Mentoring as the “Giving and Receiving of Wisdom” among Faculty and Students

For

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Mentoring as the “Giving and Receiving of Wisdom”

- *Learning How to “Mentor on the Run” at CSUN*
- *Building a Community of Mentors at CSUN*
- *Promoting a Culture of Mentoring at CSUN*

When we hear the word mentoring, most of us create the following image in our minds: that of an old sage (almost always male and white with long hair and often a flowing beard) sitting for hours in a secluded space and providing advice to a young person. Of course, in the real world, mentors come from all races of people, are both young and old, female as well as male, and have hair or no hair. However, the popular and dominant image of a mentor helps us to become more aware of an even deeper stereotype we have of mentoring. We tend to define mentoring around “big moments.” Specifically, we conceptualize mentoring as one-to-one, long-term relationships involving a wizened sage transferring wisdom to a single disciple in magical moments created over long periods of interaction. In reality, mentors in our lives can be sages, but they are more likely “ordinary” people all around us. In the real world, mentoring is reciprocal and not one-way — i.e., mentoring involves an interactive process in which both the mentor and mentee benefit. Also, in the real world, mentoring is more than an isolated relationship of two individuals; most mentoring occurs in a web of relationships with others (i.e., within a community). And, perhaps most important, mentoring in the real world occurs not only in “big moments” but mainly in “little moments”— i.e., as part of our daily interactions with others. Nevertheless, our understanding of mentoring is often limited by the stereotype of what we believe it to be.

In their small book, *Mentoring: The Tao of Giving and Receiving Wisdom*, Chungliang Al Huang and Jerry Lynch remind us about the mentoring opportunities that are always all around us. They define mentoring as “the giving and receiving of wisdom” within a web of relationships. Through the interactions that mentors have with others, they share the “gift of wisdom and [have] it
graciously appreciated and received by others who then carry the gift to all those within their sphere of influence.” Mentoring, Huang and Lynch further emphasize, occurs within a community, and mentoring activities help to promote a culture of wisdom throughout this community.

According to Huang and Lynch’s expanded understanding of mentoring, each of us daily has many opportunities to serve as both a mentor and mentee with those around us. Yes, mentoring does occur in special “big moments” — those built up through relationships with a few individuals that we have worked with intensely for years — but we need to more fully recognize that most of the most powerful acts of mentoring happen during “little moments.” The “little moments” occur in our day-to-day interactions with others all around us. But to capture the potential contained in these “little moments,” we need to expand our consciousness and overcome our stereotype that mentoring consists of “big moments.”

How can this new understanding of mentoring help us at this time at CSUN? Currently, most of us feel besieged by many impersonal forces: massive budget cutbacks, increasing student fees, and uncertainty about the future. Politicians and CSU officials want faculty and students to accomplish more with fewer resources. In the midst of this turbulence, we frequently hear students and faculty talk about the need for a greater sense of community on our campus, better communication, and more opportunities for interactions. Students want faculty and other campus mentors who not only can help them advance academically but who can understand them as people. This sentiment is keenly felt by students from immigrant backgrounds and by other students who are the first generation in their families attending college. Meanwhile, many potential mentors on our campus feel they have no time to do so.

If there were ever a time to emphasize mentoring at CSUN, now is the time. Of course, the concept of mentoring by itself cannot solve all the major challenges facing our campus, whether these be responding to budget shortfalls, accelerating student graduation rates, or promoting educational equity and diversity. However, an emphasis on mentoring — or more specifically, the creation of a “culture of mentoring” at CSUN — could help to create the conditions necessary to unleash the creativity and energy of students, staff, faculty, and administrators across our campus.

Still, the persistent stereotype that mentoring consists only of “big moments” holds us back from advancing and seeing all the potential “little moments” of mentoring surrounding us.
More than a decade ago, following a series of campus townhall meetings, Dr. Gordon Nakagawa coined the concept of “mentoring on the run” to capture the “little moments” of mentoring already happening on our campus. These “little moments” are embedded in the work of some faculty, staff, and student peer mentors who consciously use each interaction with others on our campus as a mentoring opportunity. Countering the widespread belief that mentoring at a large, commuter campus can only impact a handful of students, Dr. Nakagawa found faculty who had embedded “little moments” of mentoring in their classroom instruction and their informal interactions with students outside the classroom. He found professional staff who had infused mentoring into their work as helpers of students. He found student peer mentors who adeptly helped fellow students access campus resources and maneuver through the bureaucratic maze of the university.

During the past decade, the Faculty Mentor Program has strategically focused on increasing awareness about the power of these “little moments” of mentoring and training faculty, staff, and student peer mentors in this approach. We believe that “mentoring on the run” — rather than representing a stunted or limited form of mentoring — is an advanced form of mentoring that is ideally suited to our large, commuter campus. Moreover, because so much of the existing research on the importance of mentoring focuses on the “big moments,” we at CSUN can greatly contribute to the mentoring literature by developing insight into the power of the “little moments.” Thus, our current efforts to advance understanding of “mentoring on the run” here at CSUN may have implications far beyond our campus.

As we develop our capacity to “mentor on the run,” we will be able to change the deeply ingrained image of mentoring within our minds. Gradually, a new image will take shape — one that is rooted in the reality of the little mentoring moments and the “giving and receiving wisdom” in our daily interactions with others. This new image will not only center on the power of “little moments” of mentoring but the importance of building a “community of mentors” here at CSUN and promoting a “culture of mentoring” on our campus. We can all be part of this change.
“Mentoring on the Run”

How Faculty Are Responding to the 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 special challenge facing faculty at our commuter campus. At a series of townhall meetings in 1997 and 1998, Dr. Nakagawa asked several critical questions: How can we mentor, 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-student interactions (i.e., teaching 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 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” 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 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 a Faculty Member, 
You’re Mentoring When . . .

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

You share stories with your students about your educational career and the ways you succeeded.

You really listen to a student with their best interests in mind.

You remember a student’s name and use it often in class.

You answer students’ questions and not the questions they are supposed to ask.

You know more about a student than how they are doing academically in your class.

You seek out a student who may be in trouble.

You hear about an opportunity and think about how it could benefit a particular student.

You ask about a student’s family.

You get to class 10 minutes early to make yourself available to your students.

You talk to a student outside of your office hours about a something not necessarily related to your class.

Please add your own insights:
“Mentoring on the Run”

Learning How to Use Each Interaction with a Student – No Matter How Brief --
as a Mentoring Opportunity

As a faculty member, I already practice “mentoring on the run” when I:

1. 
2. 
3. 

During the semester, I will enhance my skill at “mentoring on the run” by doing the following small things in my interactions with students:

4. 
5. 
6. 
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 “special-admit” 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.

**Misconception:** 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.

**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 mentor learn from each other. True mentors are those who have developed the wisdom to learn from those they mentor.

**Misconception:** At a large university, one faculty can help only a limited number of students. Although a faculty 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 faculty 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, faculty can draw upon this network or community. Mentoring occurs in a community, not in isolation.
# EOP Mentoring vs. Mainstream Mentoring

## Mentoring in the University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EOP’s Approach</th>
<th>Traditional University Approach</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring serves as the foundation for EOP’s work with students. According to José Luis Vargas, the capacity of a student to find mentors on our campus is the single most important factor that determines their academic success.</td>
<td>Mentoring is defined as important for student success but not the most important factor.</td>
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<tr>
<td>EOP emphasizes the art of “mentoring on the run” – i.e., using every interaction with a student, no matter how brief, as a mentoring opportunity. EOP leaders expect all staff, all faculty teaching Bridge classes, all student assistants, and all student volunteers to be trained in the art of “mentoring on the run.”</td>
<td>Mentoring is delivered through formal one-to-one matching programs with designated mentoring times occurring over a long time period.</td>
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<td>For all who work in EOP, mentoring is defined as not something extra that is added on to existing job roles and responsibilities; instead, all staff, faculty, and student mentors are trained to infuse mentoring into their ongoing work with students.</td>
<td>Mentoring is defined as something extra that is added on to existing roles and responsibilities of faculty and staff.</td>
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<tr>
<td>To promote student success, EOP builds a “community of mentors” to help students. This community is expected to work as a team to mentor students and to mentor each other.</td>
<td>Mentoring is based on one-to-one long-term relationships.</td>
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<td>EOP promotes a “culture of mentoring” throughout our program and for the campus as a whole.</td>
<td>A mentoring culture develops in formal matching programs.</td>
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What Is EOP, and Who Are EOP Students?

By Glenn Omatsu

At CSUN, EOP (Educational Opportunity Program) serves as the conscience of the university and the center for innovation and creativity. EOP has served these two important roles for four decades.

EOP serves as the conscience of CSUN by reminding administrators and faculty – sometimes gently and other times loudly – of their fundamental responsibilities to serve the needs of low-income students, to carry out the university’s mission of advancing diversity and educational equity, and to defend the right of all people in California to a college education.

EOP serves as the center for innovation at CSUN by pioneering initiatives relating to admissions, instruction and pedagogy, student services, community outreach, community service, and other aspects of university life. Today, many initiatives launched by EOP have become standard practices at CSUN. These include student advising, mentoring and tutorial projects, transitional programs to help freshmen succeed in college, pedagogical innovations to improve learning outcomes, and retention strategies to increase student persistence rates for graduation.

For the past decade, EOP is best known for its innovative approaches in working with “special-admit” freshmen through its Bridge Transitional Programs. “Special-admit” freshmen are a subset of EOP students who were admitted to CSUN by EOP based on their high motivation and capacity to deal with life obstacles despite having low grades and test scores in high school. To help these students succeed at CSUN, EOP during the past decade reorganized its Bridge Transitional Programs to emphasize long-term learning communities and linked and integrated curricula – all built on the foundation of mentoring.

Today, growing numbers of officials in the CSU system are recognizing CSUN EOP as one of the system’s foremost models of a “learning-centered” program. EOP has gained this recognition due to its innovative approach that integrally links together its admission process, its student services, and its classroom academics to promote success for its students.
Officially, here is how EOP defines itself on its CSUN website: “EOP designs, administers, and supports programs that deliver access and retention services to CSUN students. Established in the Fall of 1968 by a legislative mandate, EOP focuses on highly motivated low-income, first-generation college students, a population that not only reflects the diversity of CSUN's feeder communities, but also the diversity of the university itself. Currently the total undergraduate enrollment of EOP students is approximately 2650 students (8% of university population).”

At CSUN in the late 1960s, student activists and community supporters embedded mentoring into the founding mission of EOP. Mentoring permeated all aspects of EOP’s work with students. For example, EOP founders connected the admission of low-income students from historically disadvantaged communities to retention services to enable them to succeed. Moreover, for EOP founders, mentoring did not refer to traditional one-to-one matching programs with designated “mentoring times.” Instead, mentoring was infused into all interactions of staff and peer mentors working with students. These EOP mentors worked together as a community and in the process created a distinct EOP culture of mentoring on this campus. Today, the core principles of the CSUN Faculty Mentor Program – “mentoring on the run,” building a “community of mentors,” and promoting a “culture of mentoring” on our campus – are drawn from the founding mission of EOP and its cornerstone of mentoring.

Who, then, are today’s EOP students? Officially, CSUN administrators define them as low-income students who are the first in their families to attend college. In contrast, EOP leaders define their students as much, much more. First, EOP students are high potential students. They are students who have been admitted into EOP through its holistic and deliberative admissions process involving several steps, including group and individual interviews. Second, EOP students who participate in the Bridge Transitional Programs for freshmen are students who embrace RRAM: the values of Respect, Responsibility, (positive) Attitude and Maturity. Third, EOP students, as a result of working with mentors, want to give back to EOP and the home communities that nurtured them.

Overall EOP is a vital part of our university. All students, all faculty, and all staff at CSUN benefit from the existence of EOP. And all people in California benefit from the accomplishments of EOP students.
Mentoring Is the Foundation of EOP
What Does This Mean?

By Glenn Omatsu

According to EOP Director José Luis Vargas, mentoring is the foundation of EOP, and all who work for EOP – from professional staff to student assistants – have the responsibility to serve as mentors for our students and for each other. Being a mentor is embedded in the job descriptions of all who work for EOP, and this added responsibility distinguishes jobs in EOP from all other campus positions.

More precisely, everyone who works for EOP has three responsibilities as a mentor:

1. To practice and master the art of “mentoring on the run” by learning to use each interaction with a student – no matter of brief – as a mentoring opportunity;
2. To promote a “culture of mentoring” in EOP and throughout CSUN;
3. To help build EOP’s “community of mentors” to help students to do well at CSUN

Serving as an EOP mentor is challenging because it means embracing an approach to mentoring that is different from the mainstream approach followed on our campus. Our campus has many mentoring programs, but they differ from EOP’s approach in several fundamental ways. Mainstream mentoring programs focus on creating formal one-to-one matching arrangements (i.e., one mentor matched to one mentee) organized around regular meetings. In contrast, EOP’s mentoring approach evolved to meet the needs of our students who are the first from their low-income families to attend college. These students, especially those who did not do well in high school, are not likely to sign up for formal matching programs, and even if they sign up they do not often follow up with meetings because they do not yet understand how to interact with mentors. Thus, EOP’s mentoring approach does not involve a formal matching program; instead, EOP’s approach emphasizes having mentors use every interaction with a student – no matter how brief – as a mentoring opportunity. In addition, EOP mentoring does not happen only during designated meeting times; instead, EOP’s approach means that any interaction can be potentially transformed into a mentoring moment with the right mindset or consciousness. Moreover, EOP’s mentoring approach is not based on one mentor matched to one mentee; instead, EOP mentoring occurs within a “community of mentors.” Finally, EOP’s approach promotes a “culture of mentoring.” This new culture emerges in offices, programs, classrooms, and other campus settings when all learn to practice “mentoring on the run” within a mentoring community.
EOP Is a “Student-Centered” Program
What Does This Mean?

Today, CSUN and many other universities pride themselves in being “learning-centered” institutions. In contrast, EOP Director José Luis Vargas wants EOP leaders to go one step further and make our program “student-centered.” What does he mean, and why is being “student-centered” so important?

A “learning-centered” institution emphasizes “student learning outcomes” (SLOs) and is valuable for changing the mindset of faculty and administrators about what students learn in college. Essentially, SLOs shift faculty and administrators’ mindset away from what faculty teach (i.e., course objectives) to what students learn. Universities that emphasize SLOs usually require SLOs for individual courses, for majors and minors of departments, and for the institution as a whole. SLOs, thus, serve as the basis for assessment at all levels of the institution.

