

Myths about Mentoring on Our Campus

Myth: Mentoring means participating in a formal one-on-one matching program involving one faculty member and one student.

Reality: Based on the research by Dr. Gordon Nakagawa, at our campus formal one-on-one mentor matching programs are difficult to create and maintain due to the size and commuter nature of CSUN. In contrast, Dr. Nakagawa highlighted the importance of “mentoring on the run” — i.e., finding ways to infuse mentoring into faculty’s day-to-day interactions with students such as teaching, advising, and research. Dr. Nakagawa also emphasized the significance of creating “communities of mentors” — i.e., having faculty members work together in learning communities in their departments and also training students as peer mentors to help with advising and other activities. One place where Dr. Nakagawa’s ideas have been implemented with great success in recent years is the EOP (Educational Opportunity Program) Residential Bridge program for “high-risk” but high-potential freshmen.

Myth: Involvement in mentoring means that a faculty member needs to do extra work in addition to an already heavy workload of teaching classes, advising students, and carrying out other departmental and university responsibilities.

Reality: To be effective, mentoring needs to be infused into teaching, advising, and other faculty interactions with students — mentoring cannot be defined as something “extra” to the college educational experience, anymore than reading or writing are seen as “extra” activities in our classrooms. Once a faculty member becomes conscious that each interaction with students is a mentoring opportunity — whether through teaching, advising, research, or informal conversations — then that faculty member gains awareness of how mentoring enhances the educational environment of CSUN.

Myth: Creating more mentoring activities on our campus is expensive and a luxury in this time of budget cutbacks.

Reality: Creating formal one-on-one mentoring projects on our campus is expensive. In contrast, creating an environment where each faculty member is encouraged to infuse mentoring into ongoing activities of teaching and advising is very cost-effective.

Myth: CSUN can achieve its strategic objectives in this period — specifically, promoting student retention, increasing graduation rates, and creating a campus that is inclusive and diverse — without addressing mentoring.

Reality: Numerous research studies have identified the critical importance of mentoring in increasing student retention and graduation rates. Those institutions that have placed mentoring at the center of their mission and values have created educational environments promoting student success. At our university, mentoring is inseparable from our mission of valuing diversity and inclusiveness and promoting educational equity. Foregrounding mentoring at our campus emphasizes the issues of human relations and empowerment that are at the core of our institutional values.