FLC Exploring Mentorship and Student Connectivity

I. **Mentorship strategies and resources**
   A. **Defining Mentorship**
   o Mentoring is a personal and reciprocal relationship in which a more experienced faculty member acts as a guide, role model, teacher, and sponsor of a less experienced student (or faculty member). A mentor provides the mentee with knowledge, advice, counsel, challenge, and support in the mentee's pursuit of becoming a full member of a particular profession. *(definitions of mentoring vary in the fields of the humanities, sciences, and professional degrees and disciplines.)*

   Purpose/Impact:
   o students who are mentored are better at problem solving, decision making, goal setting, making an effective transition to college and, overall, they are happier with their education experience.
   o academic advisors have a critical role in facilitating a productive mentoring relationship between students and faculty.
   o if a student can meet regularly with a faculty mentor, the student will be more engaged and confident.
   o with the help of an advisor who is familiar with faculty members of a department, pairing students with the right mentor can lead to a successful and productive partnership.

   B. **Guidelines/role/scope of the faculty/staff/admin mentor.**
   o academic advisors have a critical role in facilitating a productive mentor relationship between students/faculty.
   o if a student can meet regularly with a faculty mentor, the student will be more engaged and confident.
   o academic advisors can guide students to an appropriate mentor by asking some exploring questions.
   o with the help of an advisor who is familiar with faculty members of a department, pairing students with the right mentor can lead to a successful and productive partnership.
   o without some administrative approach that can equally distribute the mentor workload, certain faculty members can find themselves with a number of mentees while their less approachable colleagues have none.
   o faculty and advisors can collaborate on the faculty/student mentoring relationship.
   o faculty and advisors can become actively involved in first-year introductory courses.
   o introductory courses can also teach students about professional development, career options, and the role of faculty mentoring.
   o An advising syllabus can help support and facilitate advisor/faculty mentoring. The advising syllabus can educate students about departmental missions, learning outcomes, university resources, major requirements, and outline the student's and the advisor's responsibilities in this partnership.
   o Information such as the goal of faculty mentoring, each faculty's research background, and their experiences and highlights with previous student mentees should be included and discussed with incoming students.

   C. **Examples of best-practice mentoring**.
   o True mentorship is about more than simply making students feel cared about and supported.
   o Strong evidence (mentorship) involves challenging students, making them work hard, too.
   o Academic rigor is good for "customer satisfaction" in higher education.
   o (faculty) any time you invest in mentoring students will be time very well spent .
   o Rate(s) of faculty mentoring differs substantially according to major – (or example, arts and humanities faculty are nearly five times more likely to be mentors to students than business professors)
   o Having a faculty mentor who encouraged a student's goals and dreams more than doubles a graduate's odds of being engaged in their work and thriving in their well-being throughout their lifetime.

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II. **Connect/strengthen the communication/relationship between professional advisors/advising centers, administrators, faculty and students.**
  A. Clear Values - <u>Encourage mentoring as a core value</u> and provide the right incentives to do more of it.
  B. Recognition
  C. Integrated into Campus Culture
    ▪ Get to know our students – their sense of belonging is key.
    ▪ Listen and understand – compassion is crucial
    ▪ Communicate often and authentically
    ▪ Connect our students with activities
    ▪ Connect our students to resources
    ▪ Encourage experiential/engaged opportunities – international, service/volunteer, scholarly/research
    ▪ Team effort - Assemble and connect with faculty, professional advisors, career opportunities, academic support, etc.
    ▪ Create new pathways for faculty success that we might refer to as "mentor or meander."

  D. **Advisors can also prepare a list of questions for the student to ask her/his faculty mentor to initiate a productive relationship.** Questions such as:
    ▪ "What advice do you have for a student who's seeking a career in this field?
    ▪ How did you become interested in your field?
    ▪ What aspects of this field do you find most rewarding?
    ▪ How should I study to best prepare for classes?
    ▪ How might your research impact everyday life?"

III. **Considerations regarding how mentors are assigned, supported, assessed and measured.**
  A. **Provide recommendations as to how this fits into faculty T&P evaluation.**
    ▪ How does mentorship integrate and fit/connect with university policies such as Annual Review, Tenure and Promotion Policies, Merit Pay, etc.
    ▪ What are the parameters of faulty/student mentorship? Is it required?
    ▪ How does a faculty member keep track of/record/measure mentorship?
      • "Counting Beans"
      • Where does it count?
      • How does it count?
      • Faculty Activity Report/Plan? Digital Measures/APL Next ED?
      • Reflection and assessment in a reasonable manner
      • "publish or perish," the well-known expression for how faculty members get promoted and tenured in higher education; one source recommends the phrase "mentor or meander" to focus on the importance of mentoring toward successful T&P as well.
      • systems for assigning mentors can differ dramatically from department to department, making a standardized university-wide policy on advising difficult to implement.
      • without some administrative approach that equally distributes the mentor workload, certain faculty members can find themselves with many mentees, while their less approachable colleagues have none.

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IV. Summary Ideas from the VSU's Inaugural FLC on Mentoring

The scholarship on mentoring is varied and complex because the process of mentoring is both varied and complex; the one unifying point of agreement is the impact of effective mentoring on undergraduates, both before and after their graduation. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach to mentoring, it is not surprising that many faculty and staff will need mentoring for their own role as mentors because this has not been an established part of education or training within academia – despite its clear importance to learning and teaching. Regular, individualized mentoring can be an effective method of mentoring, but it is not the only effective approach. Indeed, the advising needs of undergraduate will almost certainly change over the course of their matriculation, so good mentoring will be many and varied. Nevertheless, it remains important that all types of mentoring be acknowledged and supported in order to promote effective mentoring across the university.