Reflecting on SLOs helps both faculty and administrators improve the quality of teaching. However, José Luis Vargas believes that teaching can be improved even more by adopting a holistic understanding of what and how students learn in college. A holistic understanding takes into account not only the knowledge and skills students gain in the classroom but also what students gain outside the classroom. A holistic understanding focuses on the process of how students learn and not only on the outcomes. Most importantly, a holistic understanding emphasizes how students experience learning in the institution. Adopting this holistic understanding of student learning means embracing a “student-centered” approach and enlarging our awareness that students learn from all interactions during college, not only from faculty in classrooms but also from staff, from fellow students, and from people in off-campus settings.

Obviously, becoming “student-centered” does not mean discarding a “learning-centered” approach. Instead, when faculty and staff become “student-centered,” they are able to enhance a “learning-centered” approach by developing an understanding of what and how students learn – from the perspective of students themselves. But how do faculty and staff become “student-centered”?

José Luis Vargas identifies the concept of mentoring as the essential catalyst for transitioning from a “learning-centered” mindset to a “student-centered” mindset. He wants all faculty and staff who work with students to infuse mentoring into
their interactions with students and to cultivate the mentoring quality of empathy to understand how students experience these interactions.

For mentors, the act of mentoring involves developing a kind of double consciousness – that of both being aware of what they are doing as mentors and also empathetically understanding the impact of their actions on others. For mentors, this double consciousness develops through mindful practice, dialogue and constant self-reflection. Generally, it is easier for mentors to develop awareness of work they do as mentors than to empathetically understand how others experience these actions.

The following two-part exercise helps mentors cultivate this double consciousness. The first part helps mentors gain more awareness of the small and powerful ways that they mentor students daily. The second part helps mentors understand the impact that their small actions have on students as they learn how to interact with mentors.
You’re Serving as a Mentor When . . .

You smile at students in your class and ask how they’re doing.

You smile at your students and ask how they are doing – even when they don’t respond.

You see potential in students that is hidden to others – and perhaps even to themselves.

You share stories about your educational career and how you succeeded.

You really listen to students with their best interests in mind.

You remember students’ names and use them often.

You answer students’ questions but not only the questions they planned to ask.

You know more about your students than only how they are doing academically.

You reach out to students when they may be in trouble.

You hear about an opportunity and think about how it could benefit students.

You congratulate students briefly after class for doing well on an assignment or for a comment they made during a class discussion.

You challenge students to do better in your classes because you know they can do better.

Please add your own insights:

_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
As a Student, You’re Receiving the Gift of Mentoring When . . .

A mentor smiles at you and asks how you’re doing.

A mentor smiles at you and asks how you’re doing – even when you don’t respond.

A mentor sees the potential in you that is hidden to others – and even to yourself.

A mentor shares stories about their educational career and ways they succeeded.

A mentor really listens to you with your best interests in mind.

A mentor remembers your name and uses it often.

A mentor answers your questions but not only the questions you planned to ask.

A mentor knows more about you than only how you are doing academically.

A mentor reaches out to you when you may be in trouble.

A mentor hears about an opportunity and thinks about how it could benefit you.

A mentor congratulates you briefly after class for doing well on an assignment or for a comment you made during a class discussion.

A mentor posts a note of encouragement on your Instagram, Snapchat, etc.

A mentor challenges you to do better in your classes because they know you can do better.

Please add your own insights:
EOP’s Community of Mentors Is Built Around Community Values of RRAM

On our campus, the most powerful forms of mentoring for students occur not in long-term, one-to-one meetings between one mentor and one student. The most powerful moments occur in informal interactions that are embedded within a community of mentors who promote a culture of mentoring within that community.

How can we create these communities of mentors on our campus? And how can we infuse a culture of mentoring into these communities?

The foremost example of a community of mentors is EOP (Educational Opportunity Program). EOP is built on a foundation of mentoring, and EOP leaders emphasize that each person who works in the program is a mentor and that each interaction that they have with a student is a mentoring moment. EOP’s resulting “culture of mentoring” distinguishes it from all other programs on our campus.

How did EOP build its community of mentors, and how does it infuse a culture of mentoring throughout the program?

It is actually relatively easy to create values for a community. The challenge is to have all community members embrace them as their own. As an example, think about CSUN’s institutional values. Currently, there are five institutional values for our campus. These are very important because they serve as the basis for SLOs (student learning outcomes) for all classes and for all majors. These values were created more than two decades ago by campus leaders who convened meetings of faculty and staff to discuss these values in great detail and to embed them within all departments. For the past two decades, campus leaders have emphasized these important values in all speeches and documents. In other words, these values have been widely propagated on our campus. But strangely, very few on our campus – even high-ranking faculty members – can readily identify these important values. Why?

In contrast, about a decade ago, EOP leader Shiva Parsa began emphasizing a core set of values for the Bridge freshmen she supervised. She created these values because she realized that Bridge freshmen who by definition are the first from their
low-income families to come to college needed a common set of values to
distinguish themselves as a learning community and to guide them to academic and
personal success. Today, all Bridge students embrace these values, which they call
RRAM: Respect, Responsibility, Attitude, and Maturity. Nearly every Bridge
freshman says that learning RRAM is the most important lesson they gained from
participating in the Bridge Program’s six-week Summer Phase.

How was Shiva Parsa able to get every single Bridge student in the span of only
six weeks to embrace a set of important community values while powerful campus
officials have not been able to have many on campus know about the important
values that guide CSUN?

First, it is important to realize that EOP is a unique program on our campus.
Students and staff have “program identity” – they have pride in being in the
program, and they recognize that membership in this program carries with it a
unique set of responsibilities and privileges that distinguish EOP students and staff
from all others on campus. Of course, this was not always the case, and EOP
Director José Luis Vargas is the leader who shifted the mindset of EOP students
and staff. He is himself an early EOP student, and when he became director of the
program two decades ago he was dismayed by the lack of identification of both
students and staff with EOP. In fact, some students and staff believed being part of
EOP was a stigma, and they hid their affiliation from others on campus. To change
this mindset, José Luis Vargas went “back to basics” and restructured EOP on the
foundation of mentoring. The approach to mentoring that he emphasized was not
the traditional approach involving formal matching programs and one-to-one
mentoring occurring only in meetings between a single mentor and a single
mentee. The approach he emphasized “mentoring on the run,” a community of
mentors, and a culture of mentoring.

José Luis Vargas realized that changing the mindset of so many people and
creating a culture of mentoring are herculean tasks, and he needed to start small.
He asked Shiva Parsa, head of EOP Transitional Programs for freshmen, to take
the lead. Many of the important EOP initiatives that have been adopted by other
programs on our campus first emerged in Bridge. These include peer mentoring
for freshman success, long-term learning communities for freshmen, linked and
integrated curriculum spanning different classes and different terms, “early
warning systems” to help faculty quickly alert staff of freshmen in academic
danger, and RRAM.
When Shiva took over leadership of the Bridge Program, she noticed that freshmen dealt with not an absence of community values in the six-week Summer Phase; the biggest challenge was too many values. Each Bridge faculty member emphasized their own set of values for the program. In one classroom, students learned assertiveness, individual attainment, and competition. In the classroom next door, other Bridge students learned cooperation, respect, and patience. In still another classroom, students learned persistence, tenacity, and resiliency. Like most CSUN students, Bridge freshmen quickly learned that for the duration of the term with that one professor, they should adopt those classroom values, but after the term was over they quickly forgot them because they had to assimilate another set of values from another faculty member.

Shiva also saw that these different values from different classrooms made it almost impossible to create an overall Bridge community during the Summer Phase. In fact, students were more likely to have a cohort identity based on their classroom rather than a program identity.

Shiva also saw that Bridge students – as the first in their low-income families to go to college – did not know how to be college students. They did not know how to act in classrooms, in the dorms, in the dining hall, or in campus offices. However, she also discovered that students wanted to learn, and that was why they eagerly latched on to the values emphasized by their first Bridge professors.

In both large meetings with students and in individual interactions, Shiva began emphasizing several values they could use to help them succeed. One of these values was Respect. Shiva noticed that Bridge freshmen came from largely racially segregated high schools where there was often racial conflict. Students also came into the Summer Phase with stereotypes about others. Blocking understanding was a high school definition of respect: “I’ll respect you only if you respect me.” Of course, back in high school this mentality created conflict, and Shiva quickly saw that Bridge freshmen brought this limited understanding of respect to college. Shiva shifted students’ mindset by telling them: “In college, you need to give respect in order to get respect.”

Shiva also noticed that Bridge freshmen were eager to be treated as adults in college but did not yet realize that adulthood brought with it responsibilities. She began to emphasize the value of Responsibility. For Bridge students to succeed in both their academic and personal lives, they needed to become responsible. Being responsible meant understanding that each decision they made brought
consequences, and becoming an adult meant understanding the consequences connected to decisions.

Shiva also saw that some Bridge students had poor attitudes. In high school, they could get away with acting out in classrooms and blaming others for their own shortcomings, but in Bridge these behaviors led to conflicts, sometimes involving professors, leading to the dismissal of some students from the program. Shiva began telling Bridge students that coming into college meant changing their Attitude. They needed a positive attitude.

Finally, Shiva recognized that Bridge freshmen connected being in college with being mature. She saw how much they valued Maturity. Thus, in her interactions with students, she emphasized acting maturely, praising those who did so and criticizing others who acted immaturesly.

Initially, these values promoted by Shiva clashed with values promoted by individual faculty members who adhered to their own set of values in their classroom. However, because Bridge students liked being in the larger Bridge community, they espoused Bridge community values more than those of their individual classrooms. Soon, they created an abbreviation for these values. They called them RRAM (Respect, Responsibility, Attitude, and Maturity). They embraced RRAM and used it to guide their lives. They also found out surprisingly that other students on campus did not have RRAM. Thus, RRAM began to distinguish students as being in the EOP community.

Peer mentors and faculty working with Bridge students also quickly learned the value of RRAM. When students acted out in classrooms, all mentors and professors usually had to say was “Remember your RRAM,” and students would transform back into college students. Some faculty also incorporated reflections about RRAM into essay assignments. Students also reminded classmates of RRAM and learned how to use these values to deal with tensions, conflicts, and problems.

What lessons can we draw from the EOP Bridge Program’s experience with RRAM? What implications can we identify for other campus programs that want to create community values?

First, the Bridge experience shows the importance of values for creating a program identity. RRAM began as values for the Bridge learning community but has now
spread throughout EOP, and students embrace RRAM as part of their EOP identity.

Second, the Bridge experience shows that it is not enough for program leaders to create values and propagate them among all within the program. Community values need to be organic to the community itself. Leaders must be able to identify values coming from students, consolidate and explain these, and then bring them back to students and have them embrace them as their own.

Third, students need to see the practical application of values the program leaders emphasize. For the Bridge Program, RRAM proved useful to students to practically deal with conflicts and tensions and their larger adaptation to college.

Fourth, values need to be embraced – as much as possible – by all sectors of the program. On campuses, it is almost natural to find competing values because faculty consider it part of academic freedom to develop values for their own classes. However, for freshman learning communities such as Bridge, both faculty and students can benefit from embracing a common set of program values. Faculty benefit because adopting program values such as RRAM virtually eliminates problems related to what is called “classmate management.”

Fifth, community values work best when there is a community of mentors espousing and practicing them. In the Bridge Program, freshmen look to their mentors (who are former Bridge students themselves) to see how they model RRAM.

Sixth, to help students understand values that they may see as common sense, it is important for leaders and mentors to explain how they are different from those practiced by high school students. Leaders and mentors need to this creatively, such as by having students show the difference through role plays.

Finally, it is important for program leaders and mentors to provide students opportunity to self-reflect on RRAM. These self-reflections can be in the form of classroom assignments or simply as part of discussions in meetings.
How Do Students Learn to Interact with Mentors?

Insights from EOP Mentors

By Glenn Omatsu

EOP is built on a foundation of mentoring, and EOP Director José Luis Vargas expects all people working with the program – whether they are professional staff or student assistants – to serve as mentors for students and for each other. He emphasizes that mentoring is not an extra job responsibility or something that people add on to their official job duties, but it is a fundamental founding principle that is integral to the work of all EOP staff and student assistants. Thus, he expects all staff and student assistants to infuse mentoring into all interactions with students and colleagues – no matter how small these interactions are. He wants all staff and student assistants to work as a community of mentors to help students and each other. He wants all staff and student assistants to promote a culture of mentoring within EOP offices and projects. In these ways, EOP has emerged as a unique program at CSUN. While other programs have mentoring components, EOP is the only program that makes mentoring the foundation of all its work.

To help students, especially freshmen, EOP provides many mentors to enable them to become successful in their academic and personal lives. But here are important questions that mentors seldom reflect on: How do students actually learn how to work with mentors? How do students who are the first in their families to attend college and who come into CSUN with little experience of being mentored learn how to interact with mentors that EOP provides? And in their interactions with EOP mentors, what do students feel – in other words, how do they experience being mentored?

The above questions are very important because at CSUN when staff and student assistants go through most mentor training programs the focus is on their roles and responsibilities as mentors and challenges to meet these expectations. In other words, the focus is on the experiences of the mentor but not as much on the experiences of the student being mentored. In contrast, because EOP has a unique understanding of mentoring, EOP mentors have a unique opportunity to delve into
questions that are not easy for other programs on our campus. EOP has this unique opportunity because nearly all EOP mentors were or are EOP students. In other words, nearly all EOP mentors came into college without knowing how to interact with mentors, but they learned how to work with mentors. Most initially learned how to work with mentors by participating in one of EOP’s Bridge Transitional Programs and gained more experience by interacting with peer advisor mentors, academic mentors, and professional staff advisors. Most state that mentors changed their lives, and they say that wanted to become an EOP mentor to give back to the program by helping new students experience the transformative power of mentoring.

What, then, do EOP staff and student assistant mentors remember about how they learned how to work with mentors when they first came to college? Here are key insights:

• They state that as the first in their families to come to college, they had to take on many responsibilities early in their lives and rely on themselves and not others. In other words, they came into college valuing self-reliance and independence. As a result, even though they heard EOP leaders talk about the importance of working with mentors, they initially felt that interacting with mentors would take away their important strengths – i.e., independence and self-reliance.

• When they first came into college – especially in Bridge Transitional Programs – they heard the word peer mentor often but did not know what mentors did or why they were there. They first learned that peer mentors were not the same as EOP leaders or professors because the peer mentors were students like themselves but only a little older. They came to appreciate peer mentors who understood their identity as slightly older students and not as “junior professors” or “little Shivas.”

