



Danzcel Gerona
Concordia University Chicago
Peer Mentoring Program



Danzcel Gerona decided to attend [Concordia University Chicago](#) after touring the school with another student, Elizabeth Cyrwus. She liked the idea of small class sizes, meeting regularly with professors and being close to the Chicago's downtown. Since she arrived on campus, Gerona said ACI's Peer Mentoring Program (PMP) has enhanced her college experience. It also led to a job as a resident assistant (RA), something she might not have known about otherwise.

A first-generation student from Bartlett, Illinois, Gerona says her PMP mentor, Lily, told her she could live in a campus dormitory and earn a salary as a RA. "That's how I found out about it and decided to apply for the job," Gerona said. Since August, Gerona has been a RA at Concordia, working mostly with freshmen and sharing her college experience.

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Gerona is a nursing major. She has an aunt and uncle who are nurses, and she was able to "shadow" her aunt, who is a wound nurse, on the job. "I knew from a young age that I

want to be part of the health care field. It wasn't until I was actually able to go to her job and see what she does for me to confirm that I actually want to be a part of the health care system." Gerona is focused on becoming an emergency room nurse, and possibly a travel nurse, available to work almost anywhere she is needed. Later, she may return to school to become a nurse anesthetist.

She learned about joining ACI's Peer Mentoring Program at Concordia after the school contacted her. During Gerona's freshman year, her mentor, Lily, met with her two or three times a month. "She would also just be there as a friend to check up on me and make sure I was doing OK with my classes," Gerona said. Her mentor told her about the RA job and applying for scholarships.

"I think for first-generation students, a lot of people don't know that you could get a job on campus and work here during school," Gerona said. At some future time, Gerona said she'd like to be a mentor in the Peer Mentoring Program. But for now, she is mentoring freshmen in her role as a RA. "I feel like being part of the mentor program has helped me tell them information they might need to know," she said. "Even though they may not be first-generation students, they're still freshmen. A lot of them don't know the benefits of being on campus, so I feel I can give them that opportunity."

Gerona is also grateful for donors who make the Peer Mentoring Program possible at her school and 11 other ACI-member colleges and universities. "I think that a lot of students struggle financially because college is really expensive. I know that I struggle financially. So I would tell them I really appreciate their contribution. It's helping me get to where I want to be in the future. They're helping move my career."

At Concordia, Gerona is member of the university's cross country team, a sport she continued from high school, and the university's tennis team. She learned to play tennis at Concordia. She also works with CougarNet Technology Services, the university's IT department, which offers audio and visual services, and printing services to the university community.