

The Power of Peer Mentoring

Peer Mentoring Resource Booklet

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The Power of Peer Mentoring

Some of the best mentors of students in our universities are other students. I repeat this statement: Some of the best mentors of students in our universities are other students.

But how can this be? After all, in universities aren't mentors supposed to be older adult professionals, such as faculty and counselors? How can a student serve as an effective mentor for another student?

Consider this: For a new student, a university can be an exciting but also intimidating place. A university can also be a lonely place for a new student, especially if that student is the first in their family to go to college, the child of immigrant parents, or a member of a minority community. Even simple things that experienced students take for granted can be challenging for a new student, such as finding classrooms and offices on campus, understanding school policies for registration for classes, and learning the special language of the university such as "syllabus," "office hours," "annotations," and "prerequisites." A small number of new students learn the answers by directly asking professors in their classes or talking to university professional staff. But many, many students find out information by asking friends, especially more experienced students. In fact, most new students find their way to the offices of university staff and professors by first talking to more experienced students. In other words, the experienced students serve as guides for new students to help them access the storehouse of knowledge and resources at the university. Moreover, new students will continue to seek the advice of experienced students regarding decisions about classes, majors, academic difficulties, and personal problems.

A mentor is defined as a knowledgeable and experienced guide, a trusted ally and advocate, and a caring role model. An effective mentor is respectful, reliable, patient, trustworthy, and a very good listener and communicator. In a university, mentors can be found among faculty and professional staff. But mentors can also be found in the ranks of students themselves. Student mentors are known as Peer Mentors. Due to their close association with other students, Peer Mentors are very important. Often new students confronted with an academic or personal problem will seek out advice first from a Peer Mentor and only with encouragement will that

student contact others in the university, such as counselors, faculty, or administrators.

Based on an informal survey at California State University, Northridge (CSUN), EOP Director José Luis Vargas found that **the single most important factor associated with high retention and graduation rates for low-income, first-generation college students was their ability to find a mentor at CSUN.** Finding a mentor not only helped students to succeed academically but also with career planning and the development of life management skills such as dealing with personal and family problems.

But finding a mentor at a big university is not easy, especially for a student who is a first-generation college student. Thus, at universities that have made a commitment to helping students, programs have been set up for peer advising and tutoring to promote opportunities for experienced students to serve as mentors for new students. However, in these programs all experienced students are not Peer Mentors. Some simply see advising and tutoring as a job and interact with students coming to see them like junior bureaucrats. Peer Mentors are those who understand their interactions with students as not simply a job but as opportunities **to help others discover the potential within themselves to succeed in the university and in life.** Peer Mentors help to nurture this potential in other students. In other words, what distinguishes Peer Mentors from other students who do advising and tutoring is not the amount of work they do but *the quality and kind of work* they do. **To become a Peer Mentor, an experienced student does not have to do extra work but to think about their interactions with fellow students in a new way.** Peer Mentors bring to their work as advisors and tutors the consciousness of the importance of mentoring.

The following sections of this booklet cover ways that experienced students can train themselves to become Peer Mentors by developing consciousness about their important role in working with fellow students, especially first-generation college students.

You're Serving as a Peer Mentor When . . .

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

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

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

You show a student how you learned time management to do well in your classes.

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

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

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

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

Please add your own insights:

Misconceptions about Mentoring

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

Reality: In a university, mentors can be young or old. Some of the most outstanding mentors of students are fellow students, or Peer Mentors.

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

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

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

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

Misconception: Only the person being mentored benefits from mentoring.

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

Misconception: Students who work as peer advisors, tutors and student assistants already have a lot of responsibilities and do not have the time to take on extra responsibilities relating to mentoring.

Reality: Mentoring is not a separate set of activities that are different from advising, tutoring or working as a student assistant in an office. Mentoring relates to consciousness about your work as an advisor, tutor or student assistant. Without this consciousness, advisors, tutors and student assistants are perceived by fellow students as junior bureaucrats focusing on rules, regulations, and procedures. Universities don't need more bureaucrats. Universities do need people who are student-centered and who can see and nurture the potential in others.

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

Reality: Not all experienced students who work with fellow students as advisors or tutors are Peer Mentors, even if they have that job title. Peer Mentors are those who have developed consciousness about mentoring and in their interactions with fellow students demonstrate respect, patience, trustworthiness, and strong communication skills, especially listening skills.

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

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

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

Reality: Each interaction with a student is a mentoring opportunity, even a single encounter with a student. The key is to develop consciousness about the importance of mentoring in your interactions with fellow students and to infuse this consciousness in your daily work as a tutor or advisor. Also, it's important for Peer Mentors 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, Peer Mentors can draw upon this network or community. Mentoring occurs in a community, not in isolation.

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

Mentoring and EOP: A Shared Commitment

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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.**

As a Peer Mentor, your principal objectives should be to:

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

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

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

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

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

- Provide information — or better yet, help your mentee(s) to find information — about academic resources (faculty, staff, academic support services, student organizations, etc.). Assist your mentee(s) in learning how to access and use these resources — don’t assume that

just because they know where their professor's office is that they also understand how to talk to their professor.

