



Malik Johnson
Rockford University
ACI Peer Mentoring Program

Malik Johnson will graduate in 2021 from [Rockford University](#), Rockford, Illinois. A computer science major, the senior says he's interested in storage management. Along the way, he's been an intern at Commonwealth Edison -- where he says he got good feedback -- and a mentee and mentor in the Men of Color Mentorship (MCM) Program at Rockford, part of ACI's Peer Mentoring Program network.



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Johnson, from the Chicago area, says he chose Rockford because of its small classes. Plus, he plays on the university's football team. "Right now I play a couple of positions. I play a defensive back/linebacker hybrid position, like the nickelback, but now I'm kind of the safety. Football has always been my main sport," he says.

When he first came to college, Johnson, a first-generation college student, says he found it difficult to find resources, but found success by connecting by networking with others who had been to college. His family has also been helpful. "They let me know that I have their full support. And they always back me up with any decision that I make," he says.

Johnson first learned of the MCM Program at Rockford when a program mentor suggested he attend a meeting. "So, I attended the discussion, and then afterwards, I met with the administrator, Dr. Karen Walker, and I was motivated by her involvement here on campus," he says. He credits Walker for being an "amazing administrator." Johnson is now a mentor to other incoming first-generation students.

The program has been helpful in many ways, Johnson says. "I learned that it's not always about you. I learned to be less selfish and help others, because if it wasn't for this program, I wouldn't have had the help that I needed throughout my journey. I've always learned to look back and try to help others climb that ladder with me as well," he says. Specific skills he learned from program are time management, plus study and business skills.

After college, Johnson expects to put some his experience into practice. "It definitely helped me. I feel like the networking has allowed me to meet important figures in different companies, that give good feedback on my work. I also meet important figures that I can use as references for the future, he says. "When I talk to the young mentees, I tell them to be realistic with their reality, and understand who they are as an individual - who they want to be in the future," he says. In addition to his major and football experience, Johnson works at the Seaver Physical Education Center, a campus athletic facility, and he works for UPS, loading and unloading aircraft.