• They state that they had learned from growing up in their neighborhoods and schools to carefully observe everything new around them. Thus, when they came into college – especially if they participated in EOP Bridge Transitional Programs – they carefully observed EOP mentors. They listened to what the mentors said but watched carefully at what mentors did to see if actions matched words. They especially observed mentors when they were not in “official” settings of speaking in front of groups or holding meetings.
with students. They observed what mentors did at other times, such as during breaks and free time.

- They state that they especially watched how mentors interacted with other students, other mentors, and EOP leaders. They listened to what language they used, what attitudes they showed, and whom mentors associated with.

- They state that as the first in their families to come to college, they felt both excitement and a sense of achievement but also feelings of fear and insecurity. In early conversations with EOP mentors, they shared their feelings of excitement and achievement, but they seldom shared their fears and insecurities. They had learned from past experiences that others took advantage of them when they learned about fears and insecurities.

- They state it was very hard to trust strangers and that at first they did not take seriously mentors’ words of kindness and willingness to help. Due to past experiences of being betrayed by others who expressed care and concern, they took a “wait and see” approach to find out if mentors were fake or real. Before they would be willing to “open up” to a mentor, they wanted to find out who the person really was.

- They state that getting respect from mentors was very important, but they had a high school mentality about respect – i.e., “if you respect me, I’ll respect you.” They were willing to give respect to EOP leaders and professors, but they felt that the mentors who were only a few years older than them needed to earn their respect. At the same time, they wanted these mentors to treat them with respect even if they did not initially reciprocate. However, by participating in EOP Bridge Transitional Programs, they eventually gained a different understanding of respect – that giving respect to others is essential for getting respect.

- They state that by participating in Bridge Transitional Programs, one of the most valuable experiences was learning about RRAM. They also state that they learned RRAM by watching how mentors used RRAM and also by getting feedback from mentors about practicing RRAM.
• Although they did not express it, they appreciated small things that mentors did, such as greeting them each morning even if they did not respond. They also appreciated it when mentors constantly offered to help them even if they did not respond. On the other hand, they remember when mentors who normally greeted them ignored them or when mentors who normally offered help did not offer any help.

• They initially appreciated mentors who were friendly, caring and sensitive, but in the long run they most appreciated mentors who were simultaneously friendly and firm, caring and challenging, and sensitive and strict.

• They state that although they are grateful for the academic help they received from mentors, the most valuable help was for personal and family problems. They found that mentors were different from friends, family members, or people in authority. These other helpers told them what to do. In contrast, mentors helped them better understand the problems, see options they did not see on their own and think about the consequences of different actions.

• They state that mentors need to take a patient approach to help them open up. At the same time in the relationship between mentors and students, it is the mentors who are the ones who need to take the initiative to help students understand what mentors do and why EOP emphasizes mentoring. Taking initiative does not require large actions; it is best done through small things.

• They state that EOP mentors have life experiences similar to EOP students, but students do not understand this. Mentors need to use opportunities to share with students their life experiences, but this needs to be done appropriately and with sensitivity.

• They state that even though as students they felt close to certain mentors, they also came to appreciate the “community of mentors” that EOP creates. They learned how to ask advice from mentors they knew well on how to talk to other mentors. They especially were interested in learning how the mentors they felt closest to got help from other mentors.
• They state that by living within a community of mentors, they also learned how to help classmates with both academic issues and personal and family problems and also how to help mentors and EOP leaders.

• They state overall that mentors helped to empower them. In other words, by interacting with mentors, they learned how to become more independent. By working with mentors, they learned how asking for help helped them to grow in self-reliance.

• They state that their decision to eventually become mentors to help new students is the best way to give back to the program that helped them.

From the above insights, here is how we can briefly answer the question, “How do students learn to interact with mentors?” Students initially do not know what mentors do or why EOP emphasizes mentoring. To learn about mentors, students carefully observe what mentors do, especially what mentors do when they are not “officially” working. Students appreciate small things mentors do and say, even if the students do not respond. Students say they need time to develop trust for mentors; most will not open up immediately, and mentors need to take a patient approach. In the relationship between mentors and students, it is important for mentors to take the initiative and show students in small ways what mentors do and how they can help them. Students see mentors as models for practicing RRAM. Finally, it is also important to show students the power of EOP’s community of mentors and how they are part of this community.
As a Mentor, How Do You Make Students Feel?

*People will forget most of what you tell them,*
*but they will never forget how you made them feel.*
- Prof. Bridget Sampson

According to Communication Studies researchers, students quickly forget more than 90% of what their professors say in classrooms. This research finding has enormous implications not only for those who teach classes but also for those who make presentations, those who work as academic advisors, those who are activists in communities, and those who raise children. But before teachers, advisors, parents, and activists despair about the difficult challenge facing them in educating others, another research finding brings hope. According to Communications Studies Professor Bridget Sampson, “People will forget most of what you tell them, but they will never forget how you made them feel.”

Professor Sampson’s statement raises intriguing questions for all mentors: As a mentor, how do you make students feel? Or, more specifically, through your interactions with students, what do students experience? When you meet with students, where do you put most of your attention: on preparing the content of the information you present to them or on reflecting on the factors that influence how students feel about their interactions with you?

EOP Director José Luis Vargas has long emphasized the necessity for all mentors who work with EOP students to be student-centered. Being student-centered means that mentors understand how students experience interactions with them. It means that they show students that they care about them. It also means that mentors are willing to make adjustments – both small and big – to better interact with students. Small adjustments are easy for mentors to make, and these small changes can have big impacts on how students experience mentoring. Consider the following examples and consider how only two or three small changes made by mentors can affect what students experience.

In different classrooms, Professor A and Professor B present the same material through an old-style lectures. Professor A lectures behind his podium. He arrives to class precisely at the beginning of class and stops lecturing precisely at the end
of class when he exits the classroom. He never smiles during his lecture. Professor B arrives to her classroom ten minutes early and chats with a few students who have also arrived early. She smiles at other students as they arrive to class. Although there is a podium in the class, she does not stand behind it. When class ends, she stays for a few minutes to talk to a few students. In which classroom do students feel more connected with the professor? Do students’ feelings affect how much they learn in each classroom?

In different offices on a college campus, Advisor A and Adviser B meet with individual students for 15 minutes each to help them set up their schedule of classes for the coming semester. In Advisor A’s office, she has students sit across from her large desk. During the 15-minute meeting, Advisor A talks for 12 minutes giving the student advice about which classes to take and detailed information about new university policies. In Advisor B’s office, he has the student sit in a chair next to him so that both of them can look at papers on his desk. Advisor B talks for six minutes, and for the remainder of time he listens as the student talks about how he did in his classes during the past semester and challenges in his personal and family life that are affecting his academic performance. How does each student feel about the meeting with each advisor? Do the students’ feelings affect what they learn from the advisor? Will these feelings influence whether the student will hold a follow-up meeting or contact the advisor for more information?

In one Peer Mentor Program helping freshmen, two peer mentors are asked to hold weekly meetings with a group of about 12 freshmen. Each meeting lasts about 30 minutes. Peer Mentor A uses the time in his meeting to present important information. He emphasizes college policies, reviews rules and regulations of the program that the freshmen are in, and expresses praise to a few students for doing well in their classes. Peer Mentor B uses her meeting as a time for students to get to know her more and to get to know each other better. She conducts an icebreaker at the beginning of the meeting. She holds a discussion, asking all participants how they are doing in classes and what challenges they are facing. She relates points from the discussion to college policies and rules and regulations in the program. From which meeting do students experience positive feelings? From which meeting do students gain the most information?

In different community groups, two activists are in charge of meetings consisting of about 15 immigrant parents. Activist A knows that the people coming to her meeting are very busy, so she begins her meeting on time and focuses on covering all the agenda points in 90 minutes. Activist B also realizes that people are busy.
Even though her group has been meeting for about six months, she begins the meeting with a short activity suggested by participants on a rotating basis to help them know each other better so they can work together more effectively. Activist B also brings small snacks to her meeting. At which meeting do participants feel more comfortable? From which activist do they learn more?

The above examples point to the importance of very small things that teachers, advisors, peer mentors, and community activists can do to promote positive feelings in the people they interact with. Experienced mentors realize that these kinds of small steps can improve the quality of interactions with people they are helping, and positive feelings can lead to more opportunities for sharing knowledge. More importantly, positive feelings make people – especially students – feel more comfortable, allowing them to reconnect with mentors to follow up with questions and on things they don’t quite understand.

The work of teachers, advisers, community activists, and parents becomes more powerful when they learn how to infuse mentoring into their work. And even “little moments” of mentoring can have great impacts by changing how people feel about themselves and about others.
Appreciating Our Interactions
With Freshmen

By Glenn Omatsu

Since 1995, I’ve had the privilege and honor of teaching freshmen. I consider it a privilege because not many faculty have this opportunity. I consider it an honor because not many faculty appreciate the challenge, the excitement and the joy connected with interacting with freshmen daily.

The freshmen that I interact with are members of the EOP Bridge community and are the first from their low-income families to attend college. In addition, most are “special-admit” students with high potential – i.e., they are freshmen with strong motivation to do well in college despite having low grades in high school. The EOP Bridge Transitional Program is built on a foundation of mentoring, and through membership in EOP the freshmen in my classes are part of a powerful, supportive community.

The following are quick suggestions for faculty and peer mentors who work with freshmen. The suggestions are based on my own experiences and from research in the fields of teaching-learning, mentoring, and cognitive science.

• **Freshmen want to be involved in communities (and relationships) that make learning possible.** For faculty and peer mentors, it’s important to help freshmen forge a community with each other in the classroom and within the overall program they are part of. To promote relationship-building and community-building, faculty and peer mentors need to infuse mentoring into all daily interactions with students, especially the smallest of interactions. For faculty, this means incorporating mentoring into their work as teachers and scholars. For peer mentors, this means realizing that some of their most powerful mentoring moments may occur in small conversations with students outside the classroom. Faculty and peer mentors also need to remember that building positive relationships and a close and supportive community takes time, especially in terms of dealing with issues of trust in a new environment.

• **Freshmen are very observant and in their early stages as college students learn a lot through their observations and interactions. Specifically, they learn about what a mentor is, not by what mentors say but by observing what mentors do.** For the first few days (and weeks) in a new class of freshmen, faculty and peer mentors may say that their students don’t say very much. However, it’s more accurate to state that freshmen are observing a lot and reaching conclusions based on what they see. Thus, for faculty and peer mentors, it’s important to transform their observations into teaching moments. For example, most freshmen begin a class with only a vague notion of what mentors are. They learn about mentors not by what faculty and peer mentors say but by what they see faculty and peer mentors do, especially in interactions with students. Students in initial class sessions notice whether peer mentors smile or do not smile, greet or do not greet students, and pay attention or look bored during class sessions. From these observations, students draw conclusions about peer mentors and the meaning of mentoring.
• **Freshmen want to be treated with respect as young adults and not as “kids.”** It is not unusual to hear a handful of peer mentors in private conversations refer to the freshmen they’re working with as “kids” even though peer mentors are only a few years older than freshmen. These same peer mentors would be horrified if faculty in their upper-division classes referred to them as children. More often than not, words are connected to mindsets and mindsets influence behavior. Freshmen – like all college students – want to be respected. And freshmen – like other adults – are able to discern which people treat them with respect and which people do not.

• **Freshmen (and, in fact, all people) don’t learn things linearly.** Although this may seem self-evident, it’s important to realize that our university (and the U.S. education system as a whole) is structured around a model of linear learning. For example, a college degree is based on the accumulation of units of credit, with each course having specific learning outcomes. Majors involve completing a sequence of courses, which are organized into levels based on linear progression. Of course, in reality, human learning is marked by moving both forward and backward, by experiencing leaps in consciousness, by layering new levels of understanding on previous knowledge, and by both learning and un-learning.

• **Freshmen are grappling with the contradiction of striving to become independent while also realizing that they are dependent on others.** Many freshmen believe that they have to deal with this contradiction by themselves and that achieving independence means not asking anyone for help. Mentors can play a powerful role in helping freshmen reframe this contradiction. Mentors can show how independence comes from using the help of others.

• **Freshmen eagerly want to transform themselves from high school students into college students by developing better thinking skills and new behaviors.** To help freshmen transform themselves, faculty and peer mentors should watch for teaching and mentoring moments, both small and large. For example, while freshmen recognize that their decisions have consequences, they sometimes don’t see the consequences until after they have happened. Mentors who have been in similar situations can help them improve thinking. Similarly, to deal with dilemmas in their lives, freshmen usually perceive only two alternatives, an “either-or” solution. Mentors can help them explore other possibilities. Faculty and peer mentors should also watch for opportunities to help freshmen develop the higher-level qualities of compassion and empathy, which have been called essential survival skills for human beings in the twentieth century.

• **Freshmen are strongly influenced by peers.** According to researchers, freshmen are more strongly influenced by peers than by professors, peer mentors, or parents. Obviously, some peer influence can be harmful for freshmen, such as prioritizing partying above academics. However, faculty and peer mentors can also harness the powerful impact of peer influence to help freshmen. One way is to help freshmen build a supportive community in their classroom and within their program to help all students do well.

It’s also important to recognize that freshman cohorts are dynamic and rapidly changing. Thus, faculty and peer mentors should watch for emerging trends. For example, in the past two years, EOP Bridge leaders have identified three new trends that have reshaped our strategies to help
freshmen succeed. I describe these new trends tentatively, relying on observations from faculty, peer mentors, and leaders in our EOP Bridge Program.

• *Freshmen spend a lot of time socializing with friends electronically but may need the help of mentors to learn how to socialize in face-to-face settings.* Perhaps as a consequence of social networking media, freshmen today spend a lot of time interacting with friends electronically. However, freshmen may need the help of mentors to learn how to socialize in face-to-face settings, especially with new people. This summer, one freshman told me that she wanted to talk to a mentor but didn’t know how to start the conversation. Another freshman said she was surprised when another student was offended by a comment she made during a group discussion; she said that she regularly texted and posted the same type of comment to her friends and none of them ever felt offended.

• *Freshmen enter college after spending most of their lives in K-12 schools based on the policy of No Child Left Behind.* In recent years, there have been numerous reports about how No Child Left Behind has influenced teaching practices (e.g., “teaching to the test.”) However, there have been fewer observations about how this policy shapes students’ approaches to learning. This past summer, one of our Bridge faculty stated that several students in his class were only focused on getting the “right answers” to questions he asked in class and became frustrated when he told them that he was more interested in having them explain the thinking behind their own answers. In his classroom, like in other Bridge classrooms, students hear that answers to questions are just the beginning of their quest for knowledge in college. However, this past summer it took longer than in previous summers for some freshmen to accept this perspective.

