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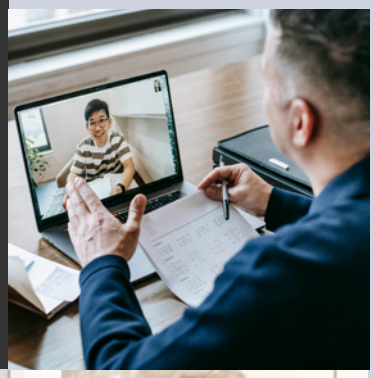
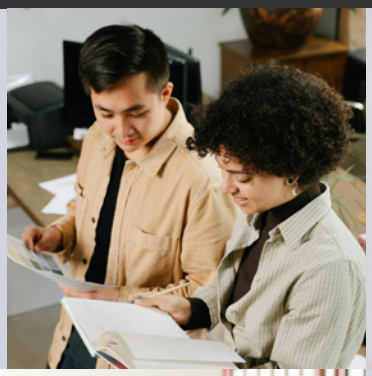
Redefining Mentoring in Higher Education





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Executive Summary

Geoff Watson
CEO, NCFDD

This is a moment of unprecedented uncertainty in higher education, as universities face cuts to research funding, a demographic cliff, a student mental health crisis, the vagaries of generative AI, and continued social and political unrest. All of these issues compound and, ultimately, fall on the shoulders of faculty. To navigate these burdens, faculty need personal and professional mentorship - now more than ever. At its best, mentorship provides a level of foundational support, guidance, and community that helps individual faculty and the entire system thrive. That's why we're so excited to be partnering with COACHE, combining their incomparable data and insight with NCFDD's 15 years of mentoring best practices, tools, and coaching. Mentoring can be a game changer in improving faculty success, career progression, and impact, but only if it's approached and implemented differently. This is the beginning of a conversation on how we reimagine mentoring for a new era.

R. Todd Benson Ed.D.
COACHE Executive Director
and Principal Investigator

The impact of higher education is both profound and far-reaching, touching individual lives and influencing global advancements. Universities and colleges educate hundreds of thousands of students, enabling them to progress in their careers and enrich their personal lives. These institutions also act as research incubators, driving groundbreaking innovations across various fields and industries. Moreover, higher education institutions like regional universities and community colleges serve as vital economic engines, fostering community growth and development while acting as essential cultural and artistic hubs.

At the core of these contributions is the faculty, the true cornerstone of the academy. Supporting and developing faculty is crucial to the mission of higher education and the broader progress of our communities. Decades of research highlight mentoring as a foundational method for enhancing faculty experiences and fostering workplace environments where they can excel. This white paper integrates the research expertise of COACHE with the field expertise of NCFDD, deepening our understanding of mentoring as a vital tool for faculty support and success.

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Redefining Mentoring in Higher Education

Mentoring has long been a cornerstone of academic life, supporting faculty as they navigate the complex demands of their careers. From the traditional apprentice-like relationships of early academia to the more dynamic, mixed mentoring models we see today, the evolution of mentoring reflects broader societal changes and the shifting priorities of higher education institutions. Although mentoring remains a critical tool for professional development, it is increasingly evident that the traditional approaches are no longer sufficient to meet the needs of today's faculty.

At its core, mentoring is about connection, guidance, and growth. However, in the current landscape of higher education, faculty are reporting a gap between the importance of mentoring and its perceived level of effectiveness. This disconnect carries significant consequences. Faculty face mounting pressure to balance research, teaching, service, and personal well-being, leading to challenges such as burnout, reduced productivity, and diminished retention. Without effective mentoring systems, institutions risk exacerbating these issues, ultimately impacting their ability to fulfill their teaching, research, and service missions.

We propose that a practical mentoring framework must embrace a combination of mentors and methods.

Compounding this challenge is the shifting nature of faculty roles. The composition of higher education faculty has changed significantly in recent decades, with a growing proportion of non-tenure track positions, including adjunct, clinical, teaching-only, and other specialized roles. Much of traditional mentoring is rooted in tenure-track pathways with a strong focus on research, which fails to address the multifaceted needs of these evolving roles. Furthermore, faculty joining higher education today have different expectations and requirements than previous generations. They connect, collaborate, and learn differently, often seeking more flexible and technologically-supported approaches to professional development.

Conventional wisdom has typically positioned mentoring as a one-size-fits-all, mentor-mentee relationship. In contrast, we propose that a practical mentoring framework must embrace a combination of mentors and methods—formal and informal, peer and cross-disciplinary—to ensure that all faculty can access the support they need to succeed. This paper explores what mentoring typically looks like in higher education today, the "effectiveness gap" — the disconnect between mentoring's importance and its actual impact — and a forward-looking vision for a new, modern approach to mentoring at both the individual and institutional levels.

Understanding the Current Landscape of Faculty Mentoring Models

Historically, mentoring was rooted in hierarchical, senior-junior relationships centered on guiding younger faculty through tenure. While these relationships remain valuable, the growing medley of faculty roles, the evolving landscape of higher education that has led to faculty burnout, and historic levels of staff turnover have necessitated a broader approach.

Formal Mentoring Programs

Formal mentoring programs are structured initiatives led by institutions to provide equitable access to mentorship. These programs pair mentors and mentees based on career stage, discipline, or specific goals and often include training to enhance the quality of mentorship. Additionally, having a formally designated mentor can be a leading predictor of higher research productivity (Bland, Seaquist, Pacala, Center & Finstead, 2002, as cited in Columbia University, n.d.). However, overly rigid structures can sometimes feel impersonal or fail to adapt to individual needs. Sustained institutional commitment and resources are critical for the success of these programs, which can serve as a foundation for comprehensive faculty development strategies.

Informal Mentoring

Informal mentoring relationships develop naturally through shared interests or personal connections. One such display of informal mentoring that is gaining popularity is external mentoring, which finds faculty seeking mentorship opportunities outside of their institution in an attempt to close the growing effectiveness gap. These organic relationships often feel more genuine and personalized, providing mentees with flexible and adaptable support. However, access to informal mentoring is often uneven, relying on social networks or chance encounters, which can perpetuate inequities. Without a defined structure, mentees may also struggle to receive consistent guidance. Institutions can complement informal mentoring with formal programs to ensure that all faculty have access to meaningful mentorship opportunities.

