Seeding a Culture of Mentorship:
Ad-Hoc Mentoring Committee Report (2024–2025)

Introduction & Background

Mentorship is a fundamental component of a thriving academic community, and in the University of Maryland College of Education, we are committed to making mentorship a valued and sustainable part of our institutional culture. The phrase "seeding a culture of mentorship" reflects both the intentionality and growth mindset behind this initiative: mentorship is not just a program, policy, or checkbox, but an evolving integrated practice that supports all members of our community — faculty, staff, students, and leadership — in their personal and professional development.
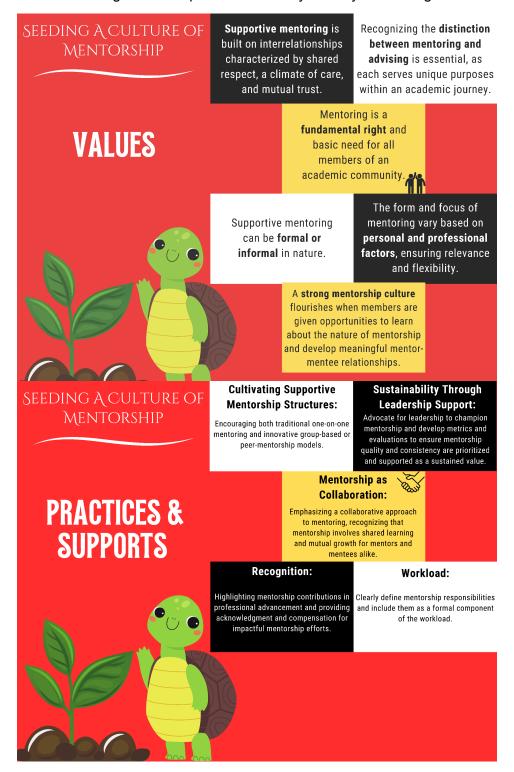
This initiative emerged in response to the college's recognition that mentorship, while widely valued, has historically been inconsistent, invisible in workload recognition, and unequally distributed. Feedback from staff, students, and faculty has emphasized that students, staff, and faculty often take on significant mentorship responsibilities without clear support, recognition, or pathways for advancement. Many noted that this "invisible labor" has yet to be adequately acknowledged in annual reviews, merit systems, or promotion criteria, despite being central to the college's community ethos.

In Fall 2024, a cross-role committee was convened to lead the development of this initiative. The committee included Dean Kimberly Griffin, faculty members Sharon Fries-Britt, Patricia Alexander, Jennifer Turner, and Andrew Brantlinger, doctoral student Satra Taylor, and Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs and Graduate Studies Doug Lombardi. Over the course of the academic year, the committee engaged in collaborative drafting, consultation with faculty and students, and two structured feedback events: a February faculty workshop and an April graduate student session.

The committee's work focused on three core pillars: Values, Practices, and Supports. These pillars define what mentorship means in our college, how it should be enacted, and what structures are needed to sustain it. What follows in this report is an articulation of those three pillars, enriched by the voices of faculty and students, and framed by an actionable plan for the next academic year.

Figure 1

Three Core Pillars Defining Mentorship in the University of Maryland College of Education

SEEDING A CULTURE OF MENTORSHIP

VALUES

Supportive mentoring is built on interrelationships characterized by shared respect, a climate of care, and mutual trust.

Recognizing the **distinction between mentoring and advising** is essential, as each serves unique purposes within an academic journey.

Mentoring is a **fundamental right** and basic need for all members of an academic community.

Supportive mentoring can be **formal or informal** in nature.

The form and focus of mentoring vary based on **personal and professional factors**, ensuring relevance and flexibility.

A **strong mentorship culture** flourishes when members are given opportunities to learn about the nature of mentorship and develop meaningful mentor-mentee relationships.

SEEDING A CULTURE OF MENTORSHIP

PRACTICES & SUPPORTS

Cultivating Supportive Mentorship Structures:

Encouraging both traditional one-on-one mentoring and innovative group-based or peer-mentorship models.

Sustainability Through Leadership Support:
Advocate for leadership to champion mentorship and develop metrics and evaluations to ensure mentorship quality and consistency are prioritized and supported as a sustained value.

Mentorship as Collaboration:

Emphasizing a collaborative approach to mentoring, recognizing that mentorship involves shared learning and mutual growth for mentors and mentees alike.

Recognition:

Highlighting mentorship contributions in professional advancement and providing acknowledgment and compensation for impactful mentorship efforts.

Workload:

Clearly define mentorship responsibilities and include them as a formal component of the workload.

Our Core Pillars: Values, Practices, and Supports

Our shared understanding of mentorship is anchored by these pillars. We draw on quoted comments from the college retreat mentoring feedback survey to demonstrate the essence of each pillar.

Values: Foundations of a Mentoring Culture

At the core of this initiative are five foundational values that guide the college's shared vision of mentorship.

1. Mentorship as a Fundamental Right and Need

All members of the college — faculty, staff, and students — deserve access to high-quality mentoring relationships that support their growth and belonging. Mentorship is not a privilege reserved for a few; it is a core need of professional life in a learning community.