• *Increasing numbers of freshmen enter college with a feeling of entitlement, which affects how they initially perceive resources and opportunities.* EOP Transitional Programs Director Shiva Parsa contrasts recent EOP freshmen with past cohorts in terms of changing attitudes and behaviors. She states that growing numbers of new EOP freshmen – including “special-admit” freshmen – come into the program with a feeling of entitlement, mirroring a developing trend for freshmen in general. This sense of entitlement affects how EOP freshmen perceive resources and opportunities. They initially don’t appreciate resources provided to them, including peer mentors. They also believe they will automatically receive more chances if they fail classes. EOP leaders realize that this sense of entitlement is harmful for students, especially in this time of diminishing opportunities. Thus, EOP leaders have begun to think about ways to address this new trend through its student-centered and innovative program design, linking together admissions, student services, and academics – all built on a foundation of mentoring.
Enhancing the Teamwork of Faculty and Peer Mentors in Classrooms

The EOP Bridge Program has emerged as a leader on this campus and throughout the nation for emphasizing the key role of Peer Mentors to help freshmen succeed. Interestingly, both peer mentors and their students quickly grasp the importance of having peer mentors in classrooms. In contrast, it takes longer for faculty to appreciate the role of Peer Mentors and understand how to work with them. Not only do Peer Mentors provide an extra set of “eyes and ears” to help faculty, but they also serve the following valuable roles to help students:

- Peer Mentors are peers of students, and due to closeness in age and experience the students often feel more comfortable asking questions to mentors rather than faculty;
- Peer Mentors serve as “early warning systems” for faculty and can quickly identify students who are not doing well;
- Peer Mentors provide valuable feedback to faculty about what students are understanding and not understanding from lectures and readings;
- Peer Mentors model for students, especially freshmen, the behaviors and attitudes that are expected in college classrooms;
- Peer Mentors help freshmen understand the new language of college, such as “syllabus,” “office hours,” “probation,” the “Dean’s List,” and the difference between the grades of an “F” and a “WU”;
- Peer Mentors show students, especially freshmen, how to ask questions to faculty and how to use faculty as resources to help them do well in classes;
- Peer Mentors help students learn how to use all the valuable resources on campus, especially writing labs, tutoring centers, the library, and academic advisors; in other words, Peer Mentors serve as a valuable “gateway” to help students not only learn about resources but also use them;
- Peer Mentors help students, especially freshmen, understand that asking for help from others at college does not take away their independence but actually helps to develop it;
- Peer Mentors often are able to understand students’ behaviors and actions, fears and uncertainties, and hopes and dreams faster than students themselves due to once being in similar situations;
- Peer Mentors enable students to discover and develop the potential within themselves to become great college students;
• And finally, Peer Mentors help students understand how to seek out and use the help of mentors during college and throughout their lifetimes.

Peer Mentors serve these valuable roles in classrooms because they are both “peers” and “mentors” for the students they are helping. This dual identity distinguishes them from other academic helpers found at CSUN, such as teaching assistants, S.I. leaders, and tutors. While all work with students on academic subject matter, Peer Mentors are “student-centered” and help students deal with both academic and non-academic challenges in their lives. Peer Mentors understand from their own experiences how non-academic challenges, such as family and personal problems, can interfere with doing well in college and they can offer practical advice to students facing similar challenges. One freshman astutely summed up why students prefer having Peer Mentors as helpers rather than teaching assistants, S.I. leaders, and tutors: “Teaching assistants help teachers, but peer mentors help students.”

Here at CSUN, the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) has pioneered the use of Peer Mentors in its Bridge long-term learning communities for freshmen who are the first in their low-income families to attend college. EOP’s Peer Mentors have helped its freshmen achieve high continuation rates during their critical first three semesters on campus. EOP leaders emphasize three main responsibilities for Peer Mentors: 1) helping freshmen to maintain good attendance in their classes; 2) helping freshmen improve time management by incorporating small changes in their lives; and 3) helping freshmen use campus resources, especially writing labs, tutoring services, and academic advisors. EOP leaders also train Peer Mentors to handle all the valuable roles identified earlier. Finally, EOP leaders train Peer Mentors in mastering the art of “mentoring on the run,” working within a “community of mentors,” and promoting a “culture of mentoring” in their interactions with students.

For Peer Mentors in any campus program, one of the biggest challenges is working effectively with their assigned faculty. Here are some of the common problems identified by past Peer Mentors:

• Not having ongoing communication with their assigned faculty;
• Not being incorporated into the class by their faculty and sometimes even feeling that their presence is not needed;
• Not being asked for suggestions from their faculty to help students learn;
• Not having discussions with their faculty on how to deal with challenging students (either challenging students that faculty have identified or that Peer Mentors have identified);
• Not being used as an “early warning system” to quickly identify and help students who are not doing well in class;
• Not being able to show students that the Peer Mentor and faculty are a team and also part of a larger “community of mentors” to help the students;
• Not being encouraged by their faculty to seek help and advice from program heads or others within their “community of mentors”;
• Being ordered by their faculty to take over the class period and teach the students (i.e., to take on the role of a teaching assistant or SI leader rather than a peer mentor)
• Being told by their faculty to grade student assignments (i.e., to take on the role of a teaching assistant rather than a Peer Mentor)
• Being asked by their faculty to get coffee for them, to make copies of materials needed in class, to deliver messages to program leaders for them, or to pick up equipment for the classroom (i.e., to take on the role of a personal assistant or classroom aide rather than a Peer Mentor)

If any of these common problems arise, Peer Mentors should take several steps: first, they should gently remind faculty about the roles and responsibilities of Peer Mentors; second, they should talk to program leaders; and third, they should work with program leaders to develop a strategy to help students by enhancing teamwork between the Peer Mentor and faculty.
How Mentors Can Help Students Take Small Steps to Change Bad Habits

Like other EOP Bridge Mentors, Mentor Bri has a storehouse of experiences that can be transformed into wisdom that can help new Bridge students. Her insights from her freshman year can help mentors work with our students to overcome bad high school habits.

As a Bridge freshman, Bri was determined to rid herself of all her bad habits from high school that had held her back from being a great student. She worked hard to get into the Bridge Program and treasured all that she gained from EOP, especially RRAM. However, like other freshmen, Bri was hard-headed and believed that she learned best from her own experiences, even while listening respectfully to advice of Bridge mentors who didn’t want her to “learn the hard way.”

For our Bridge freshmen, being hard-headed is both a blessing and a curse. It is a blessing because it was the quality that enabled them to get into college. In high school, they blocked out the disparaging words of those around them, including within their own family, who said they would never make it to college. They also persevered through EOP’s challenging admissions process while their friends gave up along the way. In other words, being hard-headed enabled them to create an identity as a strong and independent young person who was determined to succeed. However, when they entered the Bridge Program, they learned that hard-headedness could cause their downfall. From Bridge mentors, they heard countless stories of freshmen who failed classes because they did not ask for help. They learned about stubborn students who got kicked out of college because they clung to the belief that they could only learn things “the hard way.”

How, then, can a hard-headed Bridge freshman overcome bad high school habits? How can that student create a new identity as a college student without completely shedding the quality of hard-headedness that enabled them to get into college? And how can Bridge mentors help this student? Mentor Bri provides valuable insights to answer these questions.

During Bri’s freshman year – from the summer phase all the way through the spring phase – she was determined to work hard to get rid of bad high school habits. One of these bad habits was saying and doing disruptive things in classes. In high school, her disruptive statements and actions were considered funny, but
Bri knew that in college she needed to change. However, throughout her first year in Bridge, Bri would occasionally say and do things that she knew were inappropriate. When that happened, her mentors – especially Rashitta – would talk to her and tell her to stop. At first, Bri felt the mentors were criticizing her, and she reacted defensively. But because Rashitta was persistent, firm, and calm, Bri came to realize that Bridge mentors cared about her.

Bri provides valuables insights into what is going on in the mind of a hard-headed Bridge freshman who is reverting to bad high school habits but also is determined to change. She remembers that she did not want to be disruptive in the classroom, but sometimes “it just came out.” She immediately felt bad and realized that what she did was wrong. She wanted to change. However, when mentors talked to her about her bad actions, she had difficulty explaining herself. Sometimes in these discussions she said nothing. “Maybe they thought I had a bad attitude, but in reality I was really thinking about what I was doing and how I wanted to change. But it was hard to explain things.”

From her discussions with Bridge mentors, especially with Rashitta, Bri learned the power of self-reflection. Each time she did a bad high school habit, she thought deeply about it. She thought about why she did it and how she could change. However, in her discussions with mentors, she could not explain this thought process. She did not yet have the tools that college students eventually gain to communicate these deep thoughts to others.

Bri also provides one more insight. “When I was a Bridge freshman, I didn’t know how to tell my mentors that I was also working on getting rid of many bad high school habits and not just the one that they were talking to me about. I came into Bridge wanting to focus on Bad Habit A and Bad Habit B. Those were my priorities, and I really worked hard on them. Bad Habit C was being disruptive in classes. I was also working on that one too, but my main priorities were A and B.” However, as a freshman, Bri was unable to articulate this deep analysis to her mentors, and often in discussions she was quiet. Now, two years later, she is able to analyze and articulate her past thoughts, and she can use her wisdom to understand what is going on within Bridge students, especially when they are silent during discussions.

From Bri’s valuable insights, we can summarize the following points to help Bridge mentors work with freshmen:
• Bridge freshmen want to overcome bad high school habits, but the process is very difficult because the bad habits have been practiced for many years.
• Many Bridge freshmen are hard-headed, and when Bridge mentors notice their bad high school habits and talk to them they will at first regard the advice as criticism. Mentors need to be persistent, calm and firm, and students will eventually understand that the advice is not criticism but comes from caring about them.
• Although Bridge freshmen know that they need to overcome hard-headedness to do well in college, they also believe that being hard-headed enabled them to get here and is part of their self-identity as strong and independent students; thus, mentors need to patiently show them that overcoming hard-headedness will not erase that coveted self-identity but actually enhance it.
• Although Bridge freshmen may not be able to articulate it, the most valuable tool that they gain from their discussions with mentors is the capacity for self-reflection; in other words, it’s very important for mentors to help students think about their actions, especially their bad habits and how to change them.
• During all phases of the Bridge in the freshman year – summer through spring – Bridge students identify RRAM as the most important quality that they gain from their Bridge experience; thus, mentors need to use the power of RRAM to help freshmen reflect on their thoughts and actions.
• It will not be unusual for Bridge freshmen to be silent in discussions with mentors when asked to explain why they did something wrong; silence does not mean that the student is not self-reflecting on their wrong actions, but silence may mean that the student does not yet have the tools to analyze and communicate what is going on in their minds.
• All Bridge students enter our program with many bad high school habits, and they may be working hard to overcome multiple habits although not being able to explain this; when one bad habit emerges, mentors need to address it but also need to provide encouragement for each student’s progress on overcoming other bad habits.

Finally, to better appreciate the power of Bri’s wisdom, I am attaching an article (from Linkedin) by Dr. Daniel Goleman who summarizes what experts say about changing bad habits, especially in terms of findings from neuro-science. Like Mentor Bri, Dr. Goleman identifies the critical importance of engaging in self-reflection (he calls it “self-awareness”), wanting to do things differently (he calls it finding “alternatives”), and interacting with mentors (he calls it “working with a coach”).
Five Key Steps to Habit Change

By Daniel Goleman
www.linkedin.com

Last week I heard about an executive who had a self-defeating leadership habit: whenever a direct report’s performance disappointed him, he launched into a vicious attack on that person. The results were always negative: the person felt awful and his performance suffered as a result— and the relationship between the executive and that direct report became toxic. In addition such a leader misses a teachable moment: a chance for constructive feedback on what the person needs to do differently or better in the future.

The basal ganglia plays a key role in the formation of such leadership habits, both the good ones and the bad ones. As we keep repeating a routine of any kind, the brain shifts its control of the habit from areas at the top of the brain to the basal ganglia at the bottom. As this switch occurs, we lose awareness of the habit and its triggers. The routine springs into action in response to a trigger we don’t notice, and does so automatically. We lose control.

To change the habit we must first bring it into consciousness again. That takes self-awareness, a fundamental of emotional intelligence. When that leader became mindful of his self-defeating habit, he realized that it was his own fear of failure that made him panic inside and lose control of his own behavior. He knew it did not help to attack, but could not seem to stop himself.

This leadership case came up at a workshop I gave with Tara Bennett-Goleman on her new book, Mind Whispering: A New Map to Freedom from Self-defeating Emotional Habits, which explains the neuroscience of habit change. She recommends mindfulness as a way to bring unconscious habits back into awareness where they can be changed. And she outlines a simple five-step process for making that change, especially helpful if the person is working with a coach.

1) Familiarize yourself with the self-defeating habit. Get so you can recognize the routine as it starts, or begins to take over. This might be by noticing its typical thoughts or feelings, or how you start to act. You can also follow Paul Ekman's simple suggestion: keep a journal of your triggers.
2) Be mindful. Monitor your behavior—thoughts, feelings, actions—from a neutral, “witness” awareness.
3) Remember the alternatives—think of a better way to handle the situation.
4) Choose something better—e.g., what you say or do that would be helpful instead of self-defeating.
5) Do this at every naturally occurring opportunity.

Tara cites the neuroscience evidence that the more often you can repeat the new routine instead of the self-destructive one, the sooner it will replace the self-defeating habit in your basal ganglia. The better response will become your new default reaction.
Developing a Mentoring Perspective

*Mentor Roles and Responsibilities*

*What a Mentor Is . . .*

*By Dr. Gordon Nakagawa*

Mentor roles and responsibilities are varied and complex. Serving as a guide, facilitator, role model, and/or ally to the mentee, a mentor must be prepared to take on a range of roles and responsibilities that may change as the mentor/mentee relationship develops over time, as the needs and goals of the mentee shift, and as specific contexts and situations require different strategies. Although it’s not possible to pigeonhole any mentor, mentee, or mentoring relationship, a mentor will generally enact a number of common roles and responsibilities. It’s worth emphasizing that whatever role the mentor may take, the mentor’s principal goal, as Paulo Freire reminds us, is to invite and nurture the “total autonomy, freedom, and development of those he or she mentors.”

**A mentor is . . .**

- **A knowledgeable and experienced guide** who teaches (and learns) through a commitment to the mutual growth of both mentee and mentor.

- **A caring, thoughtful, and humane facilitator** who provides access to people, places, experiences, and resources outside the mentee’s routine environment.

- **A role model** who exemplifies in word and deed what it means to be an ethical, responsible, and compassionate human being.