1-on-1 Mentorship with a Senior Faculty Member

One-on-one mentoring with a senior faculty member is a traditional model in which new faculty are paired with a mentor often selected based on overlapping research interests. This approach is straightforward to implement and provides mentees access to seasoned perspectives, including institutional knowledge and deep insights into tenure and promotion processes, which are expressed needs of junior faculty as they navigate academia (Proc Biol Sci., 2023). However, this model can sometimes feel restrictive. If a mentee is paired with a mentor who is not an ideal match, the effectiveness of the relationship can be limited. Additionally, new faculty may need to supplement this guidance with informal mentorship to address specific or evolving needs.

1-on-1 Mentorship with a Peer Faculty Member

Pairing new faculty with a near-peer mentor—a colleague at a similar career stage—offers a distinct perspective. Near-peer mentors often possess recent, relevant knowledge about tenure guidelines, service expectations, and department culture. This avenue fosters a relatable and approachable dynamic, allowing mentees to feel more comfortable discussing challenges. However, while near-peer mentors can provide practical, timely advice and greater psychosocial benefits than hierarchical mentoring, they may lack the experiential wisdom that advanced mentors can offer, open the door to intra-peer competition/ intimidation when one peer achieves success, and introduce difficulties for marginalized faculty to find true peers on smaller campuses (Angelique, Kyle, and Taylor, p. 199, as cited in Hanover Research, pg. 10). This approach works best when combined with opportunities to engage with senior faculty for broader career guidance.

Group and Collaborative Mentoring

Group mentoring models create a network of mentors and mentees, often blending participants at different career stages or from various disciplines. This approach offers mentees access to varied perspectives and reduces pressure on any single mentor to fulfill all roles. It also allows mentees to choose interactions that best align with their needs. However, group mentoring requires careful planning and coordination to ensure participants engage meaningfully and equitably. Without proper structure, mentees may feel overwhelmed or struggle to navigate the network effectively. When implemented thoughtfully, this model can foster collaboration and broaden support networks. One example of effective group mentoring is NCFDD's Faculty Success Program (FSP), in which small, cross-institutional peer groups engage in development topics together. Over 15,000 faculty have gone through FSP, with 93% reporting increased productivity and 91% citing improved well-being.

Sponsorship

Sponsorship can be formal or informal and seeks to involve mentees in professional opportunities, such as co-authoring research, presenting at conferences, or collaborating on institutional projects. This approach is highly effective for career advancement, providing tangible outcomes like publications, grants, or leadership experience. However, sponsorship requires clear agreements to ensure fair workload distribution and proper recognition of contributions. Without these safeguards, power imbalances can arise, potentially diminishing the mentee's experience. When executed well, sponsorship can be a game-changer for faculty development by combining mentorship with actionable professional growth opportunities.

Cross-Disciplinary Mentoring

Cross-disciplinary mentoring brings together mentors and mentees from different departments or fields, fostering innovative thinking and diverse perspectives. This model encourages participants to explore new methodologies and ideas, broadening their professional horizons. Additionally, cross-disciplinary relationships can reduce departmental biases or politics, creating a neutral space for mentorship. However, differences in disciplinary norms or expectations can sometimes limit the relevance of guidance provided. Institutions should provide clear frameworks to help mentors and mentees navigate these differences and maximize the benefits of cross-disciplinary interactions.

No “One Size Fits All” Approach

Each mentoring model offers unique strengths and challenges, which supports the argument that there is no single path to fit all faculty needs. With the outdated single-source-of-truth approach to mentoring, mentees are left disappointed and lacking in the support they were expecting to receive (Rockqueomore, 2019.). This dissatisfaction only widens the gap between the importance and effectiveness of mentoring.

A comprehensive mentoring strategy that combines various models—such as blending formal and informal mentoring or integrating sponsorship with group mentorship—can create a stronger, more effective support system. By tailoring mentoring initiatives to meet the diverse needs of faculty, institutions can foster a culture of collaboration, innovation, and sustained professional growth.

The Strategic Role of Faculty Mentoring in Higher Education

Mentoring is not merely a tool for individual advancement but a strategic imperative for higher education institutions. A well-structured mentoring framework benefits faculty and institutions, creating a symbiotic relationship that enhances personal growth, professional success, and organizational excellence.

For Faculty: Mentoring as Empowerment

Mentoring is a foundation of career advancement and professional fulfillment for faculty members. Effective mentoring provides personalized guidance that supports faculty in navigating the complexities of academic life, including career progression, tenure, and promotion. Mentoring also fosters skill development, enhancing teaching, research, and leadership competencies.

A critical advantage of mentoring lies in its ability to expand professional networks. These networks not only open doors to collaboration and interdisciplinary opportunities but also create a sense of community in what can often feel like an

A critical advantage of mentoring lies in its ability to expand professional networks.

isolating academic environment. Moreover, mentoring offers emotional support, helping faculty navigate challenges and avoid burnout.

For underrepresented and marginalized faculty, mentoring is more than a professional resource—it can be a lifeline (Sorcinelli, Yun, and Baldi, p. 2). Faculty from historically excluded groups often face unique barriers, including implicit biases, cultural isolation, and inequitable access to opportunities. Tailored mentoring relationships can provide advocacy and actionable advice that promote a culture of faculty development that works for everyone.

73.4% of faculty who find mentoring effective also report satisfaction with their institutions, versus 44.2% of faculty who find mentoring ineffective.

For Institutions: Mentoring as a Strategic Asset

Mentoring is equally vital to institutional success. Higher education institutions face growing pressures to attract and retain top talent, increase research output, and improve student outcomes while fostering a culture of innovation and inclusivity. A well-designed mentoring program is a strategic lever to address these challenges.

Based on NCFDD's experience working with thousands of faculty and hundreds of institutions nationwide, we have come to understand that Institutions with robust mentoring programs see tangible benefits in faculty retention. These programs reduce turnover and enhance faculty satisfaction by creating a culture of support and belonging. According to data from the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE), 73.4% of faculty who find mentoring effective also report satisfaction with their institutions, versus 44.2% of faculty who find mentoring ineffective. When a faculty member is satisfied with their institution, they are more likely to stay put. This retention is not only beneficial for morale but also yields significant cost savings, as the process of recruiting and onboarding new faculty is resource-intensive. In informal discussions with academic leaders, COACHE attempted to capture the real cost of replacing a faculty member. These leaders explained that the tendency is to focus on recruitment costs such as advertising and campus visits, but there is a great deal more worth considering. Every hour spent by faculty reviewing

CVs for a replacement represents an hour not spent on teaching or research. Start-up and relocation costs will vary greatly, but they represent another significant investment. All told, their back-of-the-napkin estimate for replacing one faculty member was $96,000.

