

The Power of Mentoring
By Shelly Thompson
Director of Student Services Center, EOP
College of Humanities

One of our finest “academic treasures” at CSU, Northridge is the connection that staff have with students. Some of our best mentors on campus are found in the ranks of our staff. Consider this: For a new student, CSUN can be an exciting but also intimidating place. Even the simple things we take for granted on a daily basis can be challenging for a new student or as students seek assistance. The little things, like finding a classroom, locating faculty offices or campus procedures are often new to many of our students. We often speak our own “university language” and we can periodically forget that students may not have achieved fluency.

You may be asking yourself, “What is a mentor?” A mentor is defined as a knowledgeable and experienced guide, a trusted ally and advocate, and a caring role model. According to prevailing thinking in the university, only faculty serve as mentors for students. While this level of mentoring is occurring across campus, students may not always connect with a faculty member right away. Most students need the help of a team of mentors and this is where we can all play a critical role. We can approach our duties with a mentoring attitude; an overriding desire to guide students that is manifested in our behaviors toward them. We can serve as their “guides” as they learn to understand how to navigate the new and unexplored corridors of the university.

The next question you will ask is, “How can I serve as mentor to students who visit my department or program for assistance?” Once we see the value of mentoring, it takes very little effort to maintain it. Becoming a mentor requires only a change in consciousness. Dr. Gordon Nakagawa termed these types of interactions with students “Mentoring on the Run.” An effective mentor is respectful, reliable, patient, trustworthy and a good listener and communicator. Staff mentors see their interactions with students as opportunities to help students discover the potential within themselves to succeed in the university and in life. This is both empowering for the student and rewarding for the mentor. At its very core mentoring is a reciprocal relationship in which both parties grow and learn.

Here are a few examples of opportunities that are available to mentor students within our daily interactions...

You help students overcome their fears by educating them about locations, key people such as faculty or professional staff advisors, campus resources or campus procedures.

You seek to find out the question the student really needs the answer to.

You actively listen to a student and help them connect with campus resources so that they can resolve a need or concern.

You help a student understand our bureaucratic rules and procedures-and you explain it in a way that the student is willing to come back to you to learn more in the future.

You follow through on a referral and make sure that the student really understands where they need to go and whom they need to see.

For more information on mentoring, please contact Shelly Thompson at shelly.thompson@csun.edu or x4784. This handout is adapted from the *CSUN Staff Mentoring Resource Booklet* from FMP/EOP.