> "Supportive mentorship should acknowledge work/life balance, giving both parties an opportunity to grow and learn from each other, and be built on trust and compassion."

2. Relevance and Flexibility

Effective mentorship must be responsive to the shifting needs, identities, and goals of the mentee. There is no one-size-fits-all model. Mentoring relationships should evolve over time and reflect the realities of both mentor and mentee.

> "Flexibility — changing the amount and substance of the mentorship based on the mentee's shifting needs over time."

3. Quality Relationships

At its heart, mentorship is relational. It is built on mutual respect, trust, and a shared commitment to learning and development. Mentorship is a collaborative process, not a transactional one.

> "A mutual learning relationship where each person is learning from the other. Respecting one another's goals rather than directing each other down a specific path."

4. Supportive Mentorship

Both formal and informal structures are essential for a thriving mentoring culture. Informal hallway conversations and spontaneous problem-solving are as valuable as structured mentor-mentee pairings. A supportive culture allows both to flourish.

> "Supportive mentors provide regular time for the mentee, listen to the mentee, offer advice related to their goals, get to know them, and provide opportunities as appropriate for the mentee's professional growth."

5. Mentorship as Distinct from Other Academic Relationships

Mentorship encompasses other academic relationships (i.e., advising and supervision) but goes beyond it. Where advising and supervision are often task-oriented and tied to institutional and programmatic requirements, mentorship is much more expansive and holistic and can include identity development, personal growth, socialization into the profession, and ongoing encouragement.

> "As someone who suffers pretty strongly from imposter syndrome, good mentorship for me includes inviting me into spaces to collaborate or suggesting places where I might belong."

Practices: Enacting Mentorship in the College of Education

Through conversations with faculty, staff, and students, five central practices have emerged as essential for building a culture of mentorship in our college. In each practice, we include quoted comments from the college retreat mentoring feedback survey.

1. Encouraging a Collaborative Approach

Mentorship should not be top-down. Instead, we aim to promote co-learning, where mentors and mentees grow together. Faculty and students described this as moving away from a deficit model toward one grounded in mutual respect.

> "Mentors should 'open their window' to the mentee to see what the mentor is thinking and doing."

2. Defining Responsibilities and Expectations

A strong mentoring relationship begins with clarity. Faculty and students recommended formal tools such as mentorship agreements or checklists that outline expectations, responsibilities, and timelines.

> "Graduate School Mutual Agreement Form for mentors."

> "Checklist points for the process of the mentorship, matching with mentor and mentee. What are the milestones and are we meeting them?"

3. Fostering Open Communication and Feedback

Growth-oriented, respectful feedback is essential to mentorship. When communication is open, it builds trust and allows for honest reflection on progress and challenges.

> "Mutual commitment and follow-through are essential because students have expectations. It is unclear whether there are supportive spaces where expectations can be revisited and clarified."

4. Adapting to Diverse Needs

Mentorship must be culturally responsive and recognize the varied identities and circumstances of mentors and mentees. This includes attention to race, gender, career stage, and professional roles.

> "Culturally responsive practice — how do mentors and mentees from different cultures communicate?"

5. Exploring Multiple Forms of Mentorship

Students and faculty alike emphasized that mentorship should not be limited to a single individual or model. Effective mentorship includes one-on-one relationships, peer mentoring, group mentoring, and networks of support across departments and roles.

> "We would love it to say something about having multiple mentors – not relying on one person for everything. A mentorship web or a mentorship map."

Our commitment to an expansive understanding of mentorship necessitates that we value a broader vision of what mentorship can look like. We seek to encourage effective mentorship relationships that are developed between individuals, among groups, within peer communities, professional networks and with individuals in and outside of the academy. What we know for sure is that the needs of individuals may vary considerably and we are committed to helping each member of our community build the support that fortifies their success. As we continue to reflect on our practice as a community we will learn of new ways to effectively express and build mentorship networks that serve the COE community.

Supports: Sustaining a Mentoring Culture

Sustaining a culture of mentorship requires ongoing institutional support. The following five supports are under development, guided by feedback from across the college.

1. **Leadership Commitment**

Mentorship must be a valuable and salient priority at all levels. This includes messages from leadership, time allocated for mentorship work, and integration of mentorship into strategic planning. Faculty and staff noted that without clear signals from leadership, mentorship can remain undervalued or informal. Embedding mentorship into departmental cultures, workload policies, and annual goal setting is key.

2. **Developing Mentorship Metrics**

Without creating unnecessary burdens, we are exploring flexible ways to evaluate mentorship quality and engagement across roles. Suggestions from faculty included the creation of reflective mentorship statements, simple tracking forms, or structured feedback opportunities for mentees. Metrics should be adaptable to informal and formal mentorship contexts.

> "Encouraging reflection and growth when supportive mentorship is lacking—this does not mean keeping them from being mentors. Often, those who do harm are simply 'released' from responsibilities. They need to recognize the harm and work towards repair."

3. **Long-Term Structures**

To ensure sustainability, we propose establishing a Mentorship Advisory Board. This board would guide the development and implementation of mentorship initiatives, track progress, and connect mentorship efforts across departments and roles. The board could also coordinate mentoring recognition efforts, professional development, and program assessment.