Mentoring can also drive research productivity, helping faculty secure grants, publish in high-impact journals, and contribute to the institution's intellectual capital. This, in turn, enhances the institution's reputation, attracting additional talent, funding, and partnerships. Furthermore, mentoring programs contribute to better student outcomes. Stable and satisfied faculty are more likely to deliver high-quality teaching and engage meaningfully in student mentorship, creating a ripple effect that benefits the broader academic community.

Faculty who lack access to meaningful mentorship may feel isolated, disengaged, or unsupported.

Laying the Groundwork for Change

To address the "effectiveness gap" in mentoring, it is essential first to understand why gaps exist and how they manifest. This requires a clear view of the current state of mentoring, from its benefits and standard practices to the systemic limitations that hinder its success and the risks of inadequate mentoring. For instance, faculty who lack access to meaningful mentorship may feel isolated, disengaged, or unsupported. Over time, this can lead to burnout, attrition, and diminished career satisfaction.

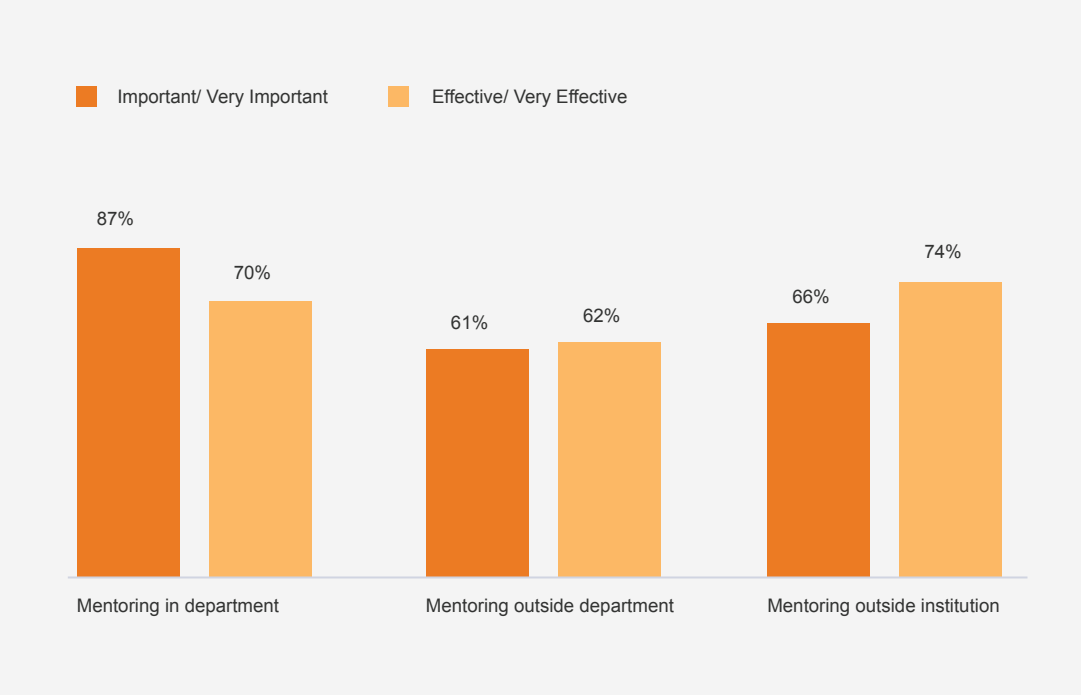
The next section will explore these gaps in depth, examining COACHE's data on the importance and perceived effectiveness of mentoring across some of the most common methods faculty can expect to encounter. With a clear understanding of where the gaps exist, we can begin to close them once and for all and create scalable and impactful programs that meet the needs of faculty at all stages of their careers.

What COACHE Data Reveals About Mentoring

Mentoring is a critical element of faculty success, but despite its widespread value, data from the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) at Harvard reveals persistent gaps that deserve attention. Between 2011 and 2024, COACHE surveyed approximately 166,000 faculty members at over 300 institutions.

The results show that while most faculty members value and benefit from mentoring, certain groups report significant challenges that, as we discuss later on, can directly impact their careers and well-being. Addressing these gaps is crucial to ensuring equitable and effective support for all faculty.

Importance vs Efectiveness of Mentoring



Where are the Gaps?

The COACHE data reveals that while faculty widely recognize mentoring's importance, its effectiveness often falls short for key groups and career stages:

Departmental Mentoring Gaps

- 87% of faculty consider departmental mentoring important, **but only 70% find it effective.**
- **Women report a 20-point gap** (91% importance vs. 71% effectiveness), indicating unmet needs in areas that matter most.
- Pre-tenure faculty, who are at the most vulnerable stage of their careers, have the **highest percentage of respondents who find mentorship to be important (92.3%), but are most likely to find department and institutional mentorship ineffective (20.1%).**

Unequal Experiences for Career Stages

- Tenured associate professors often report mixed experiences. Only 27% of those who find departmental mentoring effective believe it benefits their peers. In contrast, **92% of those who rate it ineffective think it also fails others, suggesting systemic issues.**
- Non-tenure-track faculty (such as adjuncts or lecturers) tend to have more stable or predictable positive experiences with mentoring — which is to say that they are experiencing higher levels of effectiveness. However, we know from years of evidence from NCFDD partnerships, that **the specific challenges they focus on in mentoring relationships differ from those of tenure-track faculty,** such as job security and career progression through a contingent employment lens and lack of proportionate recognition in professional development conversations.

Misperceptions of Peer Support

- Faculty who find departmental mentoring effective often believe it works well for others in their group. For example, **74% of pre-tenure faculty who report effective mentoring believe their peers are similarly supported.**

- However, among those who find departmental mentoring ineffective, **90% feel it fails not only them but their colleagues too.** In academic environments, narratives like this can impact the perception of the broader faculty, which, in turn, can impact overall faculty culture.

External Mentoring as a Lifeline

- **Faculty are more likely to find mentoring outside their institution effective (74%)** compared to mentoring within their own department. This reliance on external networks highlights gaps in internal support systems, particularly for pre-tenure faculty. In addition, it highlights the potential benefits of external mentoring, which can provide critical knowledge, community, and support that internal mentoring may not (e.g., faculty within a narrow discipline may not have peers within their own institution).

Based on NCFDD's deep engagement with faculty and institutions, these gaps point to a critical challenge: many mentoring programs struggle to address the nuanced and evolving needs of faculty, leaving some without the support they need at pivotal career moments. What happens when mentoring does not meet the specific needs of faculty? Ineffective mentoring can have profound, career-altering consequences, underscoring the demand for systemic change.

