



# Associated Colleges of Illinois

**Darcy Graham**  
**Concordia University Chicago**  
**ACI Peer Mentoring Program**



Darcy Graham, from Gross Pointe Woods, Michigan, thought she was going to attend a college near her home in Michigan. But while on a spring-break trip to Chicago, she decided to visit [Concordia University Chicago](#) in River Forest. Graham liked what she saw and was able to connect with the cross-country coach so she could continue her running career. Graham is interested in a career as a professional social worker in areas to address child abuse, or working with child protective services or with women and children who have suffered abuse.

[Click to see video!](#)



A first-generation student, Graham met Blanca Gutierrez, who taught a freshman class to new students. Gutierrez is director of the university's Office of Multicultural & First-Generation Student Engagement. Graham said she needed help with tuition payments, and Gutierrez suggested she join the Peer Mentoring Program. Among other things, she

got help completing the challenging FAFSA, a standard application for all students seeking federal financial aid.

Graham says funding provided through the Peer Mentoring Program helped her purchase books. "I wouldn't have had enough this semester to get them had it not been for this program," she says.

Graham says her peer mentor, Jorge Palacios, has been helpful since the beginning of her freshman year, offering support and encouragement. "One of the things he did that was really cool is at the beginning of this year is he gave us all goals. And, he always talks about the importance of internships and jobs," Graham says. Another benefit of peer mentoring, says Graham, is that she has friends who can offer advice and suggestions about navigating college life. "I can go to Blanca or Jorge because they've been through it," she says.