to make her own lessons more entertaining for students, including more activities that get students out of their seats. "She had a lot to offer—I felt like it was a good fit," Fulton says.

The strategies and skills that mentors model aren't the only things students take away from the experience. The value of mentoring stands out them as well. Vittoria says she's definitely willing to take on student teachers once she's settled into her own classroom. "My experience was so good, I understand what a student teacher would need—I feel like I can take that experience I had and apply it to someone else," she says. Some day soon, recent graduates will see the mentoring role from a different perspective. ■

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