



Newsletter Features

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Important Dates

- **October 12:** 4-5pm Field Advisory #1
- **October 22:** 1st student contact completed
- **November 3:** Must meet with students by this date
- **November 19:** 2nd student contact completed
- **November 30:** 4-5pm Field Advisory #2
- **December 3, F:** UIC Instruction ends.
- **December 6-10, M-F :** UIC Final examinations.

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Special Teachers and Exceptional Pupils = Urban Promise

Beginning a New Mentoring Relationship

It is part of our understanding, as educators, that scaffolding learning cannot be effective if students' knowledge and ability levels are not determined first. Therefore, at the beginning of every academic year, as teachers we make a conscious effort to acquaint ourselves with the class. Students' current knowledge, thought processes, and sentiments about learning are assessed. Time is dedicated to uncovering students' interests, perceived strengths, possible needs, etc. We learn as much as possible about our students, early on, so that learning time may be optimized and adequate long-term goals for student growth may be set. All of these efforts are made in an attempt to determine how to best support individual learning.

These initial assessment procedures are informative, effective, and necessary for the development of appropriate guidance. Thus, we encourage everyone to follow similar steps as you get to know your STEP=UP mentees. As you communicate with them and we ask that you gauge their understandings so that you may determine what type of support and guidance these students

need.

It is our hope that in sharing your anecdotes and reasoning about teaching, STEP=UP students will gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for their overall preparation program. Your "insider information" can make their on-campus coursework more real. Through your support, STEP=UP students will see first-hand how the complexities of real school dynamics must be handled while still encouraging successful learning. As you make arrangements for the first mentoring contact, here are a few ideas that we brainstormed:

1. It is important, to the mentoring relationship, that you build rapport with your student.

Neither the first discussion nor every other contact has to be entirely focused on student learning or classroom dynamics. It is completely acceptable to begin any contact with casual conversation. Getting to know your mentee's background can help you develop a good partnership. Ultimately, students should feel comfortable enough, within the mentoring relationship, to voice even their most challenging concerns.

2. Listen to the unspoken.

We know that, just like your K – 12 students, the UIC students may be unclear about certain ideas. So, listen for what is missing in the conversation. Learn to probe mentees about what they do and do not understand within their coursework and internship experiences. Ask about what particular topics they've studied, over the last couple weeks, in the cognition course or in the language course.

You might ask if they've had a specific ah-ha-moment or if they can identify a particular idea that seemed challenging or unclear. They may very well feel more comfortable raising such sensitive issues with you rather than their teacher. Also, try to raise questions and discussion on issues that they may not have yet contemplated. Strive to be the person who will stretch their learning and make relevant the content that they are discovering in their experiences here at UIC.

3. Finally, understand the dilemma of time: students' lives are very hectic, but they still need the mentoring and you as another ever-present figure in their academic and professional growth.

In our ever-chaotic lives, spare time is frequently a commodity that we must do without. Still, we encourage you to stay committed to the responsibility of enhancing the learning of these outstanding and exceptional individuals.

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It may be difficult to contact, meet, or even get an email response in a timely manner from some students. So we ask that you understand that some of these students are juggling full-time careers, families, three classes a semester, and countless other factors. Thus, it will be important for you to nudge them at times and to figure out creative ways to support them even when they assure you that everything is fine e.g. help them see that they can talk through a course paper with you.

STEP = UP Students' Expectations and Concerns for the 04/05 Academic Year

We know that you are now thinking about how to shape your mentoring relationship. So we thought it might be helpful to hear expectations and concerns right from the STEP=UP students. Therefore, we asked them to share some of their thoughts.

We report the responses that seemed most representative of all the feedback we received. It will give you an idea on what topics to raise, especially if your mentee doesn't have a lot of questions to ask or gives simple responses such as, "Everything is going fine!"

- What do you hope to gain from your mentoring relationship?
 - New ideas
 - Helpful Strategies
 - Real and relevant examples from experience
 - Opportunities for observation
 - Guidance on how to become reflective
 - Practical tips for advocating for our students
 - Tips on how to manage the systematic challenges of special education
- What are some big questions that you hope to have answered by your mentor this year?
 - What can we do to prepare ourselves before the school year starts?
 - What can we do when we don't agree at an IEP meeting?
 - What do you do when the IEP is not completely adhered to?
 - How can we work with teachers within an inclusive setting?
 - What strategies have worked best for struggling readers?
 - How do you manage grouping?
- What are your biggest concerns or insecurities about becoming a teacher of special education?
 - Surviving IEPs
 - Working with general education teachers and parents
 - Establishing good relationships with students
 - Setting up a behavior management plan
 - Not knowing how to support each student
 - Juggling all of the demands of the classroom
 - Applying course content into my own classroom

Ideas from our September Mentor Meeting:

- Focus on talking about your students and their learning. Tell specific stories about specific kids.
- Help mentees "see" your reasoning and how uncertain teaching can be.
- Share students' work samples. Show pictures from your classroom and school.
- Set a few goals between conversations, e.g., Next time let's talk about...; Next time I'll update you about Louis and his actions during math class; Next time let me hear about your other course.
- Talk about grants you have written.
- Discuss the experiences you've had working with families, especially at family conference night, IEP meetings, and just general communication.

Grand Opening of the STEP = UP Library

The STEP=UP Curriculum Library was conceived with the intention of providing students access to learning materials which they may otherwise not be able to attain. The goal is to have students explore and borrow books, videos, kits, and manipulatives that they may integrate into their classrooms during their field internship and student teaching experiences. We want students to learn how to supplement, enhance and complement the instructional materials they are provided with in their classroom.

Consequently, we have been working hard to expand the contents of the library. The search for resources began in the Fall 2003 and has been an ongoing process ever since. Currently, the library contains a wide selection of children's books, teacher education books, reference books, reading kits, videos, math manipulatives, and several other materials.

However, our search for excellent materials is not yet done. We want to ensure that we attain a wide and well-rounded collection of valuable and practical resources. Therefore, we ask that you consider yourselves a part of the library development process and thus feel free to suggest any materials that you think we may be interested in researching or attaining for the library.

We invite you to visit the library and explore the materials available. Library resources can be checked out by students, faculty, and mentors participating in the STEP=UP Program or the Special Education Masters Program. The library is scheduled to open October 13 and will be accessible Monday through Thursday from 3:30 to 4:30. If you have any questions or recommendations regarding materials please feel free to send an email to

steuplibrary@yahoo.com.