

# **EOP Staff Mentoring Resource Booklet**

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# The Power of Staff Mentors

EOP professional staff know something important about student academic success that high-ranking administrators and faculty on our campus are just now beginning to grasp. EOP staff know about the power of mentoring.

Today, administrators are scrambling to find ways to increase graduation rates and overcome the need for remediation among freshmen. Thus, they create committees to analyze student support services and the availability of resources. They reorganize advising and counseling. They provide faculty with new resources for classroom instruction. Yet, only recently have high-ranking administrators begun to discover the impact of mentoring on student academic success.

In contrast, **EOP professional staff have known about the power of mentoring for a long time.** Some of our best mentors on campus are found in the ranks of EOP professional staff. Yet, these “academic treasures” at CSUN have yet to be discovered by higher administration.

Consider this: For a new student — especially for a student who is the first in their family to go to college — CSUN can be an exciting but also intimidating place. Our campus can also be a lonely place, especially for the son or daughter of immigrants or a member of a minority community. Even simple things that experienced students take for granted can be challenging for a new student, such as finding classrooms and offices on campus, understanding school policies for registration for classes, and learning the special language of the university such as “syllabus,” “office hours,” “annotations,” and “prerequisites.”

Based on both his own experience as a student and his conversations with staff and students on our campus, EOP Director José Luis Vargas found that **the single most important factor associated with high retention and graduation rates for low-income, first-generation college students was their ability to find a mentor at CSUN.** Finding a mentor not only helped students to succeed academically but also with career planning and the development of life management skills such as dealing with personal and family problems.

But finding a mentor at a big university is not easy, especially for a first-generation college student. According to prevailing thinking in the university, faculty are supposed to serve as mentors for students. But will a first-generation college student seek out a faculty mentor? A select few do, but most need the help of others — i.e., other campus mentors — to understand how to navigate the new and unexplored corridors of the university, including developing a relationship with faculty. So where do students find these “other mentors”?

In the late 1960s, when student and community activists established programs like EOP on college campuses, one objective was to increase access to higher education for underrepresented populations such as low-income students. However, equally important was a second objective: that of providing these students with the necessary academic support services, such as mentoring, to enable them to succeed in the university. In other words, mentoring is built into the mission of EOP, and the practice of mentoring is interrelated to the mission of promoting diversity, educational equity, and inclusiveness at our university.

**A mentor is defined as a knowledgeable and experienced guide, a trusted ally and advocate, and a caring role model.** An effective mentor is respectful, reliable, patient, trustworthy, and a very good listener and communicator. EOP professional staff are among the best mentors at CSUN because we understand that our interactions with students are not simply part of our job descriptions. We see our interactions with students are opportunities **to help students discover the potential within themselves to succeed in the university and in life.** EOP staff mentors help to nurture this potential in other students.

According to Dr. Vicki Orazem, Vice Provost of the University of Alaska, mentors nurture the potential in students by **helping them make a self-assessment** of their strengths and weaknesses, by providing them **challenging new situations** to promote growth, and by **offering support** as they take up these new challenges. Mentors can become better mentors by developing deeper awareness of these three critical functions.

The following sections of this booklet cover ways that EOP staff mentors can develop greater consciousness about the mentoring we are already doing and provide suggestions for ways to educate others at CSUN about the need to incorporate mentoring into strategic thinking in this period.

# You're Serving as an EOP Staff Mentor When . . .

You help your students achieve the potential within themselves that is hidden to others — and perhaps even to the students themselves.

You share stories with students about your own educational career and the ways you overcame obstacles similar to theirs.

You help students overcome their fear of a professor and help them to ask questions in a class or visit the professor during office hours.

You show a student how you learned time management to succeed when you were a student like them.

You listen to a student describe a personal problem and explore resources at the university to deal with the problem.

You help a new student understand a particularly tough bureaucratic rule or procedure — and you explain it in a way that the student is willing to come back to you to learn about other difficult regulations.

You help a new student understand how to use resources at the university, such as the Learning Resource Center or the Counseling Center.

You know more about a student's academic performance than what they tell you.

Please add your own insights:

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# Misconceptions about Mentoring

**Misconception:** In a university, you need to be an older person with gray hair (or no hair) to be a good mentor.

**Reality:** In a university, mentors can be young or old. Some of the most outstanding mentors of students are fellow students, or Peer Mentors, who have been trained by EOP professional staff.