The Human Impact of Ineffective Mentoring

The gaps identified in the COACHE data are not just abstract numbers; they reflect real experiences with long-lasting impacts. For example, Dr. Kerry Ann Rockquemore, the founder of NCFDD, shares the story of a tenure-track faculty member who relied exclusively on her departmental mentor for guidance during her transition from graduate student to professor. Early on, this mentor advised her to "hold off working on your book for a few years to mature intellectually." Trusting this advice, she delayed her writing projects and focused on other aspects of her work. However, when her third-year review came, the feedback was overwhelmingly negative, citing her lack of publications and minimal progress on her book. The advice she initially believed was helpful had, in reality, jeopardized her career.

This example highlights an opportunity to reflect on the COACHE data in a more nuanced way: mentoring perceptions can shift over time and can happen when it's too late. This case also underscores the potential risks of relying too heavily on a single mentor. While one person may provide guidance in some areas, unmet needs—such as advice on publishing or navigating institutional expectations—can have significant career consequences. Effective mentoring requires a dynamic, needs-based approach that encourages faculty to build broad networks, addressing multiple aspects of their development.

By viewing mentoring as an ongoing and evolving process, institutions can work to close the gaps identified in the data and ensure that all faculty have the support they need to thrive—before ineffective mentoring turns into a costly misstep.

Effective mentoring requires a dynamic, needs-based approach that encourages faculty to build broad networks, addressing multiple aspects of their development.

Why These Gaps Matter

The potential consequences of mentoring effectiveness extend far beyond individual experiences to the heart of institutional cultures. Faculty who receive effective mentoring can have very different perceptions of their institution versus their peers who find mentoring ineffective. Among COACHE respondents–

A higher percentage of those who report effective mentoring:

Feel satisfied with their departments and institutions.

82.6% of faculty who find departmental mentoring effective are also satisfied with their departments, compared to only 43.2% of those who find it ineffective.

Understand promotion processes and pathways.

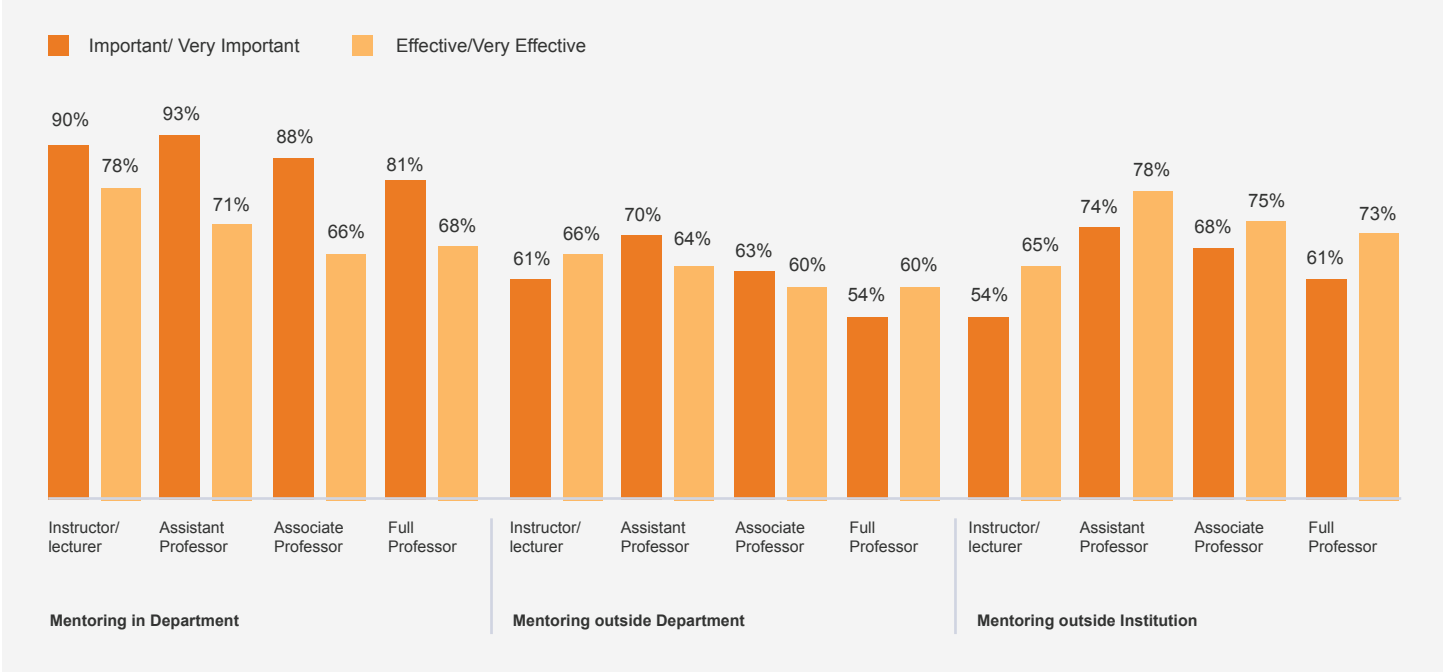
70.1% of those who find departmental mentoring effective report clarity about achieving tenure, whereas only 44% of those who find departmental mentoring ineffective report clarity about achieving tenure.

Balance teaching, research, and service responsibilities effectively.

