



Elie Imani
North Central College
ACI Peer Mentoring Program



Elie Imani is part of a family of six in Rwanda and is the third of three brothers to attend [North Central College](#) in Naperville. The eldest earned a full scholarship to study political science at North Central, and went on to study at Yale University and the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom. A second brother also earned a full scholarship and studied computer science. A couple of years ago, Imani came to Naperville to attend high school and is now a first-year student at North Central, with interests in political science and computer science. Choosing to attend North Central seemed natural, the result of his brothers' influences.

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Small classes and opportunities to work with professors are big pluses at North Central, Imani says. "I've been having deep conversations about politics, about computer science, with my professors," he says. "And I've been enjoying that. I'm very, very sure that will definitely help me with my future." Since he was young, Imani says he has been interested in political science and leadership. "I wanted to deal with politics because I understood that Africa faces a huge leadership crisis. That often results in an atrocious political reality. Ever since I was young, I believe that to accomplish this, I need to learn how to serve others first." He plans to return to Africa after school to be a mentor to other young people, providing hope for a better future.

After he was admitted to North Central, Imani heard from Karl Constant, assistant director of multicultural affairs at North Central. Constant invited him to join the ACI Peer Mentoring Program at the college which helps first-generation students navigate their early years in college. He joined right away, with mentors suggesting classes to take, providing ideas about extracurricular programs, connecting him to important academic and financial resources, and giving him tours of the campus and Chicago area. "I'll be honest, I'd be struggling if it wasn't for the mentors that I had in this Peer Mentoring Program," Imani says. "They genuinely helped me. I was like, 'Wow I do not deserve this.' But this is a great program that ... I was so grateful to have." The mentors, he says, are like brothers and sisters who helped him avoid isolation. He looks forward to their meetings together each month, he says.

Imani is grateful for donors who make the Peer Mentoring Program possible. "It's been touching my heart deeply, deep in my heart, that there are good people out there helping students, helping me and encouraging me, inspiring me to help others as well. Because it's a real opportunity that not everybody gets," Imani says.

Imani speaks four languages. His father – a Church of the Brethren pastor and farmer – and mother did not attend college, and fostered a deep connection to the church for their children. At North Central, Imani attends meetings for first-generation students, is part of the Black Student Association and International Club. Because of a personal interest in Asian culture, Imani joined a Chinese Club and will soon join the Japan Club.