**Misconception:** Mentoring only happens one-to-one on a long-term basis.

**Reality:** At a big university, mentoring occurs in many different ways. Some mentoring relationships are traditional relationships involving a one-to-one setting over a long period of time. But effective mentoring can also occur in a group setting or even through a single encounter with a student. Dr. Gordon Nakagawa urges all of us to see each interaction with students as an opportunity for mentoring and to think about ways to infuse mentoring into our daily work as advisors, tutors and student assistants.

**Misconception:** Mentoring programs at universities only are for high-achieving students, especially those who are on their way to grad school.

**Reality:** All college students need mentors, but according to research faculty in universities spend most of their time working with high-achieving students. In the late 1960s, students and community activists created programs like EOP to open opportunities in higher education for low-income, first-generation college students and to provide students with necessary support services such as mentoring to help them succeed academically and serve their communities. Thus, central to the mission of EOP is the practice of mentoring and to ensure that the university meets this responsibility for all of its students.

**Misconception:** Only the person being mentored benefits from mentoring.

**Reality:** By definition, mentoring is a reciprocal relationship where both the mentor and mentee learn from each other. True mentors are those who have developed the wisdom to learn from those they mentor.

**Misconception:** EOP professional staff already have a lot of responsibilities relating to student advising and do not have the time to take on extra responsibilities relating to mentoring.

**Reality:** Mentoring is not a separate set of activities that is different from advising or other job responsibilities. Mentoring relates to consciousness about one's work as advisor and trusted ally to students.. Without this consciousness, staff at big universities are perceived by students as bureaucrats focusing on rules, regulations, and procedures. Universities don't need more bureaucrats. Universities do need people who are student-centered and who can see and nurture the potential in others.

**Misconception:** By calling yourself a "Mentor," you become a mentor.

**Reality:** Not all university staff who work with students are mentors, even if they have that job title. Mentors are those who have developed consciousness about mentoring and in their interactions with students demonstrate respect, patience, trustworthiness, and strong communication skills, especially listening skills.

**Misconception:** To become a mentor requires a lot of time and a lot of work.

**Reality:** Becoming a mentor requires a change in consciousness — i.e., how you think about yourself and how you think about others. Workshops and training sessions can help experienced students to develop this consciousness. Mentoring is not a matter of working harder or longer or adding to your job responsibilities but seeing your work differently.

**Misconception:** At a large university, one staff mentor can help only a limited number of students. Although a mentor may want to help large numbers of students, the cold reality is that she or he can only work with a select few.

**Reality:** Each interaction with a student is a mentoring opportunity, even a single encounter with a student. The key is to develop consciousness about the importance of mentoring in your interactions with fellow students and to infuse this consciousness in your daily work as a tutor or advisor. Also, it's important for EOP staff to see themselves as part of a network of other mentors — as part of a Community of Mentors. To effectively help a particular student or a

group of students, a staff mentor can draw upon this network or community. Mentoring occurs in a community, not in isolation.

# Developing a Mentoring Perspective

## Mentoring and EOP: A Shared Commitment

The Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) involves a large number of people who have different kinds of roles and responsibilities. EOP professional staff provide a range of administrative, advising, and support services. Peer advisors help students access academic resources. Student assistants provide a range of support services in the office and are usually the first office staff that new students encounter. While we may differ in our work and duties, **the one role, responsibility and commitment that all of us share is to serve as mentors to EOP students.**

Although EOP has undergone various changes over the years, one thing that has remained consistent is the emphasis on mentoring. Mentoring is crucial for students' academic success and their development of life management skills. Mentoring is at the heart of the mission of EOP. **As a staff member of EOP, one of your most important roles is to serve as a mentor for EOP students.** Not only are you role models exemplifying what it means to be successful students at CSUN, but you are also potential allies and advocates for all students you encounter.

Does being a staff mentor mean that you will have to do mentoring duties in addition to the responsibilities that you already have? No, not at all. **Mentoring is not a separate set of activities** that are different from advising or working as student assistant in the office. Instead, **mentoring involves how you think and feel about students and about yourself.** Most important, mentoring deals with **how you communicate with students** in your role as EOP staff.

Moreover, mentoring does not necessarily mean that you must spend huge amounts of time with individual students; nor does it mean that you will become a mentor for every student that you meet. **What mentoring does mean is that you make every effort to ensure that every contact that you have with a student counts** — that every interaction matters. It's the quality, not necessarily the quantity, of time that you spend with students that sets apart mentoring from other kinds of activities. You can't and won't

be able to be a mentor to all students, but you can **invite the possibility** of being a mentor to each student in any contact with them.

