



COURTESY OF KEITH REEVES '88

MENTORS FOR MIND AND SPIRIT

In August at his home in Purchase, N.Y., Richard Rubin, part-time professor of political science and public policy (*second from right*), hosted a gathering of alumni he has mentored—(*left to right*) Gordon Govens '85, Keith Reeves '88, Thomas Burton '85, Maurice Foley '82, and Steve Howard. A new student mentoring program has been named in Rubin's honor.

Perhaps life is really a series of highways
filled with forks in the road—high roads, low roads,

and roads less traveled. It makes sense, then, that we need mentors to give us direction, help us find our bearings when we feel lost. For four former students—Maurice Foley '82, Gordon Govens '85, Keith Reeves '88, and Philip Weiser '90—that mentor was part-time Professor of Political Science and Public Policy Richard Rubin. In 2004, they started the Richard Rubin Scholars Mentoring Program to institutionalize similar guidance for current and future generations of Swarthmore students.

Rubin's four former students donated the seed money to start the program, and Rubin himself also contributed a substantial amount to the cause. With the help of Vice President for Alumni and Development Dan West, the program became a reality. The first group of students was chosen at the end of the 2004–2005 academic year.

The program, Rubin says, aims to provide guidance to students from backgrounds that sometimes lack important links and advice counseling due to economic or social circumstances. Students in the program are provided with mentors from the College faculty or staff and, from their sophomore year on, may benefit from further mentoring and participation in paid internships hosted by alumni in established careers. Separate from Career Services, the program has its own database of internships and mentors. Program participants are either nominated by faculty or staff members with whom they already have mentoring relationships, or they may self-nominate and request campus mentors from among the faculty and staff.

"We're advising them not just in courses but also in life," Rubin says. "Students coming into Swarthmore have many ideas of what they want to do, and it's a valuable tool to get to know someone who can angle you for the different possibilities after Swarthmore."

Recent program participant Danielle Toaltoan '07 took on two internships—one with the American Bar Foundation and another with Foley, her alumnus mentor and a U.S. tax court judge, who had benefited from Rubin's guidance after a shaky start at the College.

"The focus of my internship [with Judge Foley] was less on work than on developing a relationship with him. We had breakfast and lunch together, and I went to New York to see him perform in the courtroom," Toaltoan said. Foley also offered to sponsor Toaltoan's private LSAT tutoring. His willingness to help, paired with Toaltoan's relationship with on-campus mentor Assistant Dean and Gender Education Adviser Karen Henry '87 has provided her with an unfaltering support system. "They give me no chance to doubt myself," she said. "[Karen] always makes sure I'm doing OK; she's like a mother to me."

For Govens, whose mother passed away during his freshman year of college, Rubin was much more than just a professor in whom he could confide. "Some people have mentors in their family, but a college mentor takes on a role as a parent for those without someone to bounce ideas off of," he says. Govens, 44, says he still seeks Rubin's advice.

"The mentoring program supplements the college's academic advising. The academic advisor's role is to provide information to students on how best to use the curriculum when selecting courses and thinking about a possible course major. A Rubin mentor supplements academic advising by helping students learn how to navigate the College—such as connecting with faculty, accessing academic support, balancing social and academic demands, overcoming some of the social and psychological barriers they might encounter, and understanding the transition issues associated with leaving home and starting college," says Associate Dean for Multicultural Affairs Darryl Smaw, who also serves as director of the program.

Currently, the program seeks to increase the number of mentors and students within each annual group as well as the number of alumni willing to share their careers with students interested in their fields but lacking access to them.

"There's no manual to show you how to navigate those unknown waters," Govens said, "That's what a mentor is for."

—Lena Wong '10