OAKLAND UNIVERSITY

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Classmates offer knowledge and expertise through SBA Peer Advising program

By Dawn Pauli

Peer advisor Natalie Mischley with a fellow student

When sophomore Andrew Makowski needed guidance on picking a major, he turned to an innovative new SBA program that pairs undergraduate students with a peer adviser to provide answers for common advising questions.

Through the SBA Peer Advising Program, peer advisers are able to provide on-the-spot advising to students in areas such as course schedule planning, general information and major standing.

"Students like talking to other students because it offers a different perspective," says Kellie Klinck, SBA adviser. "In addition, if the question is something basic, students don't have to wait for an appointment or walk-in time. The two advising models -- professional advising and peer advising -- work well together and increase student satisfaction and service delivery."

Since premiering last March, hundreds of SBA students have worked with peer advisers, who are selected from the **SBA Scholars Program** and work up to 20 hours each week. While the program was originally designed to assist the professional advisers during peak times in the registration cycle, the peer advising program has been expanded to accommodate students' advising needs throughout the year.

"The success of the program resulted in a continuation of this service through the summer and now into the 2009-10 academic year," says Klinck.

Makowski chose pre-business with the assistance of his peer adviser, who provided information about majors and counseled him to pick something he has an interest in and would enjoy doing.

"I related to the peer adviser more than a professional adviser," he says. "It was nice to get a different opinion. By them being students also, they just went through the process, so they know what it feels like to pick a major."

Acting as a peer adviser provides students with an opportunity to hone their communication and problem-solving skills, says Klinck.

"Aside from learning about the SBA program at a deeper level, peer advisers build connections with staff and faculty of the SBA and across campus," says Klinck. "An ideal peer adviser is one who can work well with others, handle stressful or high pressure situations, communicate clearly, able to problem-solve, and understand the boundary between serving as a peer adviser and when a professional adviser is needed."

The peer advisers receive extensive and on-going training and work closely with the SBA professional advisers, who regularly monitor advising sessions.

SBA senior Natalie Mischley was one of the first peer advisers in the program and assisted with the development of the two-day training session for new peer advisers.

"This was very good experience for me since I am a Human Resource Management major. I really enjoyed connecting with other students and being able to share my experiences with them," says Mischley. "They were grateful to have someone who had already been through the same situation to rely on for help and guidance. It was a very rewarding role."

SUMMARY
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