INTRODUCTION

Mentoring is a key developmental strategy within the University’s Continual Professional Development Framework and Leadership and Management Development Framework.

It is recognised as a core aspect of the culture of the University, where staff are encouraged to improve their own performance and the performance of others.

This booklet has been developed to outline the support provided by “Initial Career Mentors” to staff that are:

- new to the University;
- moving into new roles (eg: secondment, or promotion etc);
- returning from extended periods of absence (eg: Special Studies Program; maternity leave, etc).

It forms part of a range of support resources offered to staff within the Induction and Development Program and it also complements the probation and appointment processes for staff.

If you have any further questions regarding mentoring, please refer to the Mentoring @ CSU website http://www.csu.edu.au/division/humres/services/sd/career/mentoring.htm or contact the Organisational Development Team on (02) 6933 4106.
What are the learning needs of the mentee?

When a staff member moves into a new role, their learning needs are at a peak as they struggle to understand what is expected of them. This often leads to high stress levels for the individual who has many learning needs at this time, including:

- learning about the organisation – its mission, strategies, objectives, values and policies;
- learning to function in the workgroup – understanding its culture, values and roles, and developing working relationships and networks; and
- learning how to perform – developing the skills and knowledge for the job.

In this stage they will actively seek information, guidance and advice in relation to their professional development, and then act on this advice, using their preferred personal learning strategies.

The combination of a structured Induction and Development Program (to guide skill development) and an Initial Career Mentor (to provide support and advice) can reduce ambiguity and stress for the mentee. This can also lead to a growing satisfaction with and commitment to their new role and the University.
WHAT CAN MENTORS DO?

Initial Career Mentoring is not just a one-way process of imparting critical information to staff in new roles. It is a developmental process that is tailored to suit the needs of the individual mentee.

Whilst no process will totally address the stresses involved in entering an unfamiliar work environment, or manage the emotional impact of adjustment to a new work schedule, mentors can offer some assistance which may help avoid role overload, role conflict and role ambiguity. Some appropriate interventions mentors can suggest or facilitate are shown below.

PHASE 1 - SETTLING-IN NEEDS

Early in the mentoring relationship the mentee’s learning needs may be to seek information so they feel they can master the environment. Often this is focused on trying to make connections between the information they have been given. At this stage mentees will benefit from an interactive learning process that encourages information-seeking by providing:

- help in forming accurate expectations about the organisation;
- clear information on expectations, roles, norms, and values;
- assistance in developing knowledge, skills and attitudes;
- assistance in interpreting organisational events – from insiders who are genuinely willing to share knowledge and judgements; and
- encouragement in experimenting in the information-seeking and knowledge development process.

Tips for Mentors

- Use the Induction Checklist 4: “Day 1 Welcome Activities” to guide the first meeting with the mentee.
- Actively participate in the School/Section welcoming activities for the mentee – don’t just introduce the person around, but make them feel welcome and valued.
- Be inclusive of the mentee in your work practices – e.g. invite the mentee to relevant meetings you are attending, draw their attention to important messages, emails or activities that are occurring.
- Link the mentee to people and resources which will assist them to develop knowledge of the University – its people, processes and policies.
- Encourage membership of teams, attendance at meetings, and the benefits of developing networks.
- In discussions with the mentee, expose them to the larger picture of the section, school, Division/Faculty.
- Make regular opportunities to ask questions and discuss progress – not just about tasks but about comfort, belonging, stress levels and so on. (Role conflict is common when learning a new job, balancing work and social tensions associated with moving to a new city, and/or creating a new sense of professionalism).
- Assure mentees that it is “normal” to feel a bit stressed in a new role and discuss coping behaviours. (Take note of any “dis-stress” and take immediate action to address this – e.g. talk with the Manager/Head of School, offer the Employee Assistance Program contact number.)
PHASE 2 - MOVING FORWARD

Once the mentee starts to settle into their role, their needs will change as they become less focused on “information acquisition” for survival. The mentee may now be more concerned with developing self-identity in the workplace and recognition that they are mastering tasks. In this stage they may require encouragement to examine and develop their professional and personal learning needs.

Tips for Mentors

Meet regularly to:

- provide advice on how to collect evidence or gain feedback, so the mentee can assess their progress towards their goals and expectations;
- discuss the range of CSU developmental opportunities available and how these can help prepare for future work responsibility and increasing capacity to perform in their current job;
- act as a sounding board to discuss ideas;
- Assist the mentee to reflect on their satisfaction with their progress by posing probing questions, e.g. How do you feel about your progress? What are you most satisfied with? What would you like to change?

MENTORING ACADEMIC STAFF DURING THE EARLY PROBATION PERIOD

Often the mentor will be asked by the mentee how to prepare for the first probationary review. The mentor can assist by:

- talking about their experiences and providing guidance to the mentee about the developmental, supportive process;
- offering advice on how to prepare probationary documentation;
- if requested, reading and offering comments on the draft probationary documentation or referring to another staff member who would be able to undertake this role.

The mentor may be asked by the mentee and/or Head of School to meet with the Probationary Review Panel to provide a summary of how they have supported the staff member. They may also be asked to be a member of the Probationary Review Panel. In doing so, the mentor must be aware of maintaining confidentiality and their responses should offer accurate, factual comments that do not breach any confidences from the mentoring relationship.
Initial Career Mentoring is often an informal, loosely structured relationship.

However, both the mentee and mentor should discuss and agree on the boundaries and expectations of the mentoring relationship:

- What goals are to be achieved?
- How often to meet, e.g. on a regular basis or as issues arise?
- Can the mentee approach the mentor outside these set times?
- How they prefer to work together.

In setting goals it is important that the mentor remain aware of the demands imposed on the new staff member (both internally and externally). Mentors can provide advice and guidance to find a balance between what the mentee “needs to know and do”, what they “want to know and do”, and how much they can actually assimilate during this steep learning process. Information overload is not a uncommon at this point in the person’s career.

FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS

This is up to the mentor and mentee to decide. During the first two weeks it may be fairly regularly, and then the frequency will decrease. Some mentoring programs suggest that face-to-face meetings every 2-3 weeks is recommended to establish the relationship.

HOW LONG WILL “INITIAL CAREER MENTORING” LAST?

There is no set period for the Initial Career Mentoring relationship. The relationship will “wind down” as the mentee feels more comfortable in their role. This may be as little as 3 months, or it may continue for 6 or even 12 months.

At this point the mentor may assist the mentee to find a new mentor as they move onto the next stage of their career. However, it is the choice and responsibility of individual staff to pursue a range of mentoring and support relationships that they believe will be of benefit to assist them in their current roles and future careers.

In most cases the mentor/mentee relationship will work, but sometimes it doesn’t. If either party feels it isn’t working, this should be taken up with the mentee’s Head of School or Manager to discuss alternate options.
References


de Vries, J. (ed), 2005, More than the Sum of its Parts: 10 years of the Leadership Development for Women Programme, The University of Western Australia, Perth.


