

University of North Carolina, Greensboro

Summary: Alumni magazine article about the connection of the institution's peer-to-peer efforts to their Quality Enhancement Plan. Article supported publicity for their career and peer-to-peer mentorship initiatives.

SHARING WISDOM FINDING WELLNESS

Dr. Daniel Bibeau was recognized in 2005 with the Lawther Alumni Award from what was then the School of Health and Human Performance (now part of the School of Health and Human Sciences).

Principles of public health shape her philosophy. As a faculty member, McCoy has focused on community-engaged research to address health equity issues in under-resourced and minoritized communities. She also co-founded the UNC Health and Wellness Coaching Program.

"Public health is a way for us to be healthy individuals within healthy communities. I think it's vital to create a healthy campus for our students," McCoy explains.

That means everything from well-lit walkways to safe parking facilities. And it can touch on each of the eight dimensions of health identified by Spartans Thrive.

"Investing in students holistically right now is investing in our community holistically for tomorrow."

As part of Spartans Thrive, mentoring among peers, between alumni and Spartan undergraduates will support students in their first year on campus.

Why now? McCoy says Spartans Thrive meets the needs of undergraduates today. "The pandemic helped to expose cracks in our society that some of us in higher education knew were there."

Investment in students outside the classroom is a wise course, McCoy explains. "This is going to help the whole campus because we'll all be looking at the same navigational plan. We'll all know exactly how to get students to the resources they need."

As more students have greater success, retention rates will strengthen, she notes. More students will graduate on time and move quickly toward their life and career goals. "We know that peer-to-peer mentoring works. UNC chose it because it's what our students are asking for."

In Spring 2024, 636 new mentorships have been formed – approximately 24% of our newest students. At the same time, mentoring on campus didn't appear out of nowhere. Spartans Thrive is picking up on work that was ongoing.

After a pilot program focusing on transfer students showed an increase in both feelings of self-confidence and sense of belonging within the campus community, the scope of the mentoring program was expanded. "Since 2021, we have formed more than 1,500 mentorships with first-year students."

CONNECTIONS

Beyond data, McCoy knows the value of human connections and shared wisdom from her own educational journey. "I'm a first-generation student. When I was an undergraduate at the University of Maryland, I didn't know how to talk to professors. When I needed something, I didn't bother them because culturally that's what I was told not to do."

It was a peer who helped her chart her professional health. "He listened to me in our conversations. And he tied it up with a bow!"

Mentoring is not just for undergraduates. During McCoy's first year as a faculty member, Vice Chancellor of Research and Engagement Terri Shelton reached out. "Dr. Shelton said, 'What are some things you need?' She invited me to her network and through that I was able to sit around the table with people I would never have had access to." Their relationship continues to this day. "Mentorship can be lifelong," says McCoy.

GET INVOLVED

How can alumni get involved? This summer, potential alumni mentors can complete a survey to be matched with a student in the third or fourth year of their studies. Online training through UNCG's partnership with Mentor Collective will take place late summer 2024. During Homecoming, mentors and mentees will connect either online or in person and will continue to meet monthly throughout the academic year.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT GO.UNCG.EDU/ALUMNI_MENTORING.

UNCG LEADS

When it comes to student wellness, UNCG is a leader.

"Student Well-Being: It Matters," an educational course for students, is being adopted across the UNC System.

"The research was done at UNCG, the course originated at UNCG, and now it's expanded to all 17 UNC System campuses," says David Wyrick '98 MPH, '02 PhD, professor of public health education and founder of UNCG's Center for Athlete Well-Being.

The UNC System also funded Guiding Universities in Demonstrating Empathy (GUIDE), which prepares faculty and staff for conversations about mental health with students. "GUIDE teaches empathic communication skills, both verbal and nonverbal," says Wyrick.

His team developed GUIDE and will facilitate training at every UNC System campus, he reports.



IBELONG

UNCG's IBELONG PROJECT promotes a welcoming campus environment by funding student-led projects. Natalie Adams '23, a Provost Student Excellence Award recipient, Roger Schwirck Award for Excellence speaker, was photographed for Delta Alpha Pi's "More than my disability," one of 24 projects funded in 2023.

