MENTORING IS A TWO-WAY STREET

"Openness and flexibility are key to effective mentoring programs, as each partner should gain value from the relationship. Relationships will not flourish unless both parties see the effort as a growth opportunity."

— Beverly Henry Wheeler, 2005-2006 NACAC President

THE BASICS
What is Mentoring?

Though there are many definitions for mentoring, most characterize mentoring as a supportive, professional relationship between a senior member of an institution or organization (the "mentor") and a more junior member of that same organization (the "mentee" or "protégé"). Mentoring relationships can be formal, with an established program and structured regular meetings, or they can be informal, with infrequent or irregular contacts. The Illinois Association for College Admission Counseling (IACAC), which has conducted a mentoring program since 1995, notes, "A mentor is someone who helps another learn the ways of the world." Mentors can help "newcomers" learn the organization’s "hidden language" or undisclosed policies and procedures.

Need for Mentoring

In the rapidly changing field of college admission and guidance counseling, mentoring is an important strategy for transferring knowledge gained through years of experience to those new to the field or new to leadership positions.

Given the changes in the admission field, both in terms of the increasing complexity and the expected impact of retirements, several NACAC state and regional associations, including Illinois, Western, Texas and Michigan ACACs, have established formal mentoring programs to help nurture and retain the newest group of admission and guidance professionals and engage them in the association. These formal mentoring programs assist in retaining and enhancing the skills of newcomers to the field, as well as promoting leadership development among new and established admission and guidance professionals.

Who Makes a Good Mentee?

Prospective mentees should:
- Desire to learn
- Take joint responsibility for establishing a partnership
- Reflect on their profession
- Encourage an open dialogue with their mentor
- Ask challenging questions
- Consider expectations of a mentor.

Adapted from The School Administrator Internship Handbook, p. 103

WHO MAKES A GOOD MENTOR?

Mentors should:
- Have experience as practicing admission or guidance counselors and be regarded by peers as effective in their work
- Demonstrate positive leadership qualities, such as (but not limited to) intelligence, good oral and written communication skills, willingness to accept multiple alternative solutions to complex problems, clarity of vision, and the ability to share that vision with others in the organization

- Ask challenging questions of aspiring counselors and not just provide them rote answers
- Accept alternative methods of practice seeking to encourage creativity and new ideas
- Desire for people to go beyond present levels of performance, even beyond a mentor’s own ability
- Model the principles of continuous learning and reflection
- Understand the "real ways" that things get done in an admission office.

SUGGESTIONS ON STARTING A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP
- Exchange personal profiles or resumes.
- Exchange professional job descriptions.
- Identify mutual areas of interest.
- Share methods of achieving goals.
- Discuss assistance available from organizational memberships.
- Discuss workshops that are available.
- Share helpful materials.
- Establish a level of comfort so that the mentee feels free to call the mentor for assistance or ideas.
- Meet prior to college nights, meetings or ACAC functions and attend them together.
- Be responsible for introducing mentees to others.
- Visit each other’s institutions.


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Effective Mentoring Techniques

Effective mentoring programs incorporate these essential components: connection, vision, listening, realistic expectations and support.

Connection—The first step in making a connection is understanding why the relationship is wanted or needed. Strategies to connect include respecting differences in personality; agreeing upon the mutual rewards from the relationship; communicating sincerity; and sharing common experiences.

Vision—Mentors’ questions can help the mentee better understand his/her own goals, help determine stepping stones to reach these goals and possibly open the mentee’s eyes to alternative goals.

Listening—Being a skilled listener can be crucial to helping a mentee through a difficult period or a new experience. Good listening also shows respect and builds the relationship, increases knowledge, generates ideas, and builds loyalty.

Realistic Expectations—Mismatched expectations are typically the cause of unsatisfactory relationships. Pairs should establish and periodically revisit expectations. See a sample goal-setting form on page 6.

Support—Offering encouragement when needed and reassurance when necessary are vital components of a good mentoring relationship.

Program Evaluation

An evaluation component is essential to analyzing the program to assure it is effective and able to meet the goals you have set. See a sample evaluation form on page 8.

- Develop a plan to measure program success. Select indicators of accomplished goals, such as meeting frequency and relationship duration.
- Develop a plan to measure expected outcomes. Select appropriate instruments such as questionnaires, surveys and interviews to measure.
- Create a process to reflect on evaluation findings. Refine the program design and operations based on the findings.
- Craft and deliver reports to program constituents (at minimum yearly; optimally, each quarter).

Adapted from Elements of Effective Practice, p. 7 MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership.

REFERENCES


SAMPLE GOAL-SETTING FORM
FOR MENTORING PAIRS

1. What are the shared goals for your mentor-mentee relationship? If different, what are your individual goals?

2. What will be the structure of your relationship (frequency of communication, location or method of communication, type of communication, etc.)?

3. What are the mentee's expectations of the mentor?

4. What are the mentor's expectations of the mentee?

5. What are specific activities or ways in which you hope to meet those goals?