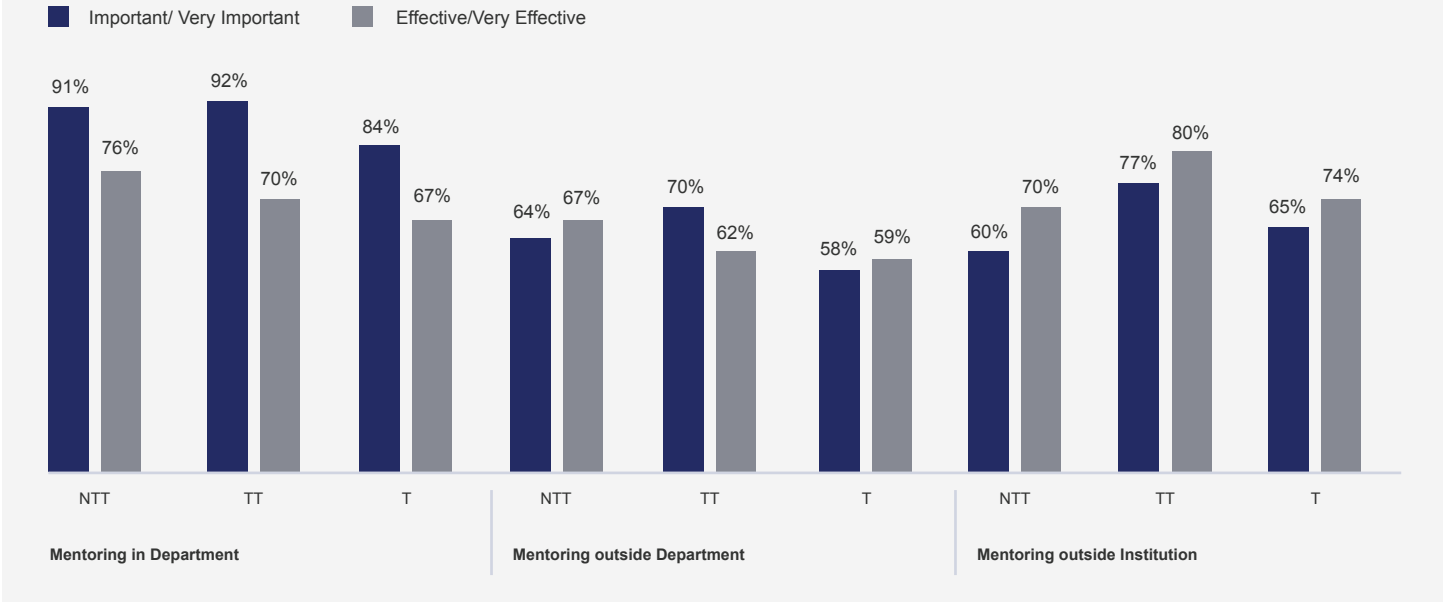
59.5% of those who find mentoring effective feel they can balance teaching, research, and service demands, compared to only 37% of those with ineffective mentoring.

When mentoring works, it can create a ripple effect that benefits both individual faculty members and their institutions. Satisfaction rises, clarity improves, and workloads become more manageable. However, when mentoring fails, we risk the opposite: inequities widen, career progression is stalled, and disengagement spreads.

Importance vs. Effectiveness of Mentoring by Rank



Importance vs. Effectiveness of Mentoring by Tenure Status



What Can Institutions Learn?

The data provides a clear message: mentoring is both a valuable tool and an area in need of improvement. To better support faculty and begin to close the effectiveness gap, targeted efforts are needed in several areas:

1. **Focus on Key Groups:** Women, pre-tenure faculty, and tenured associate professors are more likely to report dissatisfaction with mentoring. Tailoring programs to meet the unique needs of these groups could enhance their experiences.

2. **Improve Departmental Mentoring:** While departmental mentoring is viewed as a core responsibility, it lags behind external mentoring in terms of effectiveness. Investing in structured, well-resourced departmental programs could help bridge this gap.

3. **Leverage External Mentoring Successes:** The positive outcomes reported by those who seek mentoring outside their institution suggest that external networks are highly effective. Institutions should consider facilitating connections beyond their walls—through opportunities like NCFDD's Faculty Success Program and Chair Success Program—to enhance mentorship opportunities.

By addressing these gaps, institutions have an opportunity to not only improve individual experiences but also strengthen the academic community as a whole.

Women, pre-tenure faculty, and tenured associate professors are more likely to report dissatisfaction with mentoring.

Why does the Effectiveness Gap Exist?

The effectiveness gap in higher education mentoring stems from various systemic and logistical challenges that prevent mentoring programs from achieving their full potential. The current approaches often fail to address the diverse needs of faculty or adapt to the complexities of academic institutions.

This chapter explores the underlying factors contributing to the effectiveness gap and lays the foundation for a new, holistic approach to faculty mentoring.

Lack of strategic prioritization

Universities often underscore the pivotal role of faculty in fulfilling their institutional mission, characterizing them as the “heart” or “lifeblood” of the academic enterprise. However, this recognition can fall short of being translated into tangible, strategic initiatives that prioritize faculty development and career advancement.

Dr. Pearl Dowe, Vice Provost of Faculty Affairs at Emory University, highlights the critical role institutions play in fostering a culture of mentoring. She notes that while the value of mentorship is widely recognized, institutional prioritization often falls short. “If we bring faculty here, we want them to be successful,” Dr. Dowe says in broader reference to institutions as a whole. “There is a significant amount of time and money behind recruiting faculty. Why would we bring them here and not invest in them?”

Despite the significant investments universities make in recruiting faculty talent, institutional strategic plans often fail to focus on long-term faculty development or the establishment of comprehensive mentoring programs. In fact, NCFDD analyzed 23 institutional strategic plans, finding that only 5 referenced faculty mentoring.

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Lack of structure and support

Mentoring is frequently left to chance, occurring in informal settings without clear frameworks or dedicated institutional backing. This lack of structure means that both mentors and mentees are often left to define the scope and goals of their mentor-mentee experience on their own.

Lisa Hanasono, PhD, is the Academic Director of Training and Content at NCFDD and a professor in the School of Media and Communication at Bowling Green State University. She believes institutions are doing a good job of creating spaces for mentoring conversations and striving to connect faculty in various ways to encourage mentoring. However, she says there is "often a lack of efforts to systematically train folks to mentor." Many mentors do not possess the training to guide their mentees effectively, resulting in uneven experiences and outcomes.

This challenge is not simply theoretical; it plays out in real faculty experiences. Maria LaMonaca Wisdom, Assistant Vice Provost for Faculty Advancement at Duke University, recalls a conversation with a junior faculty member who described feeling lost in their mentoring relationship. Their mentor was well-intentioned but lacked the skills to offer meaningful guidance beyond broad career advice. The faculty member longed for more structured conversations about feedback, goal-setting, and navigating institutional expectations — conversations that never materialized because their mentor had never been trained to offer that level of support. As Wisdom notes, "Most faculty advisers are highly competent, emotionally mature, and resourceful people who, nonetheless, could benefit from learning how to mentor more effectively—how to communicate expectations, deliver feedback, and create a climate of trust" (Widsom, 2024).

Despite overwhelming evidence that mentorship is foundational to career development and institutional success, universities rarely allocate sufficient time, funding, or resources to structured mentoring programs. Without intentional investment and support from a university level, mentorship risks becoming an afterthought rather than the transformative tool it could and should be.

Mismatch of expectations

Mentoring relationships can falter when mentors and mentees fail to align their expectations, especially when mentoring is still prevalently viewed as a guru-type relationship that exists to solve any and all challenges a mentee might face.