- **A trusted ally, or advocate**, who works with (not for) the mentee and on behalf of the mentee’s best interests and goals.
Developing a Mentoring Perspective

Mentor Roles and Responsibilities
What a Mentor Is Not

By Dr. Gordon Nakagawa

Mentors and mentees should understand that mentors cannot be all things to their mentees. A role model is not a flawless idol to be mindlessly emulated by the mentee; an experienced guide is not a surrogate parents who stands in as a mother or father figure; a caring facilitator is not a professional therapist who is capable of treating serious personal problems; a trusted ally or advocate is not a social worker or a financier. Often, mentors and mentees encounter problems in their relationships due to different ideas about the appropriate role(s) and responsibilities of either the mentor, mentee, or both. There are boundaries in virtually any and all relationships, and the mentor/mentee relationship is no exception. While there are no hard and fast rules, and while there may be rare exceptions, there are guidelines for what a mentor is (or should be) and for what a mentor is not (or should not be).

A mentor is not . . .

- A (surrogate) parent.
- A professional counselor or therapist.
- A flawless or infallible idol.
- A social worker.
- A lending institution.
- A playmate or romantic partner.
The Impact of Mentoring on Increasing Students’ Academic Achievement

By Glenn Omatsu

What impact does mentoring have on student academic achievement? Why do universities that emphasize mentoring demonstrate higher student retention rates than those that do not?

One of the leading researchers on why students leave college is Vincent Tinto (see Vincent Tinto, *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987 and 1993). Tinto’s research also helps to identify critical factors underlying student persistence in college and academic success. In his analysis, Tinto moves beyond past research that has tended to over-emphasize individual student attributes; he examines instead factors relating to what we might be called “institutional culture” — i.e., the academic and social environment of each college, such as faculty-student interactions, student-student interactions, academic interactions in the classroom, the intellectual and social ethos outside the classroom, student support services, etc. Of course, all of these factors deal with mentoring relationships, both formal and informal relationships. In the following summary taken from Tinto’s book, I focus on ideas relating to two concepts important for CSUN at this time: the relationship between mentoring and student academic success and the significance of learning communities (or “communities of mentors”) for student persistence and achievement.

In his analysis of why students either leave college or persist to graduation, Tinto identifies the key role of faculty interactions and peer interactions and their impact on students. According to Tinto, “the faculty, more than any other group, represents the primary intellectual orientation of the institution. Their actions, within and without the classroom, provide the standards by which individuals come to judge the intellectual ethos of the institution. . . . The classrooms, the hallways, and the offices of the institution become testing grounds for student judgement as to the intellectual character and worth of the college experience” (p. 53). In addition, for students, interactions with their peers are particularly important in the decision to leave or stay in college. For students, “social identity is sometimes as important as intellectual identity, especially in the first year of college” (p. 53). For large, commuter campuses in urban areas, the impact of student contact with others is important for persistence for those students who are regarded as having “marginal” status on campus, such as “high-risk” students (p. 79). Overall, “the degree and quality of personal interaction with other members of the institution (whether with faculty or with peers) are critical elements” in students’ decisions to either stay in or leave college (p. 56).

Tinto emphasizes that frequent contact with the faculty appears to be a particularly important element for high student persistence rates in colleges (p. 56). “This is especially true when that contact extends beyond the formal boundaries of the classroom to the various informal settings which characterize social life. Those encounters which go beyond the mere formalities of academic work to broader intellectual and social issues and which are seen by students as warm
and rewarding appear to be strongly associated with the continued persistence “(p. 57).
Moreover, faculty behavior within the classroom often serves as the “important precursors to subsequent contact,” according to students. “Classroom behaviors influence student perceptions as to the receptivity of faculty to further student contacts outside the classroom” (p. 57). Thus, according to Tinto, “it is of little surprise to discover that institutions with low rates of student retention are those in which students generally report low rates of student-faculty contact” (p. 58).

Overall, Tinto concludes that student academic success and their intellectual and social development are greatest in those universities “where students interact with both faculty and student peers,” whether through formal or informal mentoring relationships (p. 70).

Tinto’s summary of educational research also highlights the importance of what we can call “communities of mentors” on student persistence and academic success. He emphasizes the role that “supportive relationships” play in “preventing and reducing the harmful effects of stress and enhancing individuals’ ability to cope effectively with stress in specific social settings” (p. 122). According to Tinto, “the establishment of supportive personal relationships — with faculty, peers, and other significant persons — enables students to better cope with the demands of the college environment,” and this, in turn, has positive impacts upon students’ academic success (p. 122). These research findings point to the importance of “collaborative effect of a variety of actors, faculty and staff alike, across the campus” (p. 122).

Tinto’s focus on the importance of collaborative efforts by faculty and staff to promote student success leads to his emphasis on conceptualizing colleges as “learning communities.” He identifies student involvement and integration in college life, especially through contact with faculty, as “a key determinant for a variety of educational outcomes” (pp. 130-131). This involvement and integration is related to the quality of students’ investment in their learning, which, in turn, is related to the amount that they learn. Thus, Tinto argues that faculty need to understand the importance of promoting student involvement in their classrooms through the creation of classroom learning communities (p. 131). Tinto further contends that the first several weeks of college for students are a very critical period. In this period, student social attachments (i.e., their capacity to involve themselves in learning communities) “may be a necessary precondition” for subsequent involvements at their institutions, including academic involvement (p. 134). In this initial period of adjustment to college life, Tinto emphasizes the importance of student contact with faculty, “specifically accessibility and contact with faculty outside classrooms, helpfulness of faculty, and the concern they show for students” (p. 135). According to Tinto, “once social membership has been achieved or at least once concerns over it have been addressed, student attention appears to increasingly center on academic involvements” (p. 134). In short, Tinto advocates for designing students’ first-year college experience around learning communities and mentoring relationships, especially with faculty.

Works cited by Tinto:

Astin, A. W., Preventing Students from Dropping Out (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1975).


Denise arrived home from work to find three letters waiting for her. One said her teenage son had made his school's honour roll, a second said he had been selected to play in an outstanding youth orchestra and the third said he was suspended from school for cutting history class to hang out downtown.

The mother of twin teenage boys was appalled by her sons' tantrums, stomping of feet, slamming of doors, name-calling and fighting. The parents of a 15-year-old were horrified to discover their daughter was sneaking out of the house at midnight to see a 24-year-old man she had just met.

These stories come from a fascinating new book by New York Times medical science and health editor Barbara Strauch, titled The Primal Teen: What the New Discoveries About the Teenage Brain Tell Us About Our Kids. Ms. Strauch brings a good-news message, so to speak, to parents of teenagers: You aren't imagining things -- your sons and daughters really do have wonky brains and can be periodically, briefly insane.

Recent research in Canada and the United States is revealing that previous notions of the adolescent brain as a finished piece of work are wrong, and that the shibboleth of attributing teenagers' aberrant and flaky behaviour to hormones is, at the very least, an incomplete explanation. In fact, the adolescent brain goes through a biological remodelling as critical to human development as that which takes place during the first two years of life -- a discovery with profound implications for educators, behavioural scientists, pediatric health professionals and, with luck, bewildered and desperate parents.

Virtually every particle of the teenage brain is under reconstruction: Nodes, lobes, neurons, synapses, the long strings of axons that are the pathways for electrical signals speeding (or, in the case of teenagers, jolting and backfiring) from one part of the brain to another and the itsy-bitsy dendrites that carry chemical messages between neurons. Nature should post "Sorry for the inconvenience" signs on their foreheads.

What the body is doing is rebuilding teenagers' brains so they can be adults. The process makes life trying for adolescents and everyone around them, tossing teens into a cauldron of cognitive mayhem, stormy moods, grunts, bizarre reasoning and the inability to conceive of the future beyond Friday night.

The brain weight of a six-year-old is 95 per cent the weight of an adult's, which is what has led neural scientists in the past to assume the teenage brain was a done deal. But six years ago, child psychiatrist and neuroscientist Jay Giedd of the U.S. National Institutes of Health was looking at the results of teenage brain scans he had had analyzed by the Montreal Neurological Institute when he suddenly realized the brains he was studying were undergoing major changes.
The grey matter, their outer layer, was thickening -- going through a period of overproduction of cells, or what neuroscientists aptly describe as "exuberance" -- and then dramatically thinning down, "a level of change that was supposed to be largely over by kindergarten," Ms. Strauch writes.

Dr. Giedd told her, "Basically I thought I was wrong. I thought the numbers were off. "There was so little information out there, and what was there said that this overproduction was over long before teen years. I just kept looking at the data. Then after about six months of looking at more brain scans, I thought, 'Hey, this is for real.' "

Since then, research into the teenage brain has become as exuberant as the object being studied. Every cell and dendrite is being peered at -- from Dr. Giedd's continuing research and the work of Tomaz Paus at the Montreal Neurological Institute, who is examining adolescent neural connections between the brain's important speech areas, to the studies of neuroscientists like University of Chicago's Peter Huttenlocher, who's counting teenage synapses.

Teenagers, it is now known, experience short-circuits in the neural wiring to their memory function and have difficulty understanding facial expressions, instructions and jokes (forget about using irony; it's not that many don't get it, they can't get it). One of the reasons for the impaired abilities is that teens use the brain's primal, emotional fight-or-flight centre rather than the brain's rational centre to decode signals from the social world around them, with frequent and fractious misinterpretations. To illustrate, Ms. Strauch describes what happened to teenagers who underwent brain scans while being shown the face of a man in fear.

The part of their brains that lit up the brightest as their minds worked to make sense of the image was not the prefrontal cortex, the centre of rational judgment used by the adult brain to sort out complex nuances of emotions. It was the amygdala, an almond-shaped knot in the middle of the brain that is one of the key areas for instinctual reactions such as fight or flight, anger or "I hate you, Mom."

Research also suggests that the connections between the left and right side of teenagers' brains are incomplete, affecting their abilities to link speech and written language to thought. Synaptic gaps in the brain development of younger teens can render them largely incapable of abstract thinking, and put algebraic equations, puns and the normal, inherent contradictions in life beyond most of their grasps.

Brain chemistry accounts for their preference for staying up late and sleeping late -- useful information for work-whacked parents desperate to get to bed while their teenage offspring are prowling bright-eyed around the house. Sleep researcher Mary Carskadon at Rhode Island's Brown University has discovered that melatonin, the natural hormone that regulates sleep (in this case the explanation is hormones), doesn't begin flowing into teenage brains until about 10:30 p.m., after most of their parents' brains have decided to call it a day. Add to this the fact teenagers need about 10 hours' sleep, two hours longer than adults, and you realize they are likely to be in perpetual sleep deficit. Why the late-flowing melatonin? Researchers aren't sure, but they've hypothesized that it has to do with some primal survival mechanism.

Most significant of all, teens' prefrontal cortex -- the brain's executive decision-making function,
its CEO, its policeman, its planner, strategist and centre of judgment -- doesn't work properly
(which is why the amygdala is employed to decode the social world, sort of a temporary detour
while the main highway is being repaired). The prefrontal cortex is still a work in progress
during the time that teenagers need it most, when they begin dewy-eyed forays of exploration
into the world on their own. Indeed, the frontal lobes, with their software of reason, risk
assessment and impulse control, are pretty much the last region of the brain to reach full
development, not until their owners are past 20.

All of which means your teenaged children may be taller than you, have deeper voices
(something fathers tend to find difficult) and at times may even sound more reasonable -- as any
parent knows who suddenly realizes her son or daughter is persuading her to accept some totally
goofy idea -- but much of the time their pilots are missing from the flight deck. Their adult
physical appearance is a Potemkin Village sham. Everything inside their skulls is a muddle, as
chaotically disorganized as their bedrooms, backpacks and school lockers. Moreover, the
research reveals that while the adolescent brain is growing in huge spurts, it's also pruning earlier
growth it no longer needs, clear-cutting millions of grey-matter cells in accordance with its
modus operandi of "use it or lose it."

The brain is thought to work by overproducing cells, retaining those that are put to use and
eventually tossing out the rest. According to this theory (not completely accepted in the world of
neuroscience), these periods of rapid, almost explosive growth -- or exuberance -- occur when
the brain is being primed to acquire new skills. What this pruning or thinning means, says Dr.
Miriam Kaufman, director of the adolescent medicine clinic at Toronto's Hospital for Sick
Children, is that not only does the brain shape behaviour but behaviour seems to shape the brain.

In other words, for the teenager engaged in sports or music or reading, the cells and connectors
necessary for those actions will flourish and become hardwired to the brain's scaffolding. And if
the teenager's primary activity is playing video games or sofa-flopping, it will be the brain cells
enabling those activities that survive, while others wither. "The research is reinforcing the kinds
of things we've been thinking about," Dr. Kaufman says. "But until now, when you've talked to
people about improving mental health [of children] there's been so much push on the first two
years. Teens have been thought of as geriatric."

Ms. Strauch reports that the research has led at least one neural scientist, Deborah Yurgelun-
Todd at Boston's McLean psychiatric hospital (she did the study with the face of the man in
fear), to revamp her parenting techniques: "I used to ask my daughter to put a dish in the
dishwasher and brush her hair and pick up her clothes, and then I'd get angry that she only did
one of those things. Now I don't expect her to hold so much information in her head. She does
one thing, and I expect that now."

Interestingly, many educators have intuitively understood that changes were taking place inside
teenage brains, but until now have lacked the substantiating evidence. In the 1980s, when Anne
Kerr was a classroom geography teacher, she would take her Grade 9 students on a walking tour
of the school's neighbourhood and then ask them to draw a bird's-eye map of it. "One-third of the
class could do it," she said. "The majority couldn't. They could draw houses on the street, but not
a bird's-eye view." The expectation at that time, she said, was that all Grade 12 students could
discuss theoretical philosophy and do complex algebraic equations. "But in fact only 20 per cent
of 18-year-olds could go from concrete to formal [theoretical abstract] learning. This was astounding to me as a classroom teacher. That's what's so exciting about this research."

Ms. Kerr, now principal of Ursula Franklin Academy, a Toronto public high school, found herself with so many questions she couldn't answer about the workings of the adolescent brain that she took a sabbatical in 1992 to study what was then known about it. "I learned so much. It's enabled me to do so much more -- and we still don't know enough about the brain. There's still a tremendous amount of room for research." What Ms. Kerr and her staff try to work with as a teaching methodology is what she calls the zone of proximal development -- figuring out what stage of development a student's brain has reached and tailoring teaching to fit that stage. Needless to say, it is an approach that doesn't fit comfortably with rigidly standardized curricula and grading. "How do you go from concrete to formal learning? There's no straight line," she says. "The brain develops in spurts and plateaus. The spurts require stimulation. The plateaus are a period of consolidation." Ms. Kerr learned to say this to students: "Your head is a jungle, and there's a road crew in there that's working, and we've got to stimulate you to keep that road crew working. You need someone like me to meet you where you're at."

