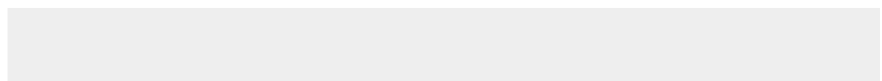




Developing and Administering Faculty- Student Mentoring Programs



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1) Executive Overview

Key Observations

Dedicated student success administrators coordinate formal faculty-student mentoring programs. Student success offices at three profiled institutions direct faculty-student mentoring programs; student success units work closely with advising and student life units to support institution retention and student support goals. Program directors recruit faculty mentors, maintain and disseminate program guidelines (e.g., minimum number of mentor-mentee meetings per semester, program-related expense reimbursement protocol), and collect and evaluate participant reviews.

Faculty-student mentoring programs offer social and academic support for incoming first-year students from underprivileged backgrounds or who lack social networks on campus. Faculty-student mentoring program coordinators at one profiled institution evaluate incoming first-year cohort demographic data and send information about mentoring opportunities to students of color, students with disabilities, and students from low-income families. Academic advisors at one profiled institution review incoming first-year cohort records and recommend that students with strong high school records and declared interest in an academic field register to participate in the non-credit faculty-student mentoring program.

Anecdotal and empirical evidence suggests that faculty-student mentoring programs improve retention and degree-completion rates for underrepresented student populations. One profiled institution established its faculty-student mentoring program to support an institution-wide initiative to improve academic outcomes for underrepresented students; mentoring program directors track and analyze student participant performance data. Contacts credit the program for a 12 percent improvement in degree completion rates for underrepresented transfer students, and report that overall retention rates for target populations have also increased.

Formalized faculty-student mentoring programs coordinated by a central administrative office ensure target student populations receive equal access to faculty mentors and facilitate data collection and analysis. Faculty-student mentoring programs at two profiled institutions maintain guidelines that outline minimum mentoring expectations for faculty and require faculty to submit end-of-term reports for all student mentees. The faculty-student mentoring program at one profiled institution is not formally overseen by an administrative office, and student success administrators struggle to integrate faculty mentoring into overall student success initiatives.

2) Administering Faculty-Student Mentoring Programs

Program Structure

Programs Target Underrepresented and Underserved Student Populations

Formal faculty-student mentoring programs provide social and academic support for students from underprivileged backgrounds or who lack social networks on campus; most mentoring programs target minority or low-income students. The mentoring program at **University D** serves incoming freshmen with strong high school academic records who are not members of an athletic team.



Unmet Need

1,300

The faculty-student mentoring program at **University A** is at capacity with 3,300 students; 4,600 are eligible.

Two faculty mentors at **University D** primarily mentor incoming first-year Latino and African-American students.

Target Student Populations

- **Minority students:** Faculty-student mentoring program coordinators at **University A** and **University B** review student data for incoming first-year cohorts and send African-American and Latino students information about mentoring programs before the start of term. Contacts report that these students disproportionately report difficulty adjusting to college life and are less likely to access academic support services.
- **Low-income students:** Mentoring program administrators at University A review financial aid data for incoming first-year cohorts and send information to all students with low estimated family contributions. Contacts report that low-income students are often first-generation college students and experience difficulty navigating initial administrative processes (e.g., course registration, required orientation sessions).
- **First-year students:** The Director of the Center for Student Advancement at **University D** encourages first-year students with strong high school academic records and declared courses of study to participate in the faculty-student mentoring program. Contacts report that first-year students who are not members of an athletics team struggle to orient themselves on campus and often suffer academically.