In other words, **every time that you encounter a student is a potential opportunity for mentoring**. Mentoring does not require separate meetings where you purposely act as a role model. Think about it: does it make any sense at all to say that you're going to meet for an hour to serve as a "role model" for a student? What makes more sense is to meet for an hour for advising about a student's schedule and also talking to the student about how well that student is doing in classes. **Whatever the setting or reason for meeting a student may be, through your words and actions you have the opportunity to serve as a mentor.**

**Mentoring means making a sincere effort to communicate with a student with an open heart and an open mind.** But having an open heart and open mind does not guarantee that students will return your good intentions with the same feelings or with gratitude. You will find that it's a lot easier dealing with some students than others. There will be differences in personality, attitudes and values. Sometimes these differences will be obstacles and will seem to get in the way in connecting with a student. But it's vital to remember that just as often, **these differences will be an opportunity to learn about others and about yourself.**

For both the mentee and the mentor, **the mentoring relationship is one of those rare gifts that makes much of what we do in EOP worthwhile and fulfilling.** Mentoring is a **reciprocal relationship**; both the mentor and mentee benefit and learn from each other. As a staff member of EOP, you have the opportunity to make a difference in students' lives by serving as a staff mentor.

We hope that you will welcome this challenge with the same kind of excitement, energy, maturity, and dedication that first brought you to EOP. As a staff mentor, you now have the opportunity to carry on the **legacy of EOP** and to pass this legacy on to the next generation of students.

[Adapted from "Developing a Mentoring Perspective" by Dr. Gordon Nakagawa, CSUN Faculty Mentor Program, 1999]

# ***“Mentoring on the Run”***

## **How CSUN Staff and Faculty Are Responding to the Special Challenge of Mentoring at CSUN**

“Mentoring on the Run” is a concept coined by Dr. Gordon Nakagawa, Faculty Mentor Coordinator from 1997-2000, to respond to the challenges facing staff and faculty at our ever-growing commuter campus. At a series of townhall meetings in 1997 and 1998, Dr. Nakagawa asked several critical questions: How can we “mentor on the run,” given the realities of a mostly commuter campus and concerns about faculty workload? How can we use existing mentoring resources effectively? How can we increase our institutional commitment to mentoring? Here are some of the gleanings from these meetings:

- At a large commuter institution such as CSUN, mentoring works best when it is infused in everyday faculty and staff interactions with students (i.e., teaching, counseling, and advising) rather than through formal programs.
- Mentoring can and does occur everyday, in many forms and many ways. Mentoring can take place in brief, not only extended, encounters. Brief contacts may have a powerful impact on students (not only first meetings, but incidental contacts).
- Mentoring often works most effectively when it is done with a purpose: developing a portfolio, collaborating on a research project, pursuing a common interest (ranging from the political to the recreational). Just as often, mentoring without a specific “purpose” can and does work (e.g., being available as a “sounding board”).
- Mentoring can be encouraged by building “learning communities” within disciplines.
- Issues related to diversity and equity are central for mentoring on our campus. Sometimes diversity is seen as a problem rather than an opportunity for enriching teaching and mentoring.
- In the face of a range of competing demands — workload, budget cuts, RTP process — mentoring (and students) may come to be seen as a burden rather than as central to the mission of education.
- The timing of mentoring opportunities is often crucial: mentoring may follow a developmental arc (e.g., mentoring first-time freshmen may be different from mentoring upper-division majors).
- Students most in need of mentoring are precisely those who “fall between the cracks” (e.g., under-prepared students). In fact, research shows that teachers spend the most time with high-achieving students.
- Effective mentoring can be characterized as:
  - a sincere desire to be open to the diverse needs of students;

- belonging to a village where wise elders teach their children, such as to swim in a river inhabited by crocodiles;
- requiring the efforts of only one person;
- student-centered;
- relationship-building;
- related to, but not synonymous with teaching, advising, tutoring, counseling;
- continually growing and open to ongoing learning (both the mentor and mentee);
- collaborative, not hierarchical;
- a passionate involvement with the well-being of students;
- invitational rather than adversarial.