Dr. Kaufman of Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children says one of the strongest messages that comes out of the new knowledge about the brain's pruning process is that schools and parents should be pushing music, language and sports skills at teenagers to ensure their brains don't toss out the cells needed for those activities. "We're talking about cycles [in the brain's growth]," she says. "If you're not reading, if you're not learning another language . . . this is going to influence changes in the brain."

Is there a list of do's and don't's for parents?

Certainly yelling at them doesn't help. "Abstract thinking comes and goes with stress," Dr. Kaufman says. "We have to be making sure that all our interactions with teenagers are developmentally appropriate." She refers to parenting guru Barbara Coloroso's model: Set limits and be respectful.

Columbia University child psychiatrist Peter Jensen, the father of five teenagers, says he has learned to replace the parenting jackhammer with subtle nudges and hints at possible outcomes of risky behaviour and then leave his offspring alone to test-drive their newly connecting prefrontal cortices. "When my oldest child was a teenager, I was always trying to be in control, always trying to be her forebrain. I am trying to raise the fifth one differently -- giving structure, but also giving more choices to her own forebrain, choices she can make herself."

The experts say: Expose them to as many experiences as you can. Those experiences shape the brain. The experts say: When your teenagers grunt and yell at you, remember that you grunted and yelled at your parents. The experts say: Let your teenagers know their brains are works in progress.

Barbara Strauch says: Let them sleep in.
Students Offer Prescriptions for Teachers
In a new book, teens describe the delicate balance they want from their instructors.

By Duke Helfand, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer
January 8, 2003

Fixing the nation's urban high schools has become a near-obsession among educators in recent years. Create smaller campuses, many say. Build more charter schools, others urge. Don't let students graduate until they pass a test. Amid all the feverish reform talk, however, the adults might want to listen to what the kids have to say about their teachers. That philosophy is behind an unusual national effort to tap the opinions of American high school students.

"Part of a teacher's job is giving teenagers the practice at ... independence," says Mahogany Spears, 17, of San Francisco. And that means giving students the ability to "try things out for themselves." Vance Rawles, 19, of New York agrees, to a point. "I hate to admit it, but respect and authority are part of the job," he says. "Kids expect adults to give us directions and boundaries, but it's a balance."

And 17-year-old Tiffany Metts of Providence, R.I., says teachers should maintain their distance. "If you are too friendly with the students, when things get out of control and you try to get authoritative, they're like, 'Yeah, whatever,' and don't pay any attention," she says.

The three are speaking to the age-old tension experienced by anyone dealing with teenagers: give them freedom, give them guidance -- sometimes at the same moment.

Such comments fill the pages of "Fires in the Bathroom," a soon-to-be-published book in which 40 high school students from across the country offer advice for the adults who oversee their education. In the book, produced by the Providence-based nonprofit education group What Kids Can Do, students get a rare opportunity to voice their opinions about what works and what doesn't in the classroom. More than anything else, these young people -- from San Francisco, Oakland, New York and Providence -- want teachers who care about them and respect them. They want teachers who can strike the delicate, if difficult, balance between authority and flexibility.

As the book emphasizes, teenagers crave relationships that make learning possible. "What we're hearing from students is that they want partnerships," said Kathleen Cushman, a veteran education journalist who wrote the book along with the 40 students, whom she interviewed at length last spring. "Everyone knows that teenagers can be hard to communicate with," Cushman added in an interview last week. But "people who think of teaching as simply the delivery of information are missing the point."

The book, to be published in April by the New Press (New York) arrives at a time when government and philanthropies are investing tens of millions of dollars to transform oversized American high schools -- some with 5,000 students or more -- into smaller learning communities where students can get more attention and develop closer ties to teachers and campus life.
Among the most prominent of these efforts is a $350-million project by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The group is donating money to organizations that will create or redesign 570 small high schools around the country that will each enroll no more than 600 students.

Although those efforts are important, they still pay little attention to what's on young people's minds, the book's authors say. "You can restructure schools until the cows come home, but you need to get these relationships right from the start," Barbara Cervone, an education reformer who co-founded What Kids Can Do two years ago, said in an interview. "Certainly smaller classrooms and smaller schools create some of the basic elements for more positive relationships between students and teachers. But that alone isn't sufficient."

The book's title, "Fires in the Bathroom," speaks to the breakdown in order that afflicts some classrooms. As 17-year-old Lauraliz Rivera of New York says in a chapter titled, "When Things Go Wrong," her class gave trouble to her first-year teacher for the whole first semester. "But then, by second semester, we let up on him, because we saw he was doing things right. Another teacher, we kept going on her, because she was still scared." Students would go to the bathroom at times when they were not supposed to and then would "set fires in the bathroom, while she was trying to be so friendly."

Another student, 17-year-old Luis Martinez, felt alienated at the nearly 2,000-student Fremont High School in Oakland, where he says he got little personal attention from teachers in ninth grade. Then, in 10th grade, he moved to a new, smaller public school called Life Academy, which concentrates on science and health studies. There, he says, teachers took an immediate interest in him, even giving out their home phone numbers in case he needed to talk. "The teachers are always there for you, always helping you out," Luis said. "They are like your friends. They tell about their own life experiences. The more you know your teachers, the more they can help you."

Cushman and Cervone originally set out to produce a modest workbook for new teachers at the request of the MetLife Foundation, which supports education and health initiatives. MetLife paid for Cushman's time and travel and for small stipends for the students. The pair found students through their contacts in the four cities. As Cushman began meeting with students, she realized that the teenagers had plenty to say. And so the project evolved into a book.

To help teachers understand the job better, "Fires in the Bathroom" doles out practical advice, much of it from the students. The book, for example, suggests that teachers hand out questionnaires on the first day of school. Among the recommended questions: What do you do after school? What do you imagine yourself doing 10 years from now? What's a fair amount of homework time to expect?

Rawles, the New York student, said he welcomes letting teachers learn more about him as he figures them out, too. The best instructors, he said, have a form of telepathy about teenagers' shifting moods. "They are perceptive. They look behind your activities. They are inquisitive," he said. "The closest thing you'll get to reading a person's mind is being empathic."
Mastering the Boring Basics

By Nicole Matos  
Chronicle of Higher Education  
April 17, 2017

It’s usually late in the job interview when I pose one of my favorite questions to faculty and administrative candidates — after they’ve already spent a good amount of time talking about their work in the loftiest of terms. They’ve described their guiding values and philosophies and touted their most-successful projects and lessons. That’s when I say: “So far we’ve talked about the visionary aspects of your position. Now I’d like to talk about the execution. Specifically, much of teaching/administrating is small and procedural. Tell me how you handle the ‘boring basics.’”

Some candidates respond with aplomb; some struggle. But perhaps my favorite candidate of all time turned to me immediately and said, with urgency, “Oh! But the boring basics are never boring, or basic!” (He got the job.)

I wholeheartedly agree. The topic of how we handle the basics of our profession is important enough, and has enough recent literature behind it, to warrant a series of columns. So here in Part 1 of this series, I’d like to discuss the insights — and my own classroom adaptations — of James M. Lang’s Small Teaching: Everyday Lessons From the Science of learning. His book, also the subject of a series of columns in The Chronicle, examines small, functional changes in our teaching that can have a big impact in the college classroom.

One of Lang’s recurrent metaphors in Small Teaching is athletics — a comparison that rings true to me both as a professor and as a former roller-derby competitor. Lang's central point is that athletic training focuses not so much on the singular high point of a game — the glorious once-in-a-lifetime-Hail-Mary play — as it does, repeatedly and consistently, on fundamentals. Professors, too, he suggests, can benefit from practicing “small ball” — maximizing those 5-to-10-minute periods of class that might otherwise be wasted or squandered. His goal is not wholesale change. One of the most refreshing aspects of the book is that it assumes that most professors are already quite respectable masters of their major modes of instruction. So instead, he focuses on small, easily forgotten “activities that instructors could turn around and use in their classrooms the next morning or the next week without an extensive overhaul.”

Some of the key takeaways of his book provide some possible answers to interview questions about the “boring basics” of teaching.

Be mindful of how you spend the minutes before class. Perhaps the biggest change I made after reading Lang's book was, for me at least, a legitimate sacrifice: I began to regularly arrive at each of my classes 10 minutes early. If you are anything like I used to be, your first minutes of class might easily be a whirlwind of confusion: handing out materials, getting technology up and running, catching up with students who missed the previous class, and the like. None of those
housekeeping chores actually helps you connect with students or engage them in immediate learning.

By consciously arriving at class early — sometimes before the previous professor has even vacated the premises — I can, as Lang argues, accomplish much more. Standing in the hallway with students and walking into the classroom with them, I find I have time to make conversation at a much more personal, authentic level than when I’m rushing in a minute before the class is supposed to start. We can talk about their other courses, or about their families and weekends. The extra time allows me, too, to post on the blackboard a regular “Do Now” assignment — a thinking or writing question that students can consider immediately as they wait for class to start. I’m finding that, with my audience primed for instruction, less time is wasted, and the opening minutes of my classes are considerably less hectic.

Be even more mindful of how you end class. In the past, I might have felt slightly smug about the end of my classes in that, once I start teaching a class, I tend to control my time well. Typically I have left time to review what we’ve accomplished in that day’s session. But Lang proposes a much better way to end class: Ask students to review the day’s content. In other words, rather than rehashing what you’ve already said, it’s much more effective to ask the students, “Can you tell me about one of the major concepts we explored today?” Even more useful, Lang writes: Ask students to devise a possible exam question or follow-up assignment based on the day’s lesson.

In Small Teaching, Lang also reminds us of the importance of giving immediate feedback to students on their work and ideas. Teaching takes a lot of energy, intellectual and emotional. It is far too easy for an overworked instructor to delay the step of responding to students until they have produced a polished final product. Because providing feedback is so costly on our psychic energies, we might even have unconsciously decided that students don’t deserve feedback until we feel like they’ve worked as hard as we have. But the best teaching happens when instructors assess student work, and help them adjust, at all stages of the process — as they struggle with beginnings, muddle through middles, and fine-tune ends.

Thus, adding constant, customary feedback as your default final activity for the day (“Before I dismiss you, I want to come around and examine your opening paragraphs/answers.”) can be a very powerful choice.

Emphasize mini-activities that encourage metacognition. Research has demonstrated again and again that active engagement is key to lasting learning. But in critically examining my own teaching against Lang's insights, I saw ways in which my more procedural, everyday practices had failed to align with that finding.

Like many instructors who assign a lot of reading, for example, I quiz students briefly at the top of class to ensure they’ve done the work. But in the interest of squeezing quizzes into just five minutes of class time, I've generally asked questions that only require one-word answers or simple facts from the reading (“What does the birthmark look like on Georgiana's face?”).

But the same five minutes, Lang reminds us, could be used to quiz students in more active ways:
• Apply a concept: “In two to three sentences, describe an insight from Nathaniel Hawthorne’s ‘The Birthmark’ that could be applied to a contemporary situation.”
• Make a prediction: “Based on ‘The Birthmark,’ list three values you think might be important for our next reading, The Scarlet Letter?”
• Set the stage for a future, larger assignment. (“If you had to make a single argument about ‘The Birthmark’ in an essay — which you will do in the next two weeks — what might your argument be?”).

Likewise, asking students to work through why they are thinking, studying, or writing in the ways that they are is also time well-spent. In a sense, you are forcing them to manage their meta. “What procedure (Post-It Notes? Notes on a separate page? No notes at all? Reading in print or on a screen?) did you use to read ‘The Birthmark,’ and how well did it work for you?” is yet another quiz question that is less boring, and less basic, than those I’ve relied on before.

Ultimately, by focusing less on the one-off showstopper lessons, and more on the everyday procedures of teaching, professors can coax more significance and substance out of their daily routines. Lang's book is a valuable resource for professors willing to fiddle with their fundamentals in the light of contemporary cognitive science — and for job candidates who want to be prepared to discuss the boring basics of their syllabus.

Nicole Matos is an associate professor of English at the College of DuPage. She is a Chicago-based writer whose published work focuses on topics including higher education and special needs parenting.
Dear Student: I Don't Lie Awake at Night Thinking of Ways to Ruin Your Life

“When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.” 1 Corinthians 13:11 (KJV)

By Art Karden
Forbes
Jan. 12, 2012

One of the popular myths of higher education is that professors are sadists who live to inflict psychological trauma on undergraduates. Perhaps you believe that we pick students at random and then schedule all our assignments in such a way as to make those students’ lives as difficult as possible. The older I get and the longer I do this, the more I recognize that we (the professors) need to be more transparent about our philosophies of evaluation. How does this work? Let’s clarify a few things.

First, I do not “take off” points. You earn them. The difference is not merely rhetorical, nor is it trivial. In other words, you start with zero points and earn your way to a grade. You earn a grade in (say) Econ 100 for demonstrating that you have gained a degree of competence in economics ranging from being able to articulate the basic principles (enough to earn a C) to mastery and the ability to apply these principles to day-to-day affairs (which will earn an A). I’ve hurt my own grades before by confusing my own incompetence with competence and my own (bare) competence with mastery, so trust me: I’ve been there, and I understand.

Second, this means that the burden of proof is on you to demonstrate that you have mastered the material. It is not on me to demonstrate that you have not. My assumption at the beginning of each class is that you know somewhere between nothing and very little about basic economics unless you were lucky enough to have an exceptional high school economics course.

Otherwise, why are you here? You might say that the course is a prerequisite for other things you want to do, but if that is the case and you know the material, you’re more than welcome to simply show up for the exams, ace them, and be on your way.

In this light, consider this: the fact that you “don’t understand” why you didn’t earn full points for a particular question might itself help explain why you didn’t earn full points. Don’t take this personally or interpret it as a sneer. See it as a learning opportunity. If you understood the material—and do note that there is a large difference between really understanding the material and being able to reproduce a graph or definition you might remember from class—you would have answered the question flawlessly. I recommend (as I have recommended to many others) that you go back, take another crack at it, and see if you can find where you have gone wrong. Then bring it by my office, and we will talk.
Finally, I’m here to be a mentor and instructor. This means that our relationship differs from the relationships that you have with your friends and family. Please don’t infer from this that I don’t care about you, because I do. A lot. I want to see you make good choices. I want to see you understand basic economics because I hope it will rock your world as it continues to rock mine and because the human consequences of lousy economic policy are enormous.