Student Selection Process at *University D*





Suggested Faculty-Student Mentoring Program Services and Activities

- **Tutoring:** Faculty mentors at **University A** lead weekly study halls in some academic departments that provide students with one-on-one or small group tutoring opportunities.
- **One-on-one activities:** The mentoring program at **University D** requires faculty mentors to meet one-on-one with assigned mentees once per semester. One-on-one meetings range from supplemental academic advising sessions to informal off-campus meals.
- **Group activities:** The mentoring program policy at **University D** directs faculty mentors to organize a group activity for all mentees at least once per semester. Mentors take mentee groups to on-campus performances or lectures, invite mentees to their homes for dinner, and arrange off-campus activities (e.g., hiking trips, amusement park excursions) to help students meet peers with similar academic interests.
- **Seminars:** Faculty mentors at **University B** offer advice and recommendations in orientation seminars on classroom etiquette, academic support services, and good study habits organized for underrepresented first-year students.

Dedicated Student Success Administrators Coordinate Mentoring Programs

A dedicated student success administrator directs faculty-student mentoring programs at all profiled institutions; student success departments are distinct units that work closely with advising offices to promote institutional retention and degree completion goals. The program coordinator at **University A** oversees seven program administrators responsible for program coordination in each college. Program coordinators at profiled institutions direct additional student success initiatives (e.g., academic support centers, peer mentoring programs, regular career fair events). A program proposal at **University C** recommends hiring two full-time administrators to direct the faculty-student mentoring program, which includes an interactive website, university-wide events, and an outreach campaign to systematically grow program enrollment.

Centralized Program Structure at *University D*



Program Coordinator:

- Maintains program guidelines
- Collects student evaluations and mentor reports



Faculty Mentor:

- Participates for at least one semester
- Performs mentoring activities pursuant to program guidelines
- Submits end-of-term reports on individual mentees

The centralized reporting structure functions effectively for small-scale programs, but contacts concede that program expansion would require additional staff resources; the program maintains 16 faculty mentors and serves up to 160 students each year.

Distributed Program Structure at *University A*



The distributed program structure serves 3,300 undergraduates in the university's seven colleges. College-level coordinators enjoy broad discretion to organize mentoring activities (i.e., group meetings, symposia, office hours).



Unregulated Faculty-Student Mentoring at *University B*

The student success office at **University B** does not administer a formal faculty-student mentoring program; contacts report that many faculty members serve as mentors to undergraduate students, but do not submit evaluations and do not follow a standardized program structure. The office director recruits minority faculty members to lead discussion groups on classroom etiquette, available support services, and strategies to cope with college life during orientation sessions for underrepresented students. The absence of centralized program leadership hampers administrative efforts to ensure equal exposure to faculty members for underrepresented students.

Faculty Participation

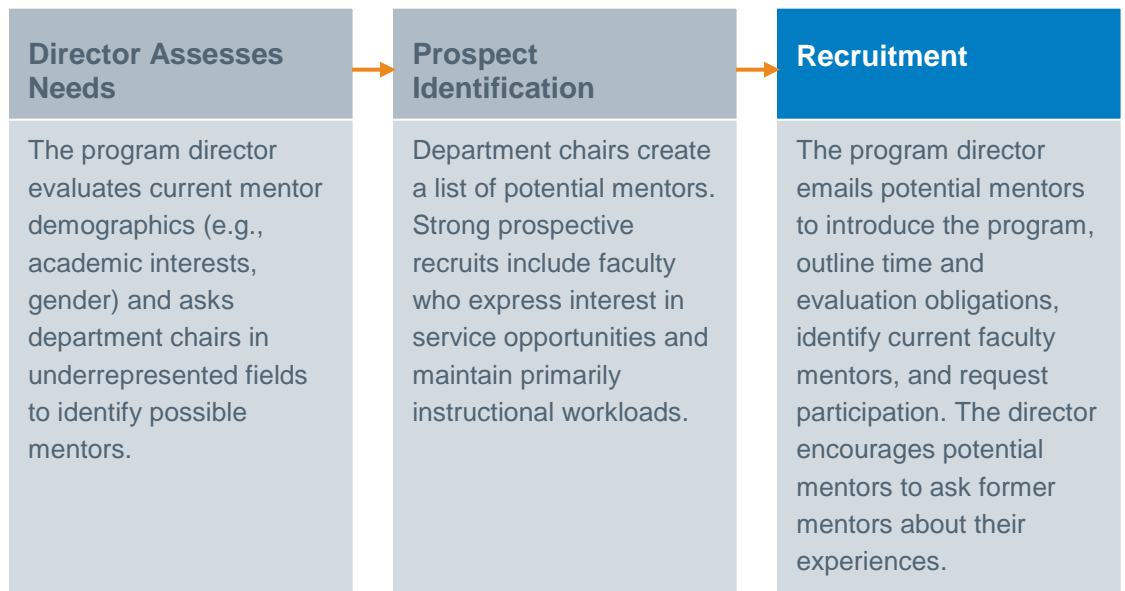
Minimize Student Tasks to Make Mentoring Programs Appear Informal

