

Facts in a Flash for Faculty! #2

Mentoring Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education

Did You Know? Mentoring between a faculty member and a student can be either a formal or informal relationship.

What is Mentoring?

“Mentoring is a dynamic, reciprocal, long-term formal, or informal, relationship that focuses on personal and/or professional development. A mentor is a sounding board and guide. Mentors provide perspective, resources, and ask thought-provoking questions. In the ideal mentoring relationship, mentors and mentees or protégés learn and teach each other” (Foster Heckman, Brown and Roberts, 2007).

History of Mentoring:

- Mentoring, both conceptually and in practice, is ancient. The Greek author, Homer, described Odysseus asking his friend Mentor to guide and protect his son when he went to war.
- In the 20th Century, as organizations like Big Brothers, Big Sisters and 12-step programs, like Alcoholics Anonymous, became popular, mentor models have proliferated.
- Mentoring programs for people with disabilities have been around at least since the 1970's.

Types of Mentoring:

- *One-to-one relationships* – Face-to-face mentoring, telephone conversations, email, letters, text messaging, any direct contact.
- *Group mentoring* – One mentor works with more than one mentee at a time.
- *Community-based mentoring* – Mentoring located in community-based situations such as volunteer mentoring.
- *Electronic mentoring* – Online communication: Internet, chat rooms, bulletin boards, discussions groups, social networks, and other technology.
- *Peer mentoring* – Two people of equal status and similar situations. One person is the mentor, but both share common characteristics and experiences.

FACTS: What are the benefits of a mentoring relationship for faculty?

- Mentoring is a reciprocal relationship. Mentor and mentee learn from each other;
- Mentoring facilitates long-lasting relationships;
- Students learn about the faculty member's area of expertise;
- Faculty learn about a student's area of expertise, for example about how to live and succeed in school with his/her particular disability;
- Mentoring skills are transferable to other areas of learning and life;
- Mentoring can be a formal or informal relationship.

Mentoring Components (from Foster Heckman, Brown and Roberts, 2007).

- *Reciprocity* – Mentor and mentee both learn from the experience.
- *Informality* – Most mentors/mentees consider their relationship casual.
- *Longevity* – Mentors and mentees are together for longer than a year.
- *Socializing* – Drinking coffee, socializing, spending time together in non-academic ways
- *Technology* – Using computer and networking technologies for electronic, or e-mentoring. Social networking sites include, but are not limited, to sites such as MySpace (www.myspace.com) and Facebook (www.facebook.com).
- *Collaboration* – Cooperation, such as exploring scholarly research writing, and presentations together.
- *Communication* – Face-to-face meetings, emails, and phone conferences.
- *Commitment* – Mentors and mentees make a long-term commitment (generally at least a year.)
- *Transferable* – Faculty and student mentoring relationship evolve over time. Relationships may continue after a student graduates. Mentoring relationships are fluid and can take a different shape over time.

Fast Fact Strategies: What you can do to help:

- Be open to working with students with disabilities.
- Remember open communication is important.
- Mentor/mentees need to develop the best way to work together.
- Seek opportunities to maintain contact.

References:

Foster Heckman, E., Brown, S. E., and Roberts, K. D. (2007). Mentoring Partnership Project: Exploring mentoring practices for students with disabilities in postsecondary education. Electronic publication:
http://www.heath.gwu.edu/files/active/HEATH_Mentoring_Partnership_Project.pdf HEATH Resource Center: Online Clearinghouse on Postsecondary Education for Individuals with Disabilities. George Washington University.

For more information on working with students with disabilities, visit our Web site at www.ist.hawaii.edu.

*Please feel free to distribute with the following acknowledgement: Teaching All Students, Reaching All Learners, Center on Disability Studies, University of Hawai'i, Honolulu, HI.
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September 2009

