Mentoring: How to Be an Effective Mentor to Students

Mentoring is a two-way relationship between two individuals built on trust. An effective faculty mentor will encourage a student’s autonomy and his or her ability to take initiative, while also supporting each student’s unique sense of purpose.

It individualizes the educational process by connecting students with a faculty member who is experienced in their chosen fields.

Mentoring also allows the faculty to foster and develop a student’s talent to ensure academic success.

Traits of effective mentors:

- Assume the role of both teacher and advocate.
- Recognize that men and women require different outcomes to mentoring:
  - Women tend to look for encouragement, support, chances to build confidence, and opportunities for growth.
  - Men tend to look for leadership development, direction, and information.
- Establish an informal dimension to the faculty mentor/student relationship.
- Define the mentor/student relationship at the first meeting: What does this student need?
- Ask open-ended questions:
  - Ask “What interested you about the course?” and not “Did you like that course?”
- Don’t make judgments about the student’s career or academic goals.
- Mirror and re-phrase what the student is saying.
- Remember that students see you as the expert. Many are afraid to admit to you that the major may not be a good fit.
- Listen.
- Complement rather than dominate.
- Refer to appropriate departments when the student needs in-depth assistance; e.g., career counselor, mental health counselor, disability support counselor, tutor, etc.

Making a good referral:

- Address the needs that you hear from the student.
- Suggest that the student make an appointment with the appropriate department.
- Explain how the referring department might help the student. (If you are not sure, check out that department’s website or schedule a meeting with someone from that department so that you feel knowledgeable about the assistance that the student will be receiving.)
- Follow up with the student to make sure that the appointment was made.
- If you think a student is at risk of harming self or others, immediately call the Dean of Students, Scott Smith, at 977-5028 or Student Health and Counseling at 977-2323.

Adapted from The Freshman Year Experience by M. Upcraft and J. Gardner.