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

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

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

Mentoring and Communication

Listening Barriers and Skills

Common Problems/Barriers in Listening

1. Viewing a topic as uninteresting.
2. Criticizing a speaker's appearance or her/his communication style (verbal cues, nonverbal cues, or both) rather than responding to her/his message.
3. Becoming "overstimulated" by something the speaker says, such that we begin thinking of our own rebuttals and fail to hear the rest of what the speaker has to say.
4. Listening only for facts.
5. Tolerating, creating, or failing to adjust to distractions.
6. Faking attention.
7. Listening only to what is easy to understand
8. Allowing emotion-laden words to interfere with listening (e.g., preferred group designations; racist, sexist, or homophobic language).
9. Permitting personal prejudice or deep-seated convictions to impair comprehension.
10. Wasting the advantages of the differential between speech rate and thought-processing speed.

Improving Listening Skills

1. Develop a desire (motivation) to listen, regardless of your level of interest in the subject matter.
2. Increase your capacity to listen.
3. Infer the speaker's intent or purpose: what is the speaker implying or suggesting about her/his goals or needs?
4. Determine *your own* purpose in every listening situation.
5. Become aware of your own biases and attitudes. What words or ideas or beliefs function as "shock" words to you?
6. Learn to use your "spare time" effectively and productively as you listen.
7. Analyze your listening habits (both productive and unproductive).

8. Be mentally and physically prepared to listen.
9. Delay judgments; hear the speaker out before you make judgments.
10. Listen not only for facts, but for main ideas, principles, concepts, and patterns.

Self-Inventory of Listening Habits

The purpose of this inventory is to help you gain a better understanding of your listening habits. When you have completed it, you should be able to describe your listening habits, and you should have established a priority of listening habits to improve. This is, of course, a subjective inventory and not an objective test.

Directions: Read this list, and place a check in front of each habit that you now have, even if you use that habit only a third to a half of the time. Then, re-read the habits you have checked, and place **two checks** in front of those habits that you think you perform almost all of the time that you spend listening, perhaps 75-100% of your listening time.

1. I prepare myself for listening by focusing my thoughts on the speaker and the expected topic and committing my time and energy to listen.
2. I ask questions about what I have just heard before letting the speaker know what I heard and understood.
3. I follow the speaker by reviewing what he or she has said, concentrating on what the speaker is saying and anticipating what he or she is going to say.
4. I analyze what I am hearing and try to interpret it to get the real meaning before I let the speaker know what I heard and understood.
5. I look at the speaker's face, eyes, body posture, and movement, and I listen to his/her other vocal cues.
6. I think about other topics and concerns while listening.
7. I listen for what is *not* being said, as well as for what is being said.
8. I fake attention to the speaker, especially if I'm busy or if I think I know what the speaker is going to say.
9. I show in a physical way that I am listening, and I try to help set the speaker at ease.
10. I listen largely for the facts and details, more than I listen for ideas and reasons.
11. I am aware of my own facial, body, and vocal cues that I am using while listening.
12. I evaluate and judge the wisdom or accuracy of what I have heard before checking out my interpretation with the speaker.

13. I avoid sympathizing with the speaker and making comments like, “I know just what you mean — the same thing has happened to me,” and then telling my story before letting the speaker know what I heard and understood.
14. I find myself assuming that I know what the speaker is going to say before he or she has finished speaking.
15. I accept the emotional sentiment of the speaker.
16. I think up arguments to refute the speaker so that I can answer as soon as he or she finishes.
17. I use “echo” or “mirror” responses to feedback to the speaker specific words and phrases the speaker has used that I need clarified.
18. I am uncomfortable with and usually reject emotional sentiments of the speaker.
19. I paraphrase or summarize what I have heard before giving my point of view.
20. I am easily distracted by noise or by the speaker’s manner of delivery.

Place an X in the blank by each number you have double-checked.

- | | |
|-------|-------|
| 2___ | 1___ |
| 4___ | 3___ |
| 6___ | 5___ |
| 8___ | 7___ |
| 10___ | 9___ |
| 12___ | 11___ |
| 14___ | 13___ |
| 16___ | 15___ |
| 18___ | 17___ |
| 20___ | 19___ |

Now you have an inventory of your *effective listening habits* (all of the *odd-numbered* habits that you checked), your *ineffective listening habits* (all of the *even-numbered*

habits that you checked), your *most effective listening habits* (all of the *odd-numbered* habits that you *checked twice*), and your *most ineffective listening habits* (all of the *even-numbered habits* that you *checked twice*).

Web Resources for Peer Mentors

University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee Peer Mentoring Resources

<http://www.uwm.edu/lets/edison/pmlinks.html>

Mentoring Peer Resources

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

San Jose State University Peer Mentor Program

<http://www.sjsu.edu/muse/peermentor.htm>

Mid Michigan Community College Peer Mentors

http://www.midmich.cc.mi.us/Peer_Mentor/default.htm

University of Michigan Peer Mentors

<http://www.onsp.umich.edu/mentorship/peern.html>

University of Tennessee, Memphis Peer Mentoring

<http://www.utmem.edu/transplant/peermentoring.html>

Articles from “The Mentoring Connection”

<http://www.wmich.edu/conferences/mentoring/>

The Mentoring Group

<http://www.mentoringgroup.com/home.html>

Formal mentor programs

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

Mentoring categories

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

Mentoring resources and links

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

National Mentoring Partnership

<http://www.mentoring.org>

“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