# **As an EOP Staff Mentor, your principal objectives should be to:**

## **1. Establish a positive, personal relationship with your mentee(s).**

- Avoid acting as if you were nothing more than a professional service provider (“I’m here to do a job. I’m an advisor/counselor; I’m *not* here to be your friend!” Make a proactive effort to act as a guide, a “coach,” and an ally and advocate.
- Once a positive, personal relationship is developed, it is much easier to realize the remaining three goals.
- Trust and respect must be established.
- Regular interaction and consistent support are important in many mentoring relationships.

## **2. Help your mentee(s) to develop academic and life skills.**

- Work to accomplish specific goals (e.g., tutoring assistance on a homework assignment or peer advising about the best use of “free” time).
- When and where appropriate, emphasize life-management skills, such as decision-making, goal setting, time management, dealing with conflict, values clarification, and skills for coping with stress and fear.

## **3. Assist mentee(s) in accessing academic and university resources.**

- Provide information — or better yet, help your mentee(s) to find information — about academic resources (faculty, staff, academic support services, student organizations, etc.). Assist your mentee(s) in learning how to access and use these resources — don’t assume that just because they know where their professor’s office is that they also understand how to talk to their professor.

#### **4. Enhance your mentee’s ability to interact comfortably and productively with people/groups from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds.**

- Your own willingness to interact with individuals and groups different from yourself will make a powerful statement about the value placed on diversity. Model the attitudes and behaviors that you emphasize.
- Contrary to popular belief, we are *not* “all the same.” It is important to acknowledge and understand, not ignore, our differences. We need to learn how to use our differences as resources for growth. Respecting our differences is necessary but not sufficient; we need to know how to negotiate our differences in ways that produce new understandings and insights.
- Everyone holds particular preconceptions and stereotypes about one’s own group and other groups. Take special care that you are not (intentionally or unintentionally) promoting your own views and values at the expense of your mentees’ viewpoints. Work at understanding and critically examining your own perspectives on race, ethnicity, culture, class, religion, sexual orientation, etc.

[Adapted from Mentor Training Curriculum, National Mentoring Working Group convened by United Way of America and One to One, 1991, in *One to One “Mentoring 101” Curriculum*, The California Mentoring Partnership.]

## Recommended Books and Articles about Mentoring

bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*

The author links teaching (and mentoring) to several concepts not normally associated with teaching and mentoring: joy, excitement, healing, and the “practice of freedom.” She draws from her own experiences as an African American woman in academia — and the influence of mentors in her own life — to illustrate how these concepts can be placed at the center of teaching and mentoring. Question: Are our own classrooms and EOP offices associated with the descriptors mentioned by bell hooks (i.e., joy, excitement, healing and the “practice of freedom”)? Should they be?

Sonia Nieto, *The Light in Their Eyes*

Nieto critiques prevailing notions of multicultural education which she says mean simply “ethnic additives or cultural celebrations.” Nieto states that the primary objective of multicultural education is to advance student learning, and she argues that for teachers to foster this type of learning they need to engage in individual, collective, and institutional transformation. For teachers (and mentors), this means examining our basic beliefs and values and changing them through “an attitude of hope and critique.” For example, in Chapter 4, Nieto describes how the current approach of schools expects the adaptation of the minority student to the school, whereas in reality it should be the teachers and schools that should adapt to the needs of children. However, this alternative approach is currently missing from education. What are the ways that we as educators can use Nieto’s insights to promote the “individual, collective, and institutional transformation” needed in this period?

Cohen, Steele, and Ross, “The Mentor’s Dilemma: Providing Critical Feedback across the Racial Divide”

The researchers look at the impact of race on the mentor-mentee relationship, especially the impact of “stereotype threat” (the association of an individual from a minority group with that group’s stereotyped academic performance). Traditionally, many faculty who work with minority students use either of two strategies to deal with “stereotype threat”: either they stress the maintenance of high academic standards in their classroom (“I treat all my students the same”), or they emphasize special praise for the academic performances of minority students. Cohen et al. propose a more complex approach — what they call a “wise strategy,” a buffered approach combining the invocation of high standards with assurances to students that they have the capacity to meet these standards. This strategy is effective in defusing stereotype threat.

Beverly Tatum, “*Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*”

In this book, Tatum provides an interpretive framework for understanding the developmental of racial identity in each individual. Racial identity in the U.S. is intricately tied to relations in society between dominant and subordinate groups. Thus, according to Tatum, the dominant group is seen as the “norm for humanity” and “inequitable social relations are seen as the model for normal human relationships.” In our daily work as and teachers and mentors, how can we use Tatum’s insights to work in multiracial and multiethnic settings where there are different levels of awareness of the factors underlying racial identity?

