

Mentoring New Faculty

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What is mentoring?

The AAHA Mentoring Guidelines provide the following definition of mentoring: a relationship in which someone invests personal knowledge, energy, and time to support another person's professional development. Mentoring can provide tools and perspective to help individuals thrive, grow, and persevere in a new work environment. (1)

The use of new faculty mentoring can help to create a community within the department that's welcoming, respectful, and inclusive, where everyone is viewed as both a learner and a teacher. (2)

The value of mentoring increases with career transitions, including new hires, promotions, a change in roles, and the implementation of new programs and procedures. Mentorship has also been shown to decrease employee turnover and burnout, increase retention, and increase productivity and job satisfaction. (1)

I have been actively mentoring for over 30 years, both in clinical practice, through my various VTSs, where I've successfully mentored over 20 other VTSs, and through my work in education. I believe in a team approach to learning and teaching, and want to involve as many members of my tribe as possible!

Why is mentoring important?

Mentoring helps to ensure new faculty members are involved in most major decision-making plans, which can help to facilitate departmental efficiency. (2) Common concerns with new faculty include, but are not limited to:

- Imposter syndrome
- A fragile sense of competency
- A lack of belonging in the department
- Balancing time for all the new role expectations
- Worry about mistakes and not doing well
- Setting up labs and classrooms
- Sense of isolation
- Lack of support and respect (2)

The benefits to the mentee include increased skill acquisition, increased productivity, and increased emotional support during the critical transition phase. The mentor also benefits from this relationship in that mentoring can help them keep up with advancements within the field, and attract and train quality employees with less turnover. (1) As we all attract new employees from our local community, the stronger our relationships and the better our reputation, the higher

the chances of us being able to effectively hire new staff. Mentoring can also be effectively used to help assimilate new faculty into the culture, mission, and goals of the organization. (2)

Very few of us entered veterinary medicine with the intention of teaching. For some of us the job transition into education was due to burnout, some due to boredom, and for me, it was due to physical limitations, as I was unable to work on the floor for 10 hours a day any longer. Very few of us were prepared to develop curriculum, set up course schedules, learn LMSs (I've worked with no less than 6 different LMSs!), and make learning creative and interesting. As we all know, teaching is not just standing in front of a group of eager and willing learners!

Who provides the mentoring, and who benefits

Mentoring can either be departmental, within the college, or outside of the college. Characteristics of a good mentor include openness and a willingness to share their knowledge and time, an ability to instill trust and respect, and the ability to see the 'big picture'. (2) The 'Big picture' being in our case, our students passing the VTNE and becoming our new wave of veterinary technicians and nurses.

At Appalachian State, where I work, the university offers a robust onboarding process to new hires, but we also have a program called the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning for Student Success (CETLSS). This is open to all staff, and has a certificate program, but also provides trans-departmental mentoring. Within CETLSS, there is the Mentor Development Learning Center (AppLC). Both of the programs have helped me immensely by providing access to information, but also sources of support within App State.

Another extremely important source of mentors is AVTE. I can't count the number of times in the past 19 years I have sought mentorship from other instructors, as well as provided help to others. Knowing that you don't have to reinvent the wheel with every new problem, change in LMS, or technology is helpful. Dr. Margi Sirois was instrumental in helping this newbie clin path instructor set up and run the lab and class, with helpful suggestions and corrections as needed.

How to set up departmental mentoring

There are several models used to support mentoring, including:

- One-on-one
- Apprenticeship
- Critical/ time-based
- Multiple mentors based on areas of expertise
- Teams using formal committees
- Reverse
- Group

If the mentee needs multiple areas that one mentor may not be able to accommodate, it can be set up with multiple mentors. Likewise, reverse mentoring is useful for cross-generational

knowledge transfer, especially between older mentees and younger, more technically advanced mentors. (2)

There are responsibilities when starting a mentoring relationship. We need to ensure:

- Trust and respect are established both ways
- Confidentiality is maintained throughout
- Two-way communication is established (no sage on the stage behavior!)
- Radical candor is encouraged
- Successes are celebrated
- Gratitude is cultivated
- Open and receptive feedback is present (1)

A Mentoring Action Plan can be established, either as an SOP or individually, to develop goals, determine the frequency of meetings, and establish timelines for the plan. (1) If doing one-on-one mentoring, a frequency of at least once weekly is recommended, while group mentoring should be at least once per month. (2)

For more information on developing a Mentoring Action Plan, please refer to the Faculty Mentoring reference, where details are provided, as well as Active Mentoring Worksheets, and more materials and worksheets that can be adapted to your program's needs. (2)

At the onset, parameters should be established, and limits set. A mentor is not required to provide 24/7 access to their mentee, nor are they required to perform the mentee's tasks. They are acting as a guide. If the mentor is assigned from within the department, the mentor will make first contact with the mentee. It is important to remember that individuals other than the program director can act as mentors! Depending on the comfort level of each individual, either a set of questions can be asked at each meeting, or an overview can be sought. I prefer the big-picture view of meetings and will ask questions based on how the mentee is doing and feeling, rather than a standard set of questions. It is important to talk about expectations and define goals. These can be departmental or individual, depending on what is needed.