The faculty-student mentoring program structure at **University D** minimizes administrative tasks for student participants; the program does not require students to complete assignments or attend all mentoring activities. The program director reports that the absence of obligatory tasks reflects an intentional effort to portray mentoring as an informal, collegial relationship between faculty mentors and students. Contacts report that perceived informality encourages students to feel comfortable soliciting advice and guidance from faculty mentors.

Deans and Department Chairs Identify Prospective Faculty Mentors

Program coordinators at **University A** and **University D** ask department chairs to identify potential faculty mentors in their departments; contacts report success recruiting young, tenure-track faculty preparing for tenure review.

Faculty Mentor Recruitment Process at *University D*



Provide Course Releases to Incentivize Faculty Participation

Faculty who participate in the faculty-student mentoring program at **University A** receive one to two course releases for service activities annually at the discretion of the department chair. Contacts report that department chairs grant two course releases to faculty who organize mentoring program events or who volunteer to continue mentoring additional student cohorts.

The pilot faculty-student mentoring program at **University C** awards faculty mentors a \$500 annual honorarium in addition to a \$500 annual budget to fund mentoring activities.

Strategies to Improve Faculty Mentor Recruitment

Increase Visibility of Faculty Mentors

Increased recognition of the service contributions of faculty mentors encourages tenure-track faculty to consider participating. Students at **University D** annually select an “outstanding faculty mentor”; the university president and provost meet and give a certificate of appreciation to the selected mentor. Contacts also alert department chairs when their faculty volunteer as mentors.

Allow Programmatic Flexibility

Faculty mentors at **University A** and University D can organize mentoring activities that align with their academic and extracurricular interests. Contacts report that faculty mentors value the autonomy they enjoy to conduct mentoring activities that meet program guidelines but respect other time commitments and academic obligations.

Recruit Program Veterans to Assist New Mentors

Mentoring program coordinators at University D ask former mentors to encourage prospective faculty to join the mentoring program. Contacts report that program veterans answer prospective mentors’ questions about administrative obligations, potential mentoring activities, and successful mentoring strategies.

Mentoring Program Policies

Colleges Enjoy Flexibility to Structure Mentoring Initiatives

Mentoring program policies at **University A** permit college coordinators to structure college mentoring activities that balance faculty resources with student demand. Contacts report that the School of Nursing, which educates the greatest number of underrepresented students, struggles to recruit enough faculty mentors to provide one-on-one meetings to all students. Coordinators organize open office hours, study halls, and mentor-led career guidance discussions to maximize student exposure to faculty mentors.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Centralized Program Coordination



Advantages

- **Standardization:** Centralized faculty-student mentoring programs issue guidelines that outline expectations for faculty mentors and ensure that student participants in all colleges receive equal access to mentors.
- **Strategic Analysis:** Staff program directors collect and analyze outcomes data and can enact programmatic changes to support institution-wide retention and degree completion goals.



Disadvantages

- **Perceived Rigidity:** Contacts at **University B** report that faculty may be reluctant to voluntarily participate in formal mentoring programs because they anticipate that programs require burdensome administrative tasks (e.g., reporting mentoring activities, attending training sessions) and impose rigid standards for acceptable mentoring activities. Faculty may prefer to maintain unregulated mentoring relationships with students.