"It's this big nebulous thing, and it means different things to different people," Dr. Hanasono said about mentoring. "Folks are probably not going to be satisfied because what they think mentoring is might not be what they are getting or trying to give"

Miscommunication, differing goals, and unclear boundaries often lead to dissatisfaction. These challenges can cause mentoring relationships to break down, leaving faculty without the guidance they need.

Without clear metrics or benchmarks, the true impact of mentoring remains undefined, thus making it nearly impossible to refine programs or advocate for their expansion.

Evaluation and assessment

Assessing the success of mentoring programs can be challenging. Institutions often struggle to measure outcomes beyond the scope of subjective feedback. Without clear metrics or benchmarks, the true impact of mentoring remains undefined, thus making it nearly impossible to refine programs or advocate for their expansion.

Ultimately, this lack of accountability and evidence-based program development leads to the sense that mentoring efforts are performative rather than meaningful. Practical assessment tools, such as using the COACHE Faculty Job Satisfaction Surveys, performance reviews to track career progress, and observing retention metrics, could demonstrate the tangible benefits of mentoring. These tools showcase outcomes like improved faculty satisfaction, enhanced career advancement opportunities, and higher retention rates, encouraging greater investment in these programs.

Sustainability

The longevity of any mentoring program depends heavily on the availability of time, funding, and institutional commitment. Budgeting processes often overlook the financial resources required to sustain effective mentoring initiatives. High faculty turnover — ironically one of the results of ineffective mentorship — also disrupts mentoring relationships and the overall sustainability of a program.

In many cases, faculty are already feeling stretched thin, trying to balance teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities. This makes it even more challenging to devote the time necessary to mentoring. Additionally, a faculty member often has little incentive to take on a mentor.

“Mentoring is often invisible, uncompensated, and something that isn’t necessarily captured concretely in institutional reward structures,” Dr. Hanasono comments.

To combat this, institutions might consider employing recognition methods or incentives for faculty members who are asked to take on the mentor role. The College of Arts and

“Mentoring is often invisible, uncompensated, and it’s something that isn’t necessarily captured concretely in institutional reward structures,” Dr. Hanasono tells us.

Sciences at Bowling Green University, for example, created a mentoring triad program to expand networking opportunities for more junior faculty and reward senior faculty for giving their time freely to a mentoring program.

“At the end of the program,” Dr. Hanasono explains, “Those who completed it would get a small amount of professional development money, and they also got a letter or some sort of formal document that they could put in their annual report or their dossier.”

Dr. Hanasono uses this example as a way to think differently about the effectiveness of mentoring at an institutional level. She argues that effectiveness can also be defined by how much an institution recognizes mentoring efforts and how the labor can be more visibly valued.

Breaking the Cycle

As we reflect on the most significant reasons behind ineffective mentoring, it is clear that the effectiveness gap comprises strategic and foundational issues that can be resolved. Institutions must address the structural deficiencies and cultural barriers to make mentoring effective for all faculty. In doing so, they can create an environment where faculty feel supported, engaged, and empowered to contribute meaningfully to their institution's mission.

The next chapter will provide actionable strategies for closing the effectiveness gap by building impactful and scalable mentoring programs that foster lasting growth and success for faculty members and institutions. From designing structured frameworks to fostering a culture of faculty development and sharing best practices, we will explore how institutions can turn mentorship from a missed opportunity into a transformative force.

Institutions must address the structural deficiencies and cultural barriers to make mentoring effective for all faculty. In doing so, they can create an environment where faculty feel supported, engaged, and empowered to contribute meaningfully to their institution's mission.

Closing the Effectiveness Gap

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to mentoring, but there is a framework that centers academic needs to close the effectiveness gap: recognizing that academics are humans first and scholars second.

Regardless of their career stage, every academic navigates a life full of challenges, triumphs, strengths, and areas for growth. As such, effective mentoring cannot rest solely on one individual or one method. Instead, it requires a collective, "it takes a village" approach.

This chapter explores how to rethink mentoring through the lens of addressing faculty needs, how to create personalized support networks, and how to embed mentorship into institutional priorities.

Rethinking Mentoring

The traditional model of mentoring, centered on a singular, all-knowing "guru," is outdated and often insufficient. Today's mentoring must take a "needs-based" approach—prioritizing the specific challenges and goals of individual faculty members.

The Differentiated Mentorship Support Model

A needs-based approach to mentoring should consider the diverse dimensions of support faculty members require. As NCFDD founder Kerry Ann Rockquemore, PhD, observes, "The idea of one guru-mentor is not just unrealistic—it's problematic. Faculty members have a wide variety of needs, and it's impossible for any one person to meet all of those needs effectively."

Professional development might involve guidance on skill-building, career progression, or leadership opportunities. Emotional support, on the other hand, could mean having someone to turn to during the inevitable highs and lows of academic life. Community, accountability, institutional sponsorship, and network access are equally essential.

As Rockquemore emphasizes, "Gurus are human—they make mistakes. Relying on one exclusively can put you at unnecessary risk and leave many needs unmet."

Instead of relying on a singular mentor, faculty should be encouraged to cultivate a mentoring network that reflects the diversity of their needs. Rockquemore stresses that faculty members — especially those in the early stages of their careers — have some combination of the following needs:

- **Professional development:** Guidance on career progression, skill-building, and leadership opportunities.
- **Emotional support:** Navigating the highs and lows of academic life.
- **Community:** Cultivating a sense of belonging and shared purpose.
- **Accountability:** Staying on track with goals and commitments.
- **Institutional sponsorship:** Advocating for recognition, promotions, and funding.
- **Access to networks:** Expanding professional connections and opportunities for collaboration.
- **Project-specific feedback:** Receiving targeted input on research, teaching, and service work.

> As Rockquemore emphasizes, "Gurus are human—they make mistakes. Relying on one exclusively can put you at unnecessary risk and leave many needs unmet."

For this paradigm shift to succeed, institutions must actively rethink how mentoring is structured, supported, and promoted. By fostering diverse and flexible mentoring networks, institutions can ensure faculty receive the right support at the right time, tailored to their specific challenges and aspirations.

This approach is not about replacing traditional mentoring relationships but enhancing them with a broader support ecosystem. By addressing the limitations of the traditional model, institutions can create a culture of mentoring that aligns with the evolving demands of academic careers, empowering faculty to thrive in an increasingly complex and dynamic academic environment.

