

“A” is for Angello

Angello was struggling. It was his freshman year as a Computer Science major at Ohio State University, and he had already acquired that label of being a “good student.” But even as a 4.0 student in high school with an Incoming Moral Scholarship to Ohio State, Angello was behind in his curriculum. His low ACT scores forced him to begin taking classes at a lower level than was fitting for his level of experience, which started his college career a semester behind where it should have begun. And as a good student, with a full ride scholarship, Angello ashamedly sought out counseling services provided by the school to help him cope with his struggles. But none of it really helped.

It wasn’t until his sophomore year that Angello met Cyndi Freeman, a faculty member at Ohio State. He was attending a workshop on seeking research opportunities when Freeman, the speaker, pointed him out and brought him to the front of the room. “If you’re dressed like this,” she said of Angello, who was wearing sweatpants and a t-shirt, “you’re probably not going to get many opportunities.”

It was then that Angello knew he needed Freeman as a mentor.

A strong personality, Freeman immediately encouraged Angello to seek out research opportunities and experiences. Feeling already overwhelmed with a 3.5 GPA, Angello brushed it off at first. But as he spent more time with Freeman, and as he followed more of her advice on surviving at Ohio State, he found that she was right. Freeman “held his hand” when he needed it, even taking him out to dinner when she saw he wasn’t eating well due to stress. She made him feel as though he was not alone in his struggle, and she encouraged him to apply for research opportunities and to take chances. And over the course of the next four years, Angello kept going back to Freeman – and he kept succeeding at whatever it was that she encouraged him to do.

According to Angello, the plan that he had for himself was to go to college, get a degree, and return home to help his family. A first-generation American, Angello was forced to be the translator for his parents, neither of whom spoke any English. But Freeman encouraged him to apply for the Summer Research Opportunities Program, and changed his outlook on the ultimate plan. Now, he is a graduating senior on a PhD track, with the goal of becoming a faculty member and mentor in the future.

So what was it that made Freeman such a productive and effective mentor? Says Angello, “Cyndi reminded me of someone, like a family person, that’s just there... I wasn’t a scholar to her, or someone who would succeed eventually and be in a position to give back eventually. Cyndi cared, and that was nice.” Aside from caring, Angello describes Freeman as resourceful and hands-on, someone who pushes you to seek more, excel, and advance. She is a problem-solver with a calming effect on her mentees, and she makes you want to come back for more guidance.

According to Angello, Freeman helped him to see that he wasn't alone in his struggle. Her office was professional, but inviting and personal at the same time. Angello felt free to show up at her office at any time, without an appointment. It was an encouraging environment and comforting. "You could just be yourself."

When asked about the result of Freeman's mentoring, Angello said without hesitation, "She helped me to see that I can actually do more good than just help my family... She had no doubts that I would succeed, regardless of what I did." Because of Freeman's mentoring and commitment, Angello now knows, "I can be a role model, or I can be that person that I would have liked to have had as a freshman. It's about paying it back and paying it forward, and a really good way to do that is to be a faculty person."

Angello believes that gaining and offering research experience is a major way to broaden participation in the sciences. Research is a way to promote independent learning while still offering support and guidance.

Of the mentoring experience, Angello says, "It should be a genuine experience. Mentees should want the help. Mentors should want to help." But overall, it is a process. And whether it is a long or short one, there has to be an element of patience.