When can it start?

Ideally, a mentoring plan is established as soon as the new hire starts. Our typical action plan is to throw the new hires into the deep end with little preparation and training because the need is great at that time. This method seldom makes a happy employee, and oftentimes creates a short-term employee. Taking a phased and gentle introduction works much better. If they must be thrown into the pool, ensure they are not there alone, but be prepared to guide and check in with them daily, or multiple times per day.

On day one, be prepared with a mentoring action plan and agenda, consider both your goals and the new faculty's goals, agree on a conversation setting, be present in all conversations, and be accountable for the mentoring relationship. (2) It is important to be accessible and offer help, not judgment. Many times, we start out strong with the best of intentions, but as the

semester progresses, we lose focus and contact with our new hires. This leaves them floundering, overwhelmed, and confused. Consistency is important. Schedule meetings, or touch base often with new hires, at least weekly until a comfort level has been reached, and no less often than monthly. Meetings can be virtual or live, depending on access and availability. Make the time mutually convenient.

Questions for meetings can include:

- How was your week/month?
- What are you working on right now?
- How are you managing your goals?
- What do you need/how can I help?

A new hire doesn't know what they don't know, which allows a mentor to help guide them in filling in those blanks. Developing curriculum, setting up labs, arranging study sessions, and working with students with various accommodations, none of these things are taught to us in school or practice.

Our program offers one-on-one mentoring, usually for the first semester, but we also utilize multiple mentors. We have a dedicated Instructional Designer who knows App State, but also all the ins and outs of our Moodle LMS. We are not expected to know how to set up and manage our classes, and our Instructional Designer is always willing to step up and guide us! We also do group mentoring. Whenever a staff member has learned a new skill, has encountered a new technology (think AI!), or has seen a knowledge gap for us, we have time booked for a group meeting. Because of the diversity within our staff, there is usually someone whom we can ask questions of or tap for help. There is no expectation that you will muddle through on your own. Questions are encouraged. Probably the best area of support we provide is our dedicated Wellbeing Coordinator. She provides support for both the students and the staff, so we never feel that we are out in left field with no support or coverage.

How can we monitor the effectiveness of mentoring

A major challenge for any mentoring relationship is evaluating the outcomes of the effort. Ideally, mentoring will foster a strong departmental relationship and provide support and training. (2) An ideal time to assess the effectiveness of mentoring is during annual reviews, but for new hires, this may need to be done as often as quarterly or every semester. Information on how to assess effectiveness can be found in the Faculty Mentoring resource.

We know that our profession is one in crisis at this point, with levels of turnover, burnout, and suicide exceeding the national average. Mentoring offers the potential to help mend some of these problems by improving well-being, providing mental health education and support, investing in clinical communication, and providing novel training methods. (1) Be prepared to offer your insight and tricks you've utilized in the classroom, and be prepared to learn in turn. Some of us have been out of clinical practice for quite a long time, and things, techniques, and

equipment continually evolve, and we need to ensure we are keeping up. Our new hires can bring us this information and experience.

Imagine how much easier your first job would have been had you been assigned a mentor, or how much easier your transition into education would have been. I went from a busy 24-hour specialty practice to a clin path lab in the basement of a medical building. I was given the keys to the rooms and told that the students would start in 2 weeks. No other support or information was provided. There was some previous teaching information, but no information on supplies, ordering protocol, time management, or even equipment use. Needless to say, this was quite an abrupt transition. I had no AVTE contacts at that time and had no support from the other 2 staff members, including the overbearing, dictatorial program director. Don't let this be the experience for your new staff!

Conclusion

Mentoring in education addresses the social isolation that new faculty often report as part of this working environment. Being the 'new kid' is never easy, but with effective and consistent mentoring, we can ensure our new faculty integrates into the existing team and becomes a productive member. It has been shown that new faculty members who have mentoring relationships are more productive, are more confident teachers, and report higher career satisfaction. (2) This all goes to support less staff turnover and a more consistent programmatic environment.

While a mentoring relationship never really ends, the frequency of check-ins can be decreased as the goals are achieved, or life limits the time and energy each has to put into the relationship. This can be restarted at any time, or mentoring changed as goals and needs change. (2) Ideally, your new hire will flourish and be present to mentor future staff!

Resources

- 1) Reinhard A, Quicksall MS, Bourquin B, et al. 2023 AAHA Mentoring Guidelines. <https://www.aaha.org/resources/2023-aaha-mentoring-guidelines> accessed 4/10/25
- 2) Phillips SL, Dennison ST. Faculty Mentoring. A practical manual for mentors, mentees, administrators, and faculty developers. Stylus Publishing, Sterling, Virginia. (2015)