That said, you should never take grades personally. I don’t think you’re stupid because you tank an exam, an assignment, or even an entire course. Economics is hard. A D or an F on an economics exam does not diminish your value in God’s eyes (or in mine) or indicate that economics just isn’t for you. It probably means you need to work smarter, and I’m here to help you with that.

Dear student, I once thought as you do. I once carried about the same misconceptions, the same litany of cognitive biases, and the same adolescent desire to blame others for my errors. I was (and remain) very poorly served by my immaturity. As shocking as it may seem, I still cling to a lot of it, even after four years of college, five years of graduate school, and now five-and-a-half years as a professor. Economics is hard, but becoming a responsible member of a free society is very, very, very hard. I’m still learning to put aside childish things. I hope you will do the same. Start now. The effort is daunting, but the rewards are substantial.

This article was inspired by periodic discussions of evaluation in the academy that crop up on the website of the Chronicle of Higher Education and on InsideHigherEd.com. A former colleague used to quote the verse above at the top of his Economics 101 syllabus. I thank Rachel Smith for comments and suggestions.
Developing a Mentoring Perspective

Who Are Our Mentors?

Directions: [1] Write the names of any and all individuals who have served as mentors in your life; [2] circle the name of one person who has been especially important or influential in your academic and/or personal growth; [3] identify one or two characteristics that describe your mentor(s).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who?</th>
<th>Characteristics?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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Based on your description of mentors and their characteristics, think about the process of mentoring. What does it mean to say that we are engaged in a “mentoring” relationship? What do mentors do in practice?
Mentoring and Communication

Listening Barriers and Skills

(From Kristin Piombino, “Listening Facts You Never Knew”)
http://www.prdaily.com/Main/Articles/14645.aspx#

• Less than 2 percent of people have had any formal education on how to listen. However, all people can improve listening skills by becoming aware of research relating to human communication and by training themselves to become better listeners.

• We listen to people at a rate of 125-250 words per minute, but think at 1,000-3,000 words per minute. In other words, we think faster than we can talk (and listen to others), and this hinders communication.

• Images go into your long-term memory, whereas words live in your short-term memory. What this fact means for communication: Images go directly into long-term memory where they are indelibly etched while words that are not attached to images are not grasped and quickly forgotten – for example, it is easier to show people a circle than to describe one.

• We derive 55 percent of a message’s meaning from the speaker’s facial expressions, 38 percent from how they say the message and 7 percent from the actual words spoken.

• The Number One quality that employers want in people that they hire is communication skills.

• Many executives rate the ability to communicate as the most important quality for promoting a person into a leadership position. They rank this quality as more important than ambition, education, and hard work.
Mentoring and Communication

Developing Observation Skills

Here is an interesting and true story about two peer mentors. Both peer mentors go to the same freshman class for the first time. The professor in this class does not ask them to say or do anything but only to observe. After the class session is over, the professor asks each peer mentor to tell her what they learned. Peer Mentor A answers that she didn’t learn anything because she didn’t say or do anything in class. In contrast, Peer Mentor B quickly describes ten valuable things she learned.

What is the difference between Peer Mentor A and Peer Mentor B? Why did Peer Mentor B learn so much, while Peer Mentor A learned nothing?

What are ten possible things that Peer Mentor B learned from visiting the freshman class for the first time — even though she didn’t say or do anything in class that day?

By visiting this class one time, what observations did Peer Mentor B make that could help her answer the following important questions?

Which students in this class are “good” students, and which could be in danger of failing?

What “small things” can a peer mentor observe that can be used quickly to identify which students most need the help of a mentor?

What “small things” can a peer mentor observe about each individual student that can be used to develop a strategy to help each individual student?
Mentoring and Communication

What Bridge Freshmen Observe About Bridge Mentors

When Bridge mentors first interact with Bridge freshmen, they can pick up a lot of valuable information by carefully observing students. However, Bridge mentors may not know that students are also observing them and also picking up information. Bridge freshmen are keen observers. Here is a list of what they observe when they see Bridge mentors in a meeting, a classroom, or at the dorm. Instructions for Bridge mentors: check off which behaviors you need to be aware of when you first interact with Bridge students.

I need to have self-awareness about this

If a Bridge mentor smiles a lot

If a Bridge mentor’s body language is not friendly

If a Bridge mentor is arrogant and always talks about how great they are

Where a Bridge mentor sits or stands in a meeting

If before the meeting begins, a Bridge mentor greets students around them

If a Bridge mentor comes to the meeting late, is texting, or is talking during presentations

If a Bridge mentor only talks to Bridge leaders, other mentors, or professors and not students

If a Bridge mentor looks bored in a meeting or in class

If a Bridge mentor is on their phone or laptop during a meeting or class

If a Bridge mentor wants to be too much of a friend for students

If a Bridge mentor wants to be too much of an authority figure for students

If a Bridge mentor practices RRAM when Bridge leaders are not around

If a Bridge mentor is encouraging when students are presenting ideas in a meeting

If a Bridge mentor asks for help from Bridge leaders and experienced mentors

If a Bridge mentor sees a student doing something wrong but doesn’t say anything

If right after a meeting, a Bridge mentor says goodbye to several students

If right after a meeting, a Bridge mentor congratulates a student for something they said or did

If right after a meeting, a Bridge mentor only talks to Bridge leaders or other mentors

If a Bridge mentor talks about their own difficulties to “move outside their comfort zone”
Identifying Challenging Students

Learning How to Use Your Community of Mentors as a Resource

Identify which of the following types of students will be the most challenging for you to work with (answer “yes” or “no”):

___ Hard-headed students (resistant to new approaches)
___ Arrogant students (think they know everything)
___ Very quiet students
___ Students who don’t follow up on your suggestions
___ Students who are not doing well but won’t ask for help
___ Students who become too dependent on you
___ Class clowns
___ Students with severe personal-family problems
___ Other students, specifically:

___________________________________________

In your community of mentors, which fellow Peer Mentor can help you in dealing with students you identified as most challenging?
Working with Challenging Students

From your list of students that you identified as challenging to work with, pick out the two most challenging types of students.

1. 

2. 

Then, list suggestions given to you from your community of mentors to help you work with these students.

1. 

2. 

Understanding Challenging Students’ Own Perspectives

Finally, from the students’ perspectives, what could be the reasons behind their challenges? In other words, how would students explain why they are challenging for you to work with?

Small Steps I Will Take to Respond to These Challenges

1. 

2. 

3.
Mentoring as the “Giving and Receiving” of Wisdom

Mentoring is defined as a reciprocal relationship — or, in the words of Chungliang Al Huang and Jerry Lynch, mentoring is the “giving and receiving of wisdom.” Oftentimes, mentors can quickly list all they give to those they mentor, but they have more difficulty listing all they receive. Mentors who see mentoring as mainly giving are on the road to “burn out.”

List at least five things you recently have given to freshmen that you will mentor. Was it easy or hard to create this list?

List at least seven things you have received from freshmen that you will mentor. Was it easy or hard to create this list?

Note: If it is easier for you to identify what you are giving than what you will be receiving, take the time to reflect on the “gifts” you are receiving each day by mentoring freshmen to avoid “mentor burn-out.”
Avoiding Mentor Burn-out
Appreciating Your Web of Mentoring Relationships

In western societies, mentoring is stereotyped as a one-to-one relationship involving one mentor interacting with a single mentee. In reality, all mentoring occurs in a web of relationships. This web provides both a network of support and a network of resources. Becoming more conscious of your web of mentoring relationships is one way to counteract “mentor burn-out,” especially when confronted with a particularly difficult problem. In your work as a faculty mentor, what is your “web of mentoring relationships”? How can this web help you when you are faced with a particularly challenging situation?

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 
6. 
7.
Investigating a “Culture of Mentoring” on Campus

Visit and quickly observe about three to five offices on your campus to identify both positive and negative examples of a “culture of mentoring.” Find at least one example of an office with a positive “culture of mentoring” for students and only one example of a negative “culture of mentoring.” If you cannot find any positive examples, identify offices that have “mixed” cultures with both positive and negative elements.

Campus offices with a positive “culture of mentoring” have the following characteristics:

• Students hang out in these offices regularly and visit them frequently, even when they don’t need to go there for official business.

• Staff in the office don’t have the mainstream mentoring mindset that believes mentoring of students only occurs formally through one-on-one meetings and designated “mentoring times”; instead, staff have mastered the alternative mindset that mentoring occurs in every interaction with students, no matter how brief.

• Everyone in the offices emphasizes “human interactions” in their encounters with students.

• Staff — especially student assistants — answer the phone with a smile.

• If the office has a reception area for student visitors, the space doesn’t look like a dentist’s waiting room or the DMV waiting area.

• Even though everyone in the office is busy, all staff are still able to answer students’ questions — with a smile.

• There is remarkable consistency in behaviors and attitudes between the highest-ranking person in the office (boss, manager, director, etc.) and the lowest-ranking person (e.g., student assistant).

• Staff interact with each other as a “community of mentors” — they help each other, nurture each other, and provide support without having to be told to do so.

• Visitors often hear warm laughter in the office.

• Staff working in this office — especially student assistants — seem to like working there.

• Based on your brief observations, if you were to ask a student visitor to describe the “culture of mentoring” in this office with three adjectives, what three adjectives would they say?
Creating a “Culture of Mentoring” for Your Classes: Insights from EOP

Faculty in this program have a unique opportunity to create a “culture of mentoring” for their classrooms. To create a “culture of mentoring,” use insights from EOP. Many EOP students describe their visits to EOP offices as different from their visits to other campus offices. They say that EOP staff, peer advisors, and student assistants better help them with problems than people in other offices. EOP leaders say that this approach to serving students is due to the “culture of mentoring” that is built into the mission of EOP (see section in this booklet, “What Is EOP, and Who Are EOP Students?”).

Write down at least three important characteristics (e.g., adjectives) that you feel define the “culture of mentoring” in your classroom.

1. 
2. 
3. 

Then in the next week, hold a follow-up discussion with your community of peer mentors to find out what three characteristics each feels is important for your classroom. Then, collectively identify the three most important mentoring characteristics that you want students who participate in this program to feel in your classroom.

1. 
2. 
3. 

Continue to work on your list until you feel comfortable with a final list of characteristics to define your classroom. This will serve as the basis for creating your “culture of mentoring.”
Discussion: Are You Using All Your Strength as a Freshman?

Some freshmen are having problems in Fall Semester because they are not using all of their strength to do well in their first year of college. Students need to learn how to use both their “inner strength” and their “outer strength.”

Using All Your Strength

A young boy was walking with his father along a country road. When they came across a very large tree branch, the boy asked, "Do you think I could move that?"

His father answered, "If you use all your strength, I’m sure you can."

The boy tried mightily to lift, pull, and push the branch, but he couldn’t budge it.

Discouraged, he said, "Dad, you were wrong. I can’t do it." His dad said, "Try again."

This time, as the boy struggled with the task, his father joined him. Together they pushed the branch aside.

"Son," the father said, "the first time you didn’t use all your strength. You didn’t ask me to help."

This is an important lesson. There are many things we can’t do alone, but that doesn’t mean we can’t get them done. We’re all surrounded by resources that can be mobilized to help us achieve our goals including family, friends, and faith.

Sometimes we fail to ask for help because of pride or stubbornness. Sometimes we think it’s a sign of weakness to admit we need a hand. And sometimes we don’t even think about asking for help. Whatever the reason, it’s a waste.

It’s important that we learn to use all our strength. This includes inner resources such as discipline, courage, and even love. It also includes outer resources. Just as we should be willing to help others, we should be willing to ask the help of others. It’s one of the great things about being human.

*Michael Josephson from “Character Counts”*
Mentoring Survey for Faculty Teaching Freshmen

According to one longtime CSUN leader, the single most important factor for students’ academic success on this campus is their capacity to find mentors.

___ I agree with this statement.
___ I don’t agree with this statement.
___ I don’t know.
___ I don’t understand what this leader means.

Think back to your first year of college. Would it have been helpful for you to have mentors?

___ Yes
___ No
___ I don’t know

Check the statement that best describes the perspective of CSUN freshmen toward mentors.

___ As new college students, most feel it’s important to do everything by themselves.
___ As new college students, most want to learn how to use the help of others.
___ As new college students, most want to learn how to do things by themselves while also using the help of others.

How should students use your help as their mentor during their first year of college (check all answers that apply)?

___ Meet with me and I will both talk to and listen to them.
___ Meet with me and I will do most of the talking.
___ I will give them advice about career plans.
___ I will give them suggestions about campus resources.
___ I will provide guidance to them about dealing with personal and family problems.
___ I will help them understand academic expectations in college.
___ I will give them advice about how to work with mentors on campus
___ Other: ____________________
___ Most students will not be interested in having me serve as a mentor.

What are the three most important qualities defining a good mentor for new college students?

___ Academic expertise ___ Good listener ___ Resourceful
___ Kind ___ Approachable ___ Friendly
___ Experienced ___ Strict ___ Caring
___ Energetic ___ Patient ___ Challenging
___ Others: ____________________

For new college students, which of the following people make the best mentors?

___ Professors ___ Advisors and other CSUN staff
___ More experienced college students ___ Parents
___ Other family members ___ Friends from high school
Name ________________________________

Mentoring Survey for College Students

According to one longtime CSUN leader, the single most important factor for students’ academic success on this campus is their capacity to find mentors.

___ I agree with this statement.
___ I don’t agree with this statement.
___ I don’t know.
___ I don’t understand what this leader means.

In your first year of college, do you want to find mentors on this campus?

___ Yes
___ No
___ I don’t know

Check the statement that best describes you at this time.

___ As a relatively new college student, it’s important for me to do everything by myself.
___ As a relatively new college student, I want to learn how to use the help of others.
___ As a relatively new college student, I want to learn how to do things by myself while also using the help of others.

How would you want mentors to help you in your first year of college (check all answers that apply)?

___ Meet with me and both listen and talk to me.
___ Meet with me and do all the talking.
___ Give me suggestions about campus resources.
___ Provide guidance to me about dealing with personal and family problems.
___ Help me understand academic expectations in college.
___ Give me advice about how to work with mentors on campus.
___ Other: ____________________
___ I am not interested in having mentors help me.

What are the three most important qualities defining a good mentor for college students?

___ Academic expertise ___ Good listener ___ Resourceful
___ Kind ___ Approachable ___ Friendly
___ Experienced ___ Strict ___ Caring
___ Energetic ___ Patient ___ Challenging
___ Others: ________________________________

For a college student, which of the following people make the best mentors?

___ Professors ___ Advisors and other CSUN staff
___ More experienced college students ___ Parents
___ Other family members ___ Friends from high school

The peer mentor and professor who gave you this survey also filled it out. Are you interested in how they answered each of these questions?

