


# Creating an Effective Faculty Mentoring Program

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*Recruiting and hiring are duties that face almost all academic leaders, and they take a large bite out of their time and resources. It makes sense, then, to make every attempt to retain these new professionals. At the 2016 Leadership in Higher Education Conference, Kenneth Alford led a preconference workshop about the development and use of a mentoring program to help develop and retain new faculty.*

Recruiting and hiring new faculty is time intensive and expensive. Despite the difficulties, hiring decisions are clearly among the most important that academic administrators ever make. The success of college programs and universities is directly correlated with hiring the right people and then providing them with the essential resources to succeed and excel in their work.

## **Getting started**

Teaching at the collegiate level is a wonderful yet complex career. We hire people and expect them to be organized, teach effectively, research thoroughly, write lucidly, publish often, serve as effective committee members, and maybe even serve as successful administrators. How many new hires on your campus arrive fully prepared and competent to fill that job description?

Far too often, a college's lofty expectations are not matched with appropriate training and resources for faculty members, especially during the more formative years. When a faculty member fails to meet expectations or falls short in the rank advancement process, the time-consuming and costly process of recruitment and hiring starts over.

Every new faculty hire has the potential to become a better teacher, researcher, writer, and administrator. Helping them reach their potential is the great challenge of creating and maintaining an effective mentoring program.

Because effective mentoring increases the likelihood that faculty members will be successful, designing and implementing a robust mentoring program is an essential part of a campus administrator's job rather than a distraction.

Even if little or no thought is given to a faculty mentoring program, a certain percentage of faculty members will seek out and obtain formative training from informal mentors on their own. Consider the risk of leaving this outcome to chance. More often than not, the disappointing result will simply confirm the aphorism: "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail." The reality is that "mentoring sometimes has to be formalized, even mandated, or it simply will not occur" (Mullen 2012).

College and department leaders can benefit from consciously considering several important questions when creating any organized mentoring program:

1. **Does my institution value mentoring?** Lip service support is easy, but the easiest way to identify whether your institution truly values mentoring is to ask what specific resources will be devoted to support your program.
2. **What does mentoring currently look like at my institution?** What organized mentoring, if any, is currently being done with your faculty?
3. **How well is the status quo working?** Be honest. Analyze the degree to which your younger faculty members are progressing and meeting your department's expectations. Are there particular aspects of their work that consistently fall short or cause you frustration? What are your pain points with newer faculty?
4. **In a perfect world, what would my mentoring program look like?** Are there senior faculty members who could train younger faculty? How can I encourage, institutionalize, and incentivize mentoring interactions?
5. **What kind of ongoing financial and personnel resources would be required to support a mentoring program?** The key is "ongoing" resources. Mentoring is not a one-time project or one-day faculty meeting. Colleges and their faculties seldom stay static. Hiring, firing, promotion, departures, retirement, and sometimes death can affect every faculty every year.
6. **How do I implement my envisioned mentoring program?** "Nail it" before you scale it. It is wise to organize a core group who can work out the kinks before adding new elements and complexity to your program.

### **Launching a pilot program**

Managing a pilot mentoring program will require you to confront several difficult program-based decisions and questions, such as

- **Funding.** Even though a pilot program will be less expensive and easier to fund than a full-scale program, it will still take financial commitment from school administrators. How

will you convince key decision makers to provide those funds?

- **Scope.** Depending on the size and nature of your institution, you need to determine the pros and cons of implementing a mentoring pilot program at the department, college, or university-wide level.
- **Pairing choices.** How will you match mentored faculty members with their mentors? Will you create mentor matches from within the same discipline? The same department? The same college? The same campus?
- **Mentor guidelines.** Make the pilot program as representative of your future program as possible. Will you require mentors to be tenured faculty? Will you exempt administrators from serving as mentors? Success usually leads to success, so involve senior faculty who have demonstrated an ability to balance their workload and who have shown the propensity and capacity to train and lead effectively.
- **Mentored guidelines.** Although you may wish to consider only full-time faculty for inclusion in the trial, consider how inviting one or more part-time or nontenured faculty members might increase the lessons learned for all participants.
- **Length.** How long do you need to determine what works and what doesn't? One year may be a reasonable starting point.
- **Evaluation.** How will you measure the effectiveness of your pilot program? Determine the evaluation criteria before your pilot program begins.
- **Buy-in.** How will you get administrators, mentors, and mentees to really invest in your program? Each of these groups needs to clearly understand the benefits of participating. If you set clear standards and observable benchmarks, you will be more likely to expand beyond the pilot phase in the future.

Reference:

Mullen, Carol A. "Mentoring: An Overview." In *SAGE Handbook of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, edited by Sarah Judith Fletcher and Carol, 13. London: SAGE Publications, 2012.

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