Murrell, Crosby, and Ely, eds., *Mentoring Dilemmas* — Chapter 11, “Mentoring with Class: Connections between Social Class and Developmental Relationships in the Academy”

This article focuses on the special problems arising from mentoring relationships across social class. According to the author, the main factor determining success in college for low-income students is their capacity to find a mentor or mentors. However, working-class students

in academia face special difficulties forming mentoring relationships with faculty from the professional class. Historically, state colleges like CSUN were created to provide opportunities for higher education for working class youth. Today, how well is CSUN dealing with this historic mission? How can we as teachers and mentors help to address the need for mentoring sensitively across social class?

Chungliang Al Huang and Jerry Lynch, *Mentoring: The Tao of Giving and Receiving Wisdom*

The authors define mentoring as “giving your gift of wisdom and having it graciously appreciated and received by others who then carry the gift to all those within their sphere of influence.” To carry out mentoring, the authors contend that we need to move beyond the prevailing Western view of knowledge as only “external” and take the approach that “what we have learned is used not to impress others but rather as wisdom to help others benefit from our knowledge.”

Marc Freedman, *The Kindness of Strangers: Adult Mentors, Urban Youth, and the New Voluntarism*

Freedman emphasizes the power of mentoring from the tradition of humanism and traditional ways that adults have worked with youth to promote achievement, nurturance, and generativity. He also proposes ways to implement structural changes to advance mentoring and suggests institutional programs.

David Sousa, *How the Brain Learns*, second edition

In the simple and very readable book designed for teachers, Sousa explains “how the brain learns” and the implications for teachers in classrooms. Chapters cover memory and retention, critical thinking, and the impact of stress on learning. Sousa also provides suggestions for brain-based lesson plans to increase student learning.

Renate Nummela Caine and Geoffrey Caine, *Making Connections: Teaching and the Human Brain*

According to the authors, the U.S. educational system is based on an “industrial model” of education which met the needs of the twentieth century but now needs to undergo a paradigm shift to meet the challenges of the new “information age.” For their new paradigm, they emphasize a brain-based approach to learning and teaching, focusing on the need for educators to help students “make connections” between existing knowledge and new knowledge and to facilitate the discovery of meaning and relevance.

Margaret Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*

Wheatley believes that our thinking about organizational structure and the process of change is mired in the “old science” of Newtonian physics — e.g., concepts of critical mass, entropy, equilibrium, incremental change, etc. She proposes a new paradigm for organizational thinking and change based on the “new science,” i.e., drawing from the insights of quantum physics and the study of complex systems, where “critical connections are more important than critical mass” and where dynamic disequilibrium, bifurcations in systems, and chaos are not only natural processes in organizations but opportunities for changes in human consciousness.

David Werner and Bill Bowers, *Helping Health Workers Learn: A Book of Methods, Aids and Ideas for Instructors at the Village Level*

The authors use the framework of Paulo Freire and critical pedagogy as their approach to training health workers in the Third World, while cautioning people to adopt Freire’s approach but not his dense language in their work with others. This book is filled with practical advice, stories, and instructional aids such as drawings and puppet shows to help educators (and mentors)

“start at the level where people are at,” to value existing knowledge in their students, and to help advance critical thinking skills.

# Web Resources on Mentoring

Mentoring peer resources

<http://www.mentors.ca/mentor.html>

Mentoring Guides from the University of Michigan

<http://www.rackham.umich.edu/StudentInfo/Publications/FacultyMentoring/Fmentor.pdf>

<http://www.rackham.umich.edu/StudentInfo/Publications/StudentMentoring/mentoring.pdf>

Formal mentor programs

<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/OR/ConsumerGuides/mentor.html>

Teacher mentoring resources

<http://www.middleweb.com/mentoring.html>

Mentoring categories

<http://www.teachermentors.com/MCenter%20Site/MCategoryList.html>

Mentoring resources and links

<http://www.mentors.net/Links.html>

100 mentoring tips for teachers in science

[http://www.brown.edu/Administration/Science\\_Education/100Tips/mentor.html](http://www.brown.edu/Administration/Science_Education/100Tips/mentor.html)

Mentoring in Faculty Development

<http://www.mcw.edu/edserv/facdev/mentor.html>

The Brain Lab: Teaching resources based on brain-based learning

<http://www.newhorizons.org/blab.html#resources>