___ Yes, I am interested ___ No, I am not interested
Talking with Professors:
Some Suggestions for Freshmen

During this semester, how many times have you done the following things in your classes?
  Asked questions to professors: ____ times
  Participated in class discussions: ____ times
  Talked to professors before or after class: ____ times

During this semester, how many times have you visited your professors during office hours?
  ____ Never
  ____ Once
  ____ Two or three times
  ____ More than four times

What are the main reasons that freshmen do not visit their professors during office hours?
  ____ They don’t know what to say or do
  ____ They are afraid
  ____ They are too busy to go
  ____ They are doing well in class and don’t need to talk to their professors
  ____ Other: _____________________________________________________

Why is it important for freshmen to learn how to talk with their professors and visit them during office hours? Write down at least three important things.

From discussing this question with fellow freshmen, write down three more important things that you heard.

Write down two examples of “lower-level questions” that you can ask in your classes. (See below for examples)

Write down two examples of “higher-level questions” that you can ask in your classes. (See below for examples)
A Guide to Asking Good Questions

Lower-level Questions

Knowledge – identification and recall of information
• Who, what, when, where how ____________________________?
• Describe ________________________________

Comprehension – organization and selection of facts and ideas
• Retell ___________ in your own words.
• What is the main idea of ________________________________.

Higher-level Questions

Application – use of facts, rules, principles
• How is __________ an example of __________?
• How is __________ related to __________?
• Why is __________ significant?

Analysis – separation of a whole into component parts
• What are the parts or features of _______________________________
• Classify __________ according to _______________________________
• Outline/diagram ________________________________.
• How does ______ compare/contrast with ____________________?
• What evidence can you list for _______________________________

Synthesis – combination of ideas to form a new whole
• What would you predict/infer from ____________________________?
• What ideas can you add to ________________________________?
• How would you create/design a new ____________________________?
• What might happen if you combined _______ with _______?
• What solutions would you suggest for ____________________________?

Evaluation – development of opinions, judgments, or decisions
• Do you agree ________________________________?
• What do you think about ________________________________?
• What is the most important ________________________________?
• Prioritize ________________________________
• How would you decide about ________________________________?
• What criteria would you use to assess ________________________________?
What Is the Difference Between a “C Student” and an “A Student”? 

Most freshmen associate getting A’s in classes with the following things:

• Reading all assigned materials
• Underlining and highlighting important materials in readings and taking notes
• Starting on assignments early and not finishing them at the last minute
• Taking careful notes from professors’ lectures and reviewing the notes
• Knowing how to study for tests
• For essay assignments and research papers, starting early enough to write several drafts
• Studying at least three hours for each hour spent in a class
• Always being well-prepared in classes by having the required books and other materials
• Having some fun in college, but not to the neglect of studying

Most freshmen associate getting C’s in classes with the following things:

• Doing just enough work to get by
• Doing some assigned readings but not all
• Starting on assignments late and sometimes not completely finishing them
• Not always paying attention in class
• Doing some studying for tests
• For essay assignments and research papers, turning in first drafts as final papers
• Not always having all the required books and other materials for classes
• Doing some studying but making sure that studying doesn’t interfere with having fun

In reality, freshmen who follow the above guidelines for getting C’s in their classes will end up failing most of their classes.

In reality, experienced college students know that the difference between getting A’s and getting C’s in classes also depends on learning how to “study smart.” To learn how to “study smart,” turn this paper over.
Learn How to “Study Smart” to Get A’s Rather Than C’s

Here are some things that experienced students suggest:

• **Set Goals:** Each semester before your classes begin, set goals. What grades do you want? What do you need to do to get that grade? Remember that no experienced EOP student sets a goal of getting a C. Those who have a goal to “just get by” are freshmen who are usually gone after their first semester of college.

• **Go to All Your Classes — Don’t Miss Classes:** One experienced student said: “When I was a freshmen, I used to think I didn’t need to go to all of my classes all the time. I used to take days off like I did in high school. Now that I’m a junior, I don’t ever miss any classes. Why? When I miss a class, I have really missed more than one session, and I have a lot of work to do just to catch up with everything that I missed that day. I’ve found that it’s a lot easier to go to class all the time so that I don’t have extra work to do.”

• **Spend a Lot of Time on Campus and Use All Campus Resources:** Unlike freshmen who hurry to leave campus right after classes, experienced students spend as much time on campus as possible. Experienced students use all resources on campus, such as advising offices, writing labs, the library, tutorial services, career counseling, and personal counseling.

• **Learn How to Form Study Groups:** For difficult classes, experienced students participate in study group with fellow students rather than trying to master hard materials by themselves.

• **Find a Mentor on Campus:** EOP Director José Luis Vargas states that the single most important factor determining whether a freshman will graduate is their ability to find a mentor on campus. Mentors can be professors, but they can also be staff members and even experienced students. Mentors are especially valuable for first-generation college students.

• **Visit Professors and Staff in Their Offices:** Experienced students get to know professors and staff and visit them in their offices. Professors and staff can provide information about job opportunities and can offer advice about career development and life enrichment.
Understanding Classroom Dynamics:
A Critical Factor in Teaching Freshmen

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As university faculty, our expertise is in an academic discipline, and we teach our classes from this framework. Thus, we prepare lesson plans by focusing on content, and we usually assess how well we teach by how well we organize and present material. We become puzzled when our students do poorly on tests or assignments, tell us that they don’t understand ideas that we’ve covered several times in class, or regularly come into our classes late or not at all. When confronted by these behaviors, some of us blame our students, citing their immaturity, their inadequate academic preparation, or their lack of commitment to the rigors of college classes. But other faculty begin to ask a critical question: Is there something more to teaching than covering subject matter? And if so, what is this “something more,” and how can we deal with it?

In contrast to the framework on teaching used by university faculty, our colleagues in K-12 classrooms approach lesson plans differently. They prepare around content, but they also focus on methods of presenting material and develop strategies to address student behaviors in their classrooms. As part of their professional training as teachers, they learn that teaching definitely consists of “something more” than academic content. However, perhaps far too often, this “something more” is conceptualized as “classroom management” and all the unfortunate images and practices associated with that concept, such as disciplinary action against students.

While drawing from the expertise of our K-12 colleagues, I feel it’s better to conceptualize the “something more” involved in teaching as “classroom dynamics.” If we are to become better college teachers, we need to understand classroom dynamics as well as we understand our academic subject matter. What’s meant by classroom dynamics? A simple answer is that it’s everything beyond our expertise in our academic discipline. It includes student behaviors, emotions, and imagination; teachers’ behaviors, emotions, and imagination; teachers’ ways of presenting academic materials; students’ interactions with teachers; and students’ interactions with other students. In our university classes, we tend to relegate these matters to the margins of academia, focusing on the primacy of subject matter. Yet, when we give a test and more than half of our students fail that test, could “something more” be going on than students failing to master subject matter? Would our students learn more if we took the time to better understand classroom dynamics and our own role as teachers in creating these dynamics?

In my own work as a teacher of “special-admit” freshmen at CSUN, I define classroom dynamics as the building of a classroom community and the creation of a positive classroom culture. I believe that helping students develop skills in working together and creating an atmosphere in the classroom where students feel safe enough to take risks in grappling with new and difficult ideas are essential factors for good learning outcomes. With each new class, I focus on classroom dynamics from the very first session, and I continue to emphasize classroom culture.
and community building in each succeeding session and each assignment. When I’m successful, I have no attendance problems in my classes, and student academic achievement rises. Thus, from my perspective, the focus on classroom dynamics is integral to the learning and teaching process. These are not original ideas, of course, but they have helped me prepare lesson plans in a different way than before, integrating classroom dynamics with academic subject matter.

Here at CSUN, many of my colleagues are doing exciting and path-breaking work to help demystify the process of teaching in the university. For example, Dr. Cynthia Desrochers, Director of CELT (Center for the Excellence in Learning and Teaching), has helped numerous faculty, including me, develop innovative approaches to promote good classroom dynamics, especially in freshmen classes. She emphasizes the need for faculty to engage students in their own learning. Student involvement in learning, she states, is the key to academic performance.

Many years ago, John Dewey stressed the need to see education as a single process involving teaching and learning. There is really no separation between the two, and only in our minds can we make this separation. Recent research in the field of brain-based learning affirms Dewey’s insight, which, by the way, is also found in the educational approaches of indigenous cultures and many non-western civilizations. Thus, rather than ignoring or marginalizing classroom dynamics or developing separate lesson plans to deal with it, we need to make these dynamics integral to teaching any academic subject.

(Dewey further stated that the goal of education in the U.S. is to train people in the practice of democracy. He distinguished between simply studying about democracy and practicing democracy and conceptualized classrooms as arenas for developing students’ skills to function effectively in a democratic society. Thus, he emphasized experiential learning (e.g., service-learning), small group work, and teamwork. Far from being simply classroom activities, these teaching strategies engaged students in the practice of democracy.)

Integrating an understanding of classroom dynamics with academic subject matter in our teaching is our ideal, but it is also difficult because our existing paradigm as university faculty is built around not seeing a connection. Where then to begin on making classroom dynamics an integral part of our lesson plans? Since it is difficult to shift entirely to a new paradigm, it’s best to start with the old paradigm and to build a new approach within the “shell of the old.” The approach I’ve taken is to think about my lesson plans in terms of 50% academic content and 50% classroom dynamics. Over time, this artificial separation will disappear, but by preparing lesson plans in this way, I give equal importance to classroom dynamics and academic subject matter. Like Cynthia Desrochers, I try to develop teaching activities that engage students in their own learning. Like John Dewey, I emphasize small group work, teamwork, and, whenever possible, experiential learning. And drawing from my background as Coordinator of the Faculty Mentor Program, I include teaching strategies that promote student interactions with me and student interactions with peers.

*Sample Lesson Plan for Integrating Classroom Dynamics into Academic Subject Matter*

I teach for the EOP Bridge Program, and the freshmen I teach are “special admit,” first-generation, low-income college students. Most of the students in my classes are Asian American, Latino American, and African American. As part of the six-week Bridge Residential
Program (summer phase), they take two linked and integrated classes from me — University 100 and University Writing — and then continue with me as a “learning community” for an additional class in fall semester and spring semester. As a Bridge faculty member, my responsibilities are not only to help students master basic academic skills to succeed at the university but to also help them learn how to work together in a multicultural environment. Many come from high schools marked by ethnic and racial conflict, and others from neighborhoods where there was minimal interethnic interaction.

On the next page is an activity that I have students do on the first day of my Bridge summer class after initial exercises designed to help students remember names of classmates. This assignment on “multicultural foods” serves multiple purposes. It helps me find out what students already know about various cultures in America, so that I can design future lesson plans around existing knowledge; a goal here is to have each student become a “cultural expert” to help educate others in the class. The assignment also helps me to discover stereotypes that students have about other cultures and to create lesson plans to overcome stereotypes as needed. The assignment also serves as the basis for a future library research assignment, helping students to learn about the process involved in doing research and using the library. Moreover, I use this assignment to begin to teach students the importance of working together and the processes involved in group work. Finally, this assignment gets all students in the class talking and laughing. (I should add that I have as much fun with this exercise as my students.)

I first have students do the assignment individually. I ask each to identify as many of the foods as they can. I then ask how many each student is able to identify. Usually, working individually, students identify at most four or five items. Next, I put students in small groups of three to four students and have them combine knowledge. When I ask how many food items the small groups are able to identify, the answer is usually double to triple what students were able to do individually. At this time, I have students from each group explain food items they know. Finally, I have the class as a whole combine knowledge to identify as many food items as possible. Usually, at this point students have identified most of the food items, and we are able to have a discussion about the importance of learning about other cultures and using our classroom as an opportunity for all students to expand their knowledge of themselves and others.
Multicultural Food List

What is a samosa?
What is a pupusa?
What is pho?
What is chicken molé?
What is pan dulce?
What are grits?
What color is banana sauce?
What is tiramisu?
What is kimchee?
What are chuchitos?
What is boba drink?
In Chinese communities, what is “white rabbit” candy?
What is balut?
What is jerk chicken?
What is a burrito al pastor?
What is masala?
What is jambalaya?
What is baklava?
What is menudo, and what are the main ingredients in menudo?
What is spam musubi?
What is key lime pie, and from what part of the U.S. did it come from?
Which culture in the world has the hottest food?
Mentoring Resources for Faculty Mentors

CSUN Faculty Mentor Program website
Learn how to “mentor on the run,” how to promote a “culture of mentoring” in your classroom, and how to build a “community of mentors” in your program
http://www.csun.edu/csun-eop/fmp-resources

Promoting good classroom dynamics in a freshman classroom
http://www.csun.edu/sites/default/files/classdynamics.pdf

“Mentoring as the ‘Giving and Receiving of Wisdom’: Breaking the Chains of Colonialism on Our Hearts, Minds, and Souls”
http://www.csun.edu/sites/default/files/Anti-colonial-mentoring-Omatsu-accessible-PDF.pdf

Power of peer mentoring
http://www.csun.edu/csun-eop/fmp-resources-peer-mentors

Student leadership development booklet
http://www.csun.edu/sites/default/files/leadership_booklet.pdf

Recommended Books


Chungliang Al Huang and Jerry Lynch, Mentoring: The Tao of Giving and Receiving Wisdom (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1995). 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.”

http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_college_student_development/v052/52.3.schreiner.html
Based on interviews with successful “high-risk” students and faculty and staff from different colleges, the authors identify key themes on how college personnel positively influence high rates of persistence for these students.

Barbara Strauch, The Primal Teen: What the New Discoveries about the Teenage Brain Tell Us about Our Kids (New York: Doubleday, 2003). Summarizes the latest research on the teenage brain and ways that parents (and educators) can use this research to more effectively understand and work with youth.
Vincent Tinto, *Completing College: Rethinking Institutional Action* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013). Practical suggestions for how faculty, staff, and administrators in institutions of higher education can help students succeed on their campuses.

Vincent Tinto, *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). Analyzes why students leave college, especially during their freshman year, and how colleges can address this challenge.

Margaret Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1999). 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* (Palo Alto: Hesperian Foundation, 2001). 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.
“The fundamental task of the mentor is a liberatory task. It is not to encourage the mentor’s goals and aspirations and dreams to be reproduced in the mentees, the students, but to give rise to the possibility that the students become the owners of their own history. This is how I understand the need that teachers have to transcend their merely instructive task and to assume the ethical posture of a mentor who truly believes in the total autonomy, freedom, and development of those he or she mentors.”

Paulo Freire, Mentoring the Mentor