Building Personal Mentoring Networks

Creating a robust mentoring network begins with identifying and aligning specific needs with available resources. Instead of relying on a single mentor, mentoring can be envisioned as a mosaic where different individuals contribute to various aspects of career support.

For example, faculty who have experienced NCFDD programs have successfully utilized the Mentor Map — a resource that has templatized the process of establishing a mentoring network — at the center of their development strategy.

Building a Mentor Map

The NCFDD's Mentor Map offers a structured framework for transitioning from a traditional person-based model to a needs-based approach, enabling academics to create networks that evolve alongside their careers.

NCFDD's Mentor Map is a tool that encourages self-reflection through targeted questions, such as:

- **What challenges am I facing in my career right now?**
- **What skills or knowledge do I need to achieve my goals?**
- **Who in my institution, field, or broader network can help me address these needs?**

This structured approach helps faculty identify gaps in their current support systems and actively seek mentors or resources to address them.

> "By making a mentor map and resource map, it allowed me to identify the people whom I can ask help/support from and the experts that I trust in certain areas. This saved me lots of time and furthermore improved my relationship with my colleagues and peers both within and outside the university."
>
> **Peng Tian, PhD**
> Assistant Professor
> The University of Missouri

> For me, thinking about mentoring in terms of the support/skills you need and to consider a network of people who can address different aspects of that needed support/skills was the most useful for me.
>
> Since the workshop, I have been able to identify areas where I need to improve my mentor map. I have worked towards cultivating and improving my relationships with different people who may, hopefully, fill in some of those gaps. I have also tried to be more specific with my needs and in my requests to various prospective mentors."
>
> **Bethany Almeida, PhD**
> Assistant Professor
> Clarkson University

Aligning Needs with Mentorship Opportunities

The Mentor Map encourages faculty to adopt a proactive and intentional approach to mentoring by focusing on specific, career-related needs. For example, faculty can use the map to identify targeted strategies and resources that directly address their goals:

EXAMPLE GOAL 1
Enhancing research productivity: Faculty might connect with colleagues experienced in securing research funding, attend workshops on research methodologies, and/or access NCFDD webinars on publishing strategies.

EXAMPLE GOAL 2
Improving teaching practices: Faculty could work with instructional coaches, participate in communities of practice focused on pedagogy, and invite peer feedback through classroom observations.

EXAMPLE GOAL 3
Exploring leadership opportunities: Faculty might seek mentors outside their discipline who can provide diverse perspectives on administrative roles and team management.

As Dr. Rockquemore, PhD, explains, "Effective mentoring today requires a network of people to provide different types of support for different aspects of professional life."

A diversified mentoring network, guided by tools like the Mentor Map, not only enhances individual success but also strengthens the overall academic ecosystem. This intentional, needs-based approach creates a culture of mentorship that adapts to the changing needs of faculty while promoting collaboration and long-term growth.

Elevating Mentoring as an Institutional Priority

For mentoring to thrive, universities must integrate it into their strategic priorities. This involves creating an environment where mentoring is valued, well-resourced, and systematically assessed.

Institutions can elevate mentoring by connecting it to broader goals, such as faculty retention, research productivity, student success, and overall faculty well-being. For example, mentoring helps foster a supportive culture that enables personal and professional growth and, as such, can be linked to the overall happiness of faculty. This happiness helps attract and retain top talent.

Similarly, mentoring programs can enhance research output by pairing faculty with experienced mentors who provide guidance on securing grants and publishing in high-impact journals. A study conducted on the correlation between mentoring and publication rates among those early in their careers in biomedicine, for instance, found that researchers who received specialized research guidance (the need) from their mentor were twice as likely to have published (Gutiérrez et al. 2021).

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(Gutiérrez et al. 2021)

Programatizing Mentoring

Once mentoring is established as a priority through this connection of broader institutional goals, institutions need to programatize it with well-structured support systems, training, and evaluation processes. Placing mentorship at the center of faculty development strategies ensures mentoring becomes a consistent and impactful component of academic life. Structured training for mentors, including workshops on best practices, communication skills, and cultural competence, helps create a culture of effective mentorship.

Institutions can complement internal mentoring initiatives and provide additional avenues for professional development with external resources such as the NCFDD Mentor Map. For example, institutions like the University of Minnesota School of Nursing are proactively “pre-filling” areas of the Mentor Map for new faculty by identifying existing resources that faculty can call on for various types of support. This approach, as explained by a professor at the university, ensures that mentoring resources are accessible and structured from the start.

> “The mentorship network is important, and recognizing this helps mentees and mentors tailor their interactions and support. As a mentor, participating in this workshop helped me reflect on ways that I can be most helpful to my mentees as part of a larger network of support around that mentee. I will be using the mentor map with mentees in the future to help us identify the various types of support that each member of the network can provide. This ought to help us all be more effective as a supportive team. As an organization, we're going to identify areas of the mentor map that could be 'pre-filled' for new faculty, identifying existing resources in the organization that faculty can call on for various types of support."
>
> Anonymous Professor, University of Minnesota School of Nursing

In addition to the structural support provided by initiatives like the Mentor Map, assessing the effectiveness of mentorship programs is equally crucial. To evaluate their success, institutions can gather data through satisfaction surveys and longitudinal studies from partners such as COACHE. For example, Emory University uses these tools to continuously refine its mentoring programs, ensuring they align with faculty needs and institutional goals.

Case Study: Emory University's Best Practices in Mentoring

Emory University's approach to mentoring is central to its faculty success strategy and serves as a model for fostering effective mentoring relationships and promoting a culture of successful faculty development. Through structured programs, institutional commitment, and a focus on data-driven improvements, Emory has developed strategies that enhance faculty development, satisfaction, and retention.

Why Mentoring Matters at Emory

The decision to invest deeply in mentoring at Emory stems from recognizing its critical role in faculty success and institutional excellence. Dr. Pearl Dowe, Emory's Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs, has spoken passionately about the transformative impact mentoring had on her own career. She emphasized that mentoring is not only about professional guidance but also about creating a culture of belonging where "everyone matters." As she explained, "If we're talking about eminence, we have to have a culture that says all of our faculty contribute to that eminence, whether it's teaching, mentoring students, or research."

The commitment was further bolstered by data from COACHE faculty surveys, which highlighted gaps in faculty satisfaction and professional development. For example, faculty indicated a need for clearer pathways from associate to full professor and expressed feelings of isolation, particularly among those with unique research interests. This feedback underscored the need for a comprehensive and flexible mentoring strategy, which Emory quickly designed and implemented.

