



Associated Colleges of Illinois

Melanie Gallardo
Concordia University Chicago
ACI Peer Mentoring Program



Melanie Gallardo, a first-generation student from Elgin, Illinois, was introduced to [Concordia University Chicago](#) through a campus tour and almost immediately decided that the River Forest university would be her college choice. She attended Jumpstart, a college introduction program, prior to entering Concordia, and it was there that she learned about the ACI Peer Mentoring Program. At her mother's urging, she joined.

"I felt like I could be a part of something that could really benefit me as a first-generation student," says Gallardo. "Since both of my parents don't really know how school works after high school, I never really knew how to ask for help when it came to college work, especially when it comes to financial aid, because we weren't really aware of where we could go for help."

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Gallardo says she's interested in a career as a middle school teacher because she had a good school experience during those years. "I know that as an educator, it's really hard for students, especially in middle school, to make that connection with why they should love education. I just want to be a part of that for them, guiding them towards loving education, the same way I did when I was in 7th grade," she says.

Since her first semester at Concordia, Gallardo has learned a lot about college life and joined student government, serving as a senator. She credits her mentor, also an education major, for teaching her about class schedules, financial aid and how to be a successful student. This was especially true in her first semester in college. "She laid out the outline of how my future years are going to be here as a student at Concordia," Gallardo says.

"In my case, having a peer mentor has strongly affected the way I'm going to continue my education," she says. "I think that I had that boost that not many students on campus have and for that, I'm very grateful."