Early group mentoring events can be a great place to allow students to get to know faculty and, later, help students to self-identify mentors, as scholarship suggests that assigned mentors are not as effective as ones where the student's preferences are involved; however, mentors can certainly change over the course of a program as students focus on their specific post-graduate goals (indeed, building up strong relationships with a variety of faculty would be beneficial for entry into employment as well as graduate school). Also, note that the effective evaluation and organization of many of the group mentoring type of events has the potential to result in informative self-assessments for programs.

For individual mentoring, an online survey instrument with targeted application could also provide insight into mentoring activities; for example, at the end of every semester, each faculty/staff member could identify a certain number of students that they felt should be contacted with a request to fill out a Student Opinion of Mentoring form that semester; however, the scholarship on mentoring shows that mentoring is difficult to assess effectively and, therefore, multiple and varied approaches need to be employed, which reflects the nature of mentoring itself.

A variety of venues offer an environment for mentoring:

- Student handbooks (University, College, Department, Program):
- Information and resources available on website(s)
- Communication through Student Success Portal & Posting Grades on BlazeVIEW
- Submitting In-Progress Grades (midterm grades – including non-1/2000 level courses – dual enrollment & athletic grade requests
- Workshop/Review/Gathering Targeted to Needs Appropriate to Each Year in Program
- New/Transfer Student Meet & Greet
- Freshmen Learning Communities
- Panels on Graduate School
- Professional Practices Seminars & Writing Workshops
- Capstone/Professional Mentoring
- Incorporation of a "Mentoring Moment(s)" into selected courses
- Classroom visits to share a particular skill/topic/approach associated with discipline success within the structure of an existing a course; inclusion of the Academic Support Center and the Library
- On/Off Campus visits with Professionals which may or may not be associated with a course
- Undergraduate Research Presentations/Symposia with students and presenters
- Publication of Undergraduate Research

Each program/department could/should identify the key mentoring goals for students by academic year and design specific departmental mentoring activities. Then, the expectations for participation in both group and individualized mentoring per semester/year need to be defined, along with the planned methods for recognizing those activities.

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A selection of final thoughts regarding mentoring from the final narratives submitted by FLC attendees:

"At this point, I am very willing to continue as a resource and mentor on mentoring in this FLC and for the University. But my biggest concern is asking faculty to do something that: 1. We as a committee/advisory board have not yet clearly defined, 2. Have not identified how mentoring will "count" in the tenure and promotion evaluations, 3. Have not outlined as to what counts as mentoring."

"Another issue that came up frequently was the question who would serve as mentors and/or who should serve as mentors. These discussions were very eye opening for me as I never really thought of someone in a faculty role that "shouldn't" or "wouldn't" serve as a mentor. I have always seen my role in academia primarily as a mentor, not just a teacher. Once again, I am not sure that we answered this major question, but the discussion surrounding it was very robust and at time passionate."

"The pull between the obvious benefits of mentoring and the need to define and track it are at odds with each other, and it seems counterintuitive to log an act that is intuitive and organic for some. After all, if we look at other relationships like those with our parents or romantic partners, we don't pause to log and track interactions. This logging seems more reflective of counseling and psychology rather than organic relationship."

"That has led me to realize even more that "mentoring" as a top down expectation may have limitations for the success of a mentoring mentality for VSU. I think colleagues may be reluctant to "sign up" as a mentor, if there are still unclear expectations, equity, how students will be assigned/divided, and yes, even how this will or will not count toward tenure and promotion. I know, I can hear people saying, "It's about the students and helping them, not how it "counts" for the instructor." But the bottom line, is it DOES matter. For untenured faculty, tenure is something that occupies much angst, and need to be assured that everything they do will matter as it contributes to student, program, college, and university success. And while the majority of us want to give all we can to support, encourage, retain, and ultimately have our efforts serve as recruitment, if they do not get tenure, their own career (and possible need for mentoring) is in jeopardy."

"My definition of mentoring is as follows. Mentoring is a focus on the support of students during the process of their matriculation as well as in preparation for their post-graduate goals. This support can be academic, administrative, or psychological. While the fluid nature of mentoring may resist an exact definition, it flows naturally out of the desire to educate and has been proven to have significant impact on student success, both before and after graduation."

"Once we are able to adequately assign, measure, and assess mentoring we will still need to deal with the ongoing campus issues of communication."

"The extent to which the FLC discussions focused on how faculty get credit disappointed me."

(Dr. Rickman offers a well-thought-out, detailed description of how he sees mentoring initiated in departments. His plan is available on the FLC One Drive.)

FLC attendees:
Lois Bellflower, Alicia Roberson, Glenda Swan, Jay Rickman, Emily Rogers, Deb Marciano, Christine James, Kim Kulovitz, Marsha Walden

FLC facilitators: Michael Schmidt and Lee Grimes

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A Selection of Readings on Mentoring

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Vaughn, V. Mentee missteps.

Chow, Yung-Hwa., & McCormick, L. Suggestions for starting a departmental faculty mentoring program: Benefits, barriers, and advisors' role.

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Reh, F. (2019). Understanding the role of a mentor.

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