

Oakland University's 'Genius-to-Genius' program helps students socialize, build relationships

Genius-to-Genius, an innovative program developed at Oakland University, is helping students build relationships, enhance their socialization skills and transition to college life by pairing them with peer consultants who are trained to help them through the process.

"The program is open to any Oakland University student who needs extra support on campus," said Evelyn Wright, program coordinator for G2G. "So far, it's been very successful."

According to Wright, students who participate in the program are matched with consultants hired through the **Handshake** platform, which is utilized by the university's Career Services Office to help students and alumni search for internships, on- and off-campus employment, and networking opportunities.

"Many of our consultants have experience working with students, including those with special needs," she said.

In the G2G program, consultants and students typically meet once per week on campus for one-on-one sessions.

"I think the students really benefit from the one-on-one meetings," Wright said.

Students in the program are also encouraged to meet as a group and participate in a variety of activities designed to help them build friendships and develop their interpersonal skills, including sporting events and movie nights.

"It's a great way for students to get to know each other," Wright said.

Developed by Chaturi Edrisinha, Ph.D., an associate professor in the Human Development and Child Studies Department and the director of research at the Oakland University Center for Autism, the Genius-to-Genius program is the result of a collaboration between the OUCA, the School of Engineering and Computer Science, and the Office of the Dean of Students.

"Dr. Edrisinha saw a big need for a program like this," Wright said. "She saw students who were falling through the cracks, spending their time in their dorm rooms, isolated."

According to Edrisinha, the OUCA conducted a survey last year to evaluate the need for services for students on the autism spectrum at Oakland University.

The results of the survey indicated that most students do not need academic support; however, they often lack the social skills to take advantage of the opportunities available on campus.

"Most were honor students and had excellent GPAs, but often lacked the soft skills to make good team members on group projects," Edrisinha said. "They also failed to make friends in their classes and had difficulty bonding with classmates or socializing."

When Edrisinha and her colleague – Jan Graetz, Ph.D., an associate professor of Education, Human Development and Child Studies shared the results of the study with Louay Chamra, dean of the School of Engineering and Computer Science; and Nancy Schmitz, assistant vice president for student affairs and dean of students – they immediately recognized the need for the G2G program.

"They made our vision possible," Edrisinha said. "If not for their generous support, G2G would not exist."

While there are currently 15 students enrolled in the program, Wright said she hopes it will continue to grow as students learn about it and word spreads.



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