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# BC needs to increase mentorship opportunities for first year women

By [Anne Williams](#) on 30th October

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## Why is it so hard for first year women to find access to mentors?

It's been stated so much that it reads like a cliché: College is quite the transition.

This time of adjustment and beginnings is difficult for everyone to varying degrees, but can be helped with the guidance of a mentor.

Peer-to-peer mentorship can be a powerful tool for acclimating to the unprecedented challenges faced by first year students as they deal with roommates, peer pressures, and homesickness (among other issues.) Older students are able to provide guidance on problems that they may have faced when they were younger, and can act as an invaluable source of perspective and support.

Freshman year is a critical time of development and growth – so why, then, is it so hard for first year women to find access to mentors?

The discrepancy in mentorship opportunities is stark, and should be cause for concern.



An often-cited 2012 study showed that senior [women leave Boston College with lower self-confidence](#) than they had as first year students. This loss in self-confidence undoubtedly is intensified when combined with other factors such as being AHANA, or LGBTQIA+.

In contrast, senior men leave Boston College with higher self-confidence. That men become more confident in their time at BC is not a bad thing, but that their experience is so vastly different from their female counterparts shows that something needs to be done.

Every freshman will face obstacles, but being a first year woman at BC presents a specific set of challenges. The culture of maintaining a perfect appearance (both physically and emotionally) takes its toll on women who receive subtle, yet relentless messages that their worth lies in their perceived attractiveness.

Additionally, 1 in 5 Boston College women will experience sexual assault during their four years here, and freshman year, particularly the first six weeks, puts college women at the greatest risk for assault.

The trauma from surviving an assault can stay with someone for years, affecting multiple parts of a person's life – academics, friendships, and other relationships, to name a few. Sexual assault affects all genders of course, but it is no secret that it primarily affects women in a deeply pervasive way. As a woman, if you haven't been assaulted, you most likely have been catcalled at, leered at, or made to feel sexually uncomfortable at some point during your time here.

Women of color, as well as queer women, must also face an additional set of "othering," that comes with having a marginalized identity, and any mentorship programs that exists at Boston College should acknowledge the role that these identities play in one's college experience here.

Despite the clear indications that Boston College does not offer an entirely healthy atmosphere for women, first year women have few opportunities to pursue gender-based mentorship.

The Center for Student Formation provides two primary mentoring opportunities for students: Freshmen League for first year men, and Ascend for sophomore women.



Freshmen League is a wildly successful program in the second semester that pairs eight freshman mentees with two “captains,” upperclassmen who lead weekly discussions on the BC experience, as well as the meaning of masculinity at Boston College.

300 first year men participate in the Freshmen League, and most walk away having gained a network of friends, a comfortable space to share their experiences, and a support system in the form of the two “captains.”

Ascend is similar to the Freshmen League in structure and scope, but takes place in the second semester of

sophomore year. This needs to change.

The Women’s Center this year has introduced DUO, a mentoring program that pairs first year women with upperclassmen women. According to BC’s website, DUO encourages “conversations surrounding growth and personal development.” While this program is commendable for its intentionality, it is not enough. Due to limited resources, only 70 first year women will be able to participate in DUO.

The rest of the freshman female population will have to wait until second semester of sophomore year to apply to have a mentor, at which point it is almost too late to prevent a loss of confidence, as so much of that loss takes place during freshman year.

We cannot expect BC students to be men and women for others if they cannot first be comfortable and happy with themselves.

As someone who was sexually assaulted second semester of my freshman year, I know that the importance of having a strong support system cannot be overstated.

Having a reliable and supportive mentor can be an essential part of surviving freshman year, and first year women deserve to have unrestricted access to that resource.

By limiting these opportunities for women, the university inadvertently ensures that women will continue to lose confidence as they navigate their way through their four years at Boston College.

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