Emory's Innovative Approach to Mentoring

Emory's Center for Faculty Development and Excellence (CFDE) has been instrumental in implementing a multi-faceted mentoring framework. Recognizing the traditional one-on-one mentoring models might not meet the needs of all faculty, Emory introduced alternative approaches, such as mentoring cohorts and cross-departmental groups. These models were informed by COACHE data and tailored to specific faculty needs.

For example, the College of Arts & Sciences established College-wide mentoring groups where senior faculty mentor small cohorts based on shared characteristics, such as discipline, career stage, or underrepresented status. This model not only fosters interdisciplinary collaboration but also addresses feelings of isolation among junior faculty.

Dr. Dowe noted the importance of empowering schools and colleges to design their own mentoring initiatives: “We didn’t dictate how they should support their faculty. Instead, we provided the data and allowed them to act on it.” This decentralized approach has been a hallmark of Emory’s mentoring strategy, enabling each unit to address its unique challenges while aligning with broader institutional goals.

Leveraging Strategic Partnerships and Resources

Emory has strategically partnered with NCFDD to provide extensive mentoring resources. Through Emory’s NCFDD Institutional Membership, faculty have access to tools like the Mentor Map and the Faculty Success Program (FSP), a comprehensive 10-week program designed to enhance productivity, work-life balance, and academic excellence for faculty at all stages of their careers. Dr. Dowe’s office actively promotes these resources through newsletters and targeted communications. “We’re really trying to push out more information because we know faculty gravitate toward these programs,” she said.

The FSP has proven particularly impactful. The program’s effectiveness lies in its multifaceted approach, which includes weekly small-group coaching sessions, peer networking opportunities, and personalized coaching. These elements provide faculty at Emory with practical strategies, accountability, and a supportive community to help them navigate the challenges of academia and achieve long-term success. “We’ve retained almost 90% of the faculty who participated in the [FSP] program,” Dr. Dowe noted, highlighting the correlation between mentoring support and faculty retention.

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Measuring Impact and Driving Change

Emory measures the success of its mentoring initiatives using longitudinal data and satisfaction surveys like those from COACHE. Insights from these tools have driven targeted improvements, such as addressing gaps in the promotion process from associate to full professor. Dr. Dowe shared, “The data from COACHE showed us that while faculty understand the path to tenure, there’s a gap when it comes to moving from associate to full professor.”

These findings have informed interventions, including mentoring programs tailored to different career stages and disciplines. Regular data collection and analysis allow Emory to refine its mentoring strategies continuously."The data showed us where we needed to focus, and we are intentional about addressing those areas," Dr. Dowe said.

Compelling Results

Emory's comprehensive mentoring strategy demonstrates the university's commitment to fostering faculty success and engagement. By creating a supportive culture and aligning mentoring initiatives with institutional goals, Emory has achieved notable outcomes:

- Record participation in mentoring programs
- More faculty reporting the importance and effectiveness of mentoring resources provided to them
- Increased faculty satisfaction
- Enhanced faculty attraction and retention efforts

One poignant example of mentoring's impact involved a faculty member who felt undervalued within their department. Dr. Dowe collaborated with the dean to organize a symposium showcasing the faculty member's work, inviting peers from across the country. "Instead of him going there, we brought them here to showcase his work," she said. This effort elevated the faculty member's profile and strengthened their connection to the university. "He's still here," Dr. Dowe remarked, demonstrating the impact of personalized mentoring efforts.

As Dr. Dowe succinctly put it, "Why would we bring faculty here and not be 100% invested in their success?"

By fostering a supportive culture, leveraging strategic partnerships, and aligning mentoring initiatives with institutional goals, Emory University has established a robust framework for faculty success. That framework created an environment where faculty feel valued and inspired to stay. As Dr. Dowe succinctly put it, "Why would we bring faculty here and not be 100% invested in their success?"

Mentorship Redefined: The Pathway to Academic Excellence

As we draw to a close, the overarching themes converge on a singular purpose: **empowering academic success through intentional, needs-based mentorship.** Each chapter has emphasized the transformative potential of shifting away from outdated mentorship paradigms and embracing modern frameworks that foster resilience, collaboration, and growth within academia.

This final chapter synthesizes these insights while encouraging further engagement with leading research-practice partnerships to inform strategic plans like COACHE and programmable mentorship resources such as NCFDD.

Reflecting on Key Themes

The journey of mentoring reimagined begins with the understanding that academic success thrives on recognizing faculty as humans first and scholars second. Institutions play a pivotal role in creating ecosystems that support the multifaceted needs of their faculty, acknowledging that academic careers unfold within complex personal and professional landscapes. Throughout this paper, several themes have emerged:

01. Holistic Mentorship
Moving beyond the “guru-mentor” model to embrace a networked approach that addresses professional, emotional, and institutional needs.

02. The Differentiated Mentorship Model
Emphasizing that no single mentor can meet all faculty needs, calling for the cultivation of diverse mentorship networks.

03. Institutional Prioritization
Positioning mentorship as a strategic priority by embedding it into the fabric of faculty development and institutional goals.

04. Data-Driven Insights
Leveraging tools and metrics to refine mentorship strategies and ensure alignment with evolving faculty challenges.

These themes underscore the importance of cultivating mentorship systems that not only address immediate needs but also foster long-term growth, well-being, and institutional success.

The Path Forward

The work behind fostering effective mentorship does not end with the strategies outlined here. It is an ongoing process that requires commitment, innovation, and collaboration. Engaging with both research-practice partnerships like COACHE and faculty development resources like NCFDD can provide complementary support for sustaining this work. COACHE's research-driven approach helps institutions use data to inform mentoring practices, while NCFDD offers practical tools, programs, and community-based support to help faculty implement those practices effectively. Together, these resources empower both individuals and institutions to build impactful mentorship ecosystems.

The path to closing the mentorship effectiveness gap lies in embracing a culture of intentionality and adaptability. By prioritizing mentorship as a shared responsibility, institutions can empower their faculty to navigate the complexities of academic life with confidence and purpose. Faculty, in turn, are encouraged to take proactive steps in building comprehensive mentoring networks that align with their unique needs and aspirations.

Mentorship evolves alongside the individuals and institutions it serves, requiring ongoing reflection and refinement. By committing to this work, the academic community can ensure that mentorship remains a cornerstone of success, fostering resilience, innovation, and excellence for years to come.

The path to closing the mentorship effectiveness gap lies in embracing a culture of intentionality and adaptability.

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