This past spring the Department launched a pilot of its new Mentorship Program. Six students were matched with mentors in the fields of law, local government, academia, and business. In this section, the Department talks to two of the participants, **Jeanna Ballard** and Mayor **Christopher Nelson**, about their experience in the program. The full program, open to all junior and senior Political Science majors, will kick off this fall. For more information on the Mentorship Program, visit: [http://polisci.niu.edu/polisci/mentors/index.shtml](http://polisci.niu.edu/polisci/mentors/index.shtml).

Department: Jeanna and Chris, thanks for sitting down and talking with us about your experience in the mentorship program. Why don’t you both start by telling us what was the most rewarding experience you had participating in the program.

Jeanna: The best experience I had as part of the mentorship program was learning how to develop my professional skills. Meetings with seasoned individuals can be rather intimidating, but by attending several meetings I became more comfortable and aware of my nervous habits and was able to correct them over time. As a college student, it was also nice to get free lunch (laughs).

Chris: I benefitted from a substantial amount of assistance from others as I began my career. Such mentoring even continues to the present day. Because of this, I was grateful for the opportunity to assist another person in a similar fashion.

D: Jeanna, what was the best piece of advice that you received from Mayor Nelson?

J: To stay connected with those from NIU and in the area. Staying connected can help me to learn more about the different career paths and can provide me with opportunities that may not usually be offered.

D: How did the program shape your career plans?

J: The program definitely shaped my career plans because without it there is a good chance I would not be attending grad school next fall. Due to Mayor Nelson's help and connections I was able to meet the coordinator of NIU's MPA Program. The meeting with the coordinator and Mayor Nelson's personal experience and advice encouraged me to apply to the program. This fall, I will be attending graduate school at NIU pursuing a Master's in Public Administration with an emphasis in strategic planning and leadership.

D: Chris, Jeanna clearly learned a great deal from you. Did you learn anything from her?

C: Absolutely. I learned that the NIU Political Science program continues to produce determined and resourceful students. The mentoring relationship also prompted me to recall how difficult the choice might be for a graduating student to choose a path that offers opportunity, but not in a way that precludes mid-career adjustments.

D: What do you think makes a good mentor?

C: Accessibility and a willingness to be an advocate for the mentee. Although I did not initially know Jeanna personally, I recognized early on that she was a smart and conscientious student, and so felt confident connecting her with persons in my network.

D: I’m glad to hear that you both had a positive experience. Why would you encourage students and alumni to participate in the mentorship program?

J: Students should participate in the mentorship program because it really helps to build connections with successful individuals in the area. The program also provides students with a new perspective on future career and academic plans and helps them to achieve those goals.

C: I definitely would encourage alumni to participate. A successful university program is one that retains and fosters involvement by its alums. If the alums assist, the success of students entering the workforce grows, and the overall prestige associated with an education from NIU is enhanced. Everyone benefits.