"Whether you are a first-generation UNCG graduate or a graduate who comes from a long line of Spartan alumni, you've belonged here," Adams said in her commencement address.

☀️ We're concerned about all dimensions of your health and wellness from the moment you step on campus. ☀️

— REGINA MCCOY '98 MPH



WHAT IS SPARTANS THRIVE?

MINERVA'S ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

First-year students take a "foundations" course about health and wellness. "We anchor everyone," says Associate Vice Provost Regina McCoy. "One student told me they learned how to set goals."

Adding a wellness competency to traditional "reading, writing, and arithmetic" answers a big question, she says: "How do we

transform our students into human beings who are going to be leaders later on?"

SPARTAN EXPERIENCE

What is "co-curricular"? "We provide services outside class that allow students to get social interaction and complement what they're learning in the classroom," says Dr. Brett Carter, associate vice chancellor for student affairs and dean of students.

Focused on documenting activities like club leadership, Spartan Experience helps students track and explain their personal and professional development to future employers.

MENTOR COLLECTIVE

UNCG partners with Mentor Collective to connect mentors and mentees. After a pilot program for transfer students showed increases in "sense of

belonging" and "self-efficacy" in 2020, mentoring expanded to all first-year students.

"Research shows that mentored students are more likely to succeed and persist than their non-mentored peers," says McCoy.

SPARTANS THRIVE
UNCG's Quality Enhancement Plan
Health and Wellness

SHARING WISDOM FINDING WELLNESS

SPARTANS THRIVE GOES BEYOND THE EXPECTED WITH THE POWER OF MENTORING.

BY MERCER BUTTER '11 MA • PHOTOGRAPHY BY SEAN NORONA '13

I N HER FIRST FULL-TIME POSITION WITH UNCG,

Regina McCoy '98 MPH served as a field placement coordinator, helping community health education majors find internships in local clinics, international health programs, and more. Part of that work was helping young professionals find their way.

More than 25 years later, a belief in the power of mentoring and a passion for student success still guide McCoy forward. The professor is now associate vice provost for retention and student success, and she's spearheading Spartans Thrive, the University's new five-year Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). Such plans are implemented as a required part of university accreditation. This one employs a well-rounded view of health and a peer mentoring program to boost well-being and achievement across campus.

"I was very lucky to be at UNCG for the last QEP, which was on global engagement. I know we benefited greatly from it," says McCoy.

“We know peer-to-peer mentoring works and it's what our students are asking for.”

— REGINA MCCOY '98 MPH

Spartans Thrive promotes student success and retention through a health and wellness competency in the general education program; a co-curricular transcript to document leadership roles, professional development, and community engagement; and a “Spartans First” mentoring program.

The goal is nothing new. The University has been helping students thrive for more than 135 years.

“At UNCG we've always thought of wellness from our historical point of view, going back to Woman's College, with physical and intellectual wellness,” says McCoy.

While these are essential, she argues that students benefit from a well-rounded view of health. That's why Spartans Thrive addresses financial and career health; cultural and social health; and environmental health and wellness, as well.

MENTORSHIP

A coach, a guide, a shoulder to lean on, or a helping hand. However you define mentors, they can be key elements of success.

“A mentor is someone who says, ‘I'm like you and I'm going to help you walk through the hills and valleys of this experience,’” says McCoy.

That spirit of mentorship is also part of UNCG's DNA. “I have never walked across this campus in a straight line,” says McCoy. “You see someone, and they engage you and make you feel like this is the place for you.”

She came to UNCG pursuing a master's in public health, attracted by the program's emphasis on community health and the value it places on practical application. “It was not just about obtaining a degree. It was about integrating my work with my academic pursuits, mentoring the next generation of health educators, and contributing significantly to the field of public health.”

She benefited from mentors like Dr. Kathy Conley and



Peer mentor Makalah Brownridge, who will graduate this May, and Regina McCoy '98 MPH.

“ I got involved in mentoring because I worked with Orientation. A lot of students told me they needed someone to go to with questions as they started college. ”
- PEER MENTOR MAKALAH BROWNRIDGE