

Faculty and students get acquainted outside the classroom

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Katie Russell, a professor of practice in the Tulane Department of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering, serves as a faculty mentor in Butler Hall on the uptown campus. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

There should be more to a faculty-student relationship than three 50-minute classes per week and a set of office hours. That's why the [Tulane Department of Housing and Residence Life](#) is transforming the on-campus living experience with the new Faculty Mentor Program, which is designed to create opportunities for students to collaborate with professors outside the classroom.

“The goal is to assist students who may need some extra help adjusting to our campus culture and community,” said Katie Russell, a professor of practice in the Tulane [Department of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering](#) and a faculty mentor in Butler Hall.

Russell said that she, and other faculty mentors, regularly host student-teacher luncheons and lead intersectional discussions as a chance for students to speak with the professors in a more casual environment.

The mentorship is also said to be helpful for new students adjusting to university life.

“During Mardi Gras, we provided king cake and made costumes with the dorm residents,” said Russell.

But fun is just one aspect. It also gives professors an opportunity to get to know their students better.

Brittany Kennedy, a lecturer in the Tulane School of Liberal Arts’ Department of Spanish and Portuguese and a faculty mentor in Sharp Hall, said she believes the program is equally beneficial for faculty as it is for students.

“For faculty, it’s been just long enough since we were students ourselves that we forget some of the challenges and struggles that come with this stage of life,” said Kennedy. In her opinion, the program has made her a more empathetic teacher.

To date, the program is active in Butler, Sharp and Monroe halls. It will expand to Josephine Louise Hall this fall. Faculty mentors are also active in two honors residences—Wall Residential College and Weatherhead Hall.

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“Having us in the residence halls has been an excellent way to have the students see us as partners in their education, not gatekeepers of grades or knowledge.”
Brittany Kennedy, faculty mentor in Sharp Hall