Programs Tied to Retention Initiatives Require Greater Administrative Oversight

A partnership with the Education Trust, a Washington, DC-based education policy nonprofit organization, required administrators at **University A** to develop plans to improve retention rates for underrepresented students. Administrators established the faculty-student mentoring program as a component of the institution's retention initiative. The program coordinator works with institutional research staff to track and analyze participant performance data and annually reviews program success with the Equity Scorecard, a toolkit developed by the University of Southern California's Center for Urban Education.¹

3) Evaluating Faculty-Student Mentoring Program Outcomes

Reviewing Outcomes Data

Programs Boost Retention Rates for Targeted Populations

Mentoring program directors at **University A** track the academic performance of program participants and compile data on retention and degree completion rates. The faculty-student mentoring program has increased the retention rate for underrepresented transfer students by 12 percent since its launch in 2008. Overall student retention rates have also increased, although not by a statistically significant figure.

1) [University of Southern California CUE-Equity Scorecard](#)

Require Faculty Mentors to Submit Formal End-of-Term Reports

Reported interest in additional career guidance motivated the recruitment of alumni mentors to complement faculty mentoring efforts at **University A**.

Faculty-student mentoring programs at **University A**, **University C**, and **University D** require faculty mentors to submit formal reports of mentoring activities and mentee progress at the end of every term. Program directors use reports to evaluate program participant satisfaction and ensure that students receive adequate access to faculty mentors. Reports document mentoring interactions between faculty members and students, additional mentoring activities that students attended, and any challenges that students mentioned to mentors. Mentors also document changes in student confidence, satisfaction with academic and social activities, and perceived wellbeing. Faculty mentors at University A complete assessments that assign a numeric score to gauge student progress through the program, and can also submit written evaluations.

Participant Feedback

Student and Faculty Participants Praise Mentoring Program Offerings

Contacts at all profiled institutions report universally positive anecdotal feedback from faculty and student participants in mentoring programs. Contacts at **University A** and **University D** report that the majority of first-time faculty mentors volunteer to continue serving after they complete the required minimum mentoring term.

Contacts report that students appreciate opportunities to interact with faculty in a non-classroom setting and the ability to have candid discussions with faculty mentors. The program coordinator at University A reports that many student mentees volunteer to serve in a peer mentoring program after participating in the faculty-student mentoring program.

The program coordinator at University D reports that faculty mentors appreciate the autonomy they enjoy to develop mentoring activities and value the opportunity to converse with motivated students outside of a classroom setting.



Genuine Collegiality

“They [students] have no idea that we [student success staff] are here, if that makes sense. They just see it as this great faculty member reaching out directly to them and doing great things, helping them choose classes, and telling them more about their fields.”

-Forum Interview

4) Research Methodology

Project Challenge

Leadership at a member institution approached the Forum with the following questions:

- **Administering Faculty-Student Mentoring Programs**
 - How are faculty-student mentoring programs structured?
 - Who oversees faculty-student mentoring programs?
 - What faculty participate? Is participation incentivized or required?
 - Do program policies vary by department? If so, why?
 - Do administrators leverage department faculty-student ratios to set participation policies?
 - How does program participation impact faculty workload?
 - How do contacts measure program outcomes?
 - How have outcomes changed over time?
 - What programmatic goals are connected to outcomes? How successful have other institutions been in reaching these goals?
 - What feedback do program participants offer?
 - How do administrators solicit feedback?

Project Sources

The Forum consulted the following sources for this report:

- Advisory Board's internal and online research libraries (eab.com)
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (<http://nces.ed.gov/>)

Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed administrators responsible for oversight of faculty-student mentoring programs at public universities.

A Guide to Institutions Profiled in this Brief

Institution	Location	Approximate Institutional Enrollment (Undergraduate/Total)	Classification
University A	Pacific West	25,000/28,000	Master's Colleges and Universities (larger programs)
University B	Midwest	37,000/48,000	Research Universities (very high research activity)
University C*	South	18,000/29,000	Research Universities (very high research activity)
University D	South	20,000/27,000	Research Universities (very high research activity)

**Information for this institution was collected through publicly available sources*