4. **Providing Training & Resources**

Faculty, staff, and students expressed strong interest in professional development opportunities. These may include book studies, interactive workshops, video examples, FAQs, and guides. One suggestion included redirecting time from less essential meetings to mentor-mentee events. Others proposed flexible training options across multiple modalities (e.g., Zoom, text-based, asynchronous learning).

> "Faculty are overworked and cannot do the work needed for mentoring, too. What if we canceled a monthly meeting and instead invited students for lunch, allowing time and space for mentoring?"

5. **Recognition & Incentives**

Mentorship contributions should be formally acknowledged. Ideas included meaningful integration of mentorship into annual reviews (i.e., reflecting effective mentoring beyond number counts of advising and supervision), developing college- or department-level awards, and tying mentorship to workload adjustments or service credit. Recognition must include PTK faculty, staff, and those contributing through informal mentorship pathways.

"Give credit to mentors for their invisible work."

"Put systems in place for PTK faculty that exist now for TTK faculty advancement. It could bring more perceived value to the work PTK faculty do and dissolve barriers between ranks."

Stakeholder Feedback: Voices from the Community

Our work has been shaped directly by student, staff, and faculty input. We conducted a mentoring feedback survey, breakout discussions at a February 2025 faculty workshop, and small group and whole group discussions at an April 2025 graduate student workshop. Across these efforts, we heard consistent themes, as well as unique perspectives based on role and experience. What follows is a synthesis of this feedback, organized around seven major insights.

1. Mentorship Is Transformational When Done Well

Graduate students repeatedly emphasized that effective mentorship has the power to positively transform their academic, professional, and personal lives.

> "Proper mentorship is transformational (positively)."

> "Positive transformation can enlighten or empower you."

This underscores the need for consistent, high-quality mentorship experiences that foster confidence, open doors, and provide a sense of belonging.

2. Faculty and Students Want Clarity and Mutual Commitment

Both groups voiced a desire for mentorship agreements or checklists to help define the relationship. While many mentor-mentee relationships thrive organically, participants noted that mentorship can falter without clear boundaries and expectations. These comments directly reinforce the practice outlined earlier in this report around "Defining Responsibilities and Expectations" — a call for shared clarity at the outset of mentoring relationships, supported by tools such as mentorship agreements and shared goal setting. While many mentor-mentee relationships thrive organically, participants noted that mentorship can falter without clear boundaries and expectations.

> "Mentorship is not consistent, so progress is not consistent."

> "Accountability is needed because students have expectations. Don't know if there is a safe space for accountability to happen."

3. Peer Mentorship Is Often Undervalued, Yet Critical

Students noted that their peers are often the most helpful in navigating the day-to-day challenges of graduate school, especially when faculty have limited availability.

> "Sometimes, I feel peers are more supportive than faculty and advisors in helping me navigate graduate school. When I was looking for an internship, peers helped me in preparing for interviews."

Faculty, too, mentioned the importance of mentorship that goes beyond one-to-one pairings and includes peer support and distributed mentoring networks.

4. Culturally Responsive Mentorship Is Essential

Breakout group participants flagged the need for intentional, culturally responsive mentorship practices. They asked how mentors and mentees from different backgrounds can communicate effectively and called for training that addresses identity, culture, and power dynamics.

> "Culturally responsive practice — how do mentors and mentees from different cultures communicate?"

5. Informal Mentorship Labor Must Be Acknowledged

Faculty shared that informal mentoring — spontaneous meetings, emotional support, and peer mentoring among colleagues — is valuable but often invisible.

> "Workload seems to only recognize formal mentorship. How do we recognize informal mentorship?"

> "Mentorship is service, and faculty who do it are completing an important service that takes time and energy. Currently, this extra labor is not being honored in tenure/advancement/promotion conversations. This is a problem."

6. Students Need More Entry Points to Mentorship

Graduate students asked how mentorship could be made more accessible, especially across departments or programs where faculty-student ratios are high. To address this need, the college plans to develop an online mentorship network that will help students identify mentors based on specific areas of expertise, availability, and interest. This network will provide more visibility into who is available to mentor on particular topics and create opportunities beyond one's immediate advisor or department.

> "When mentorship is lacking in the classroom & faculty have limited hours, where can students go to get their cups filled?"

Ideas included mentorship networks, more visibility into who is available to mentor on specific topics, and mentorship opportunities beyond one's immediate advisor.

7. Faculty Called for Flexibility in Mentorship Models

Faculty raised questions about how to structure mentoring without creating unnecessary rigidity. Many voiced support for a menu of mentorship options and the ability to recognize different models.

"Cultivating structures: how do we know which is the right model? Or should it be a mix of all?"

Implementation Plan: 2025–2026

Summer 2025

- Finalize and post the mentorship Values, Practices, and Supports on a prominently accessible college webpage.
- Begin planning and logistics for book study and professional development workshops.
- Build the infrastructure for the online mentorship network (directory and matching system).

Fall 2025 and Spring 2026

- Launch professional development for faculty:
  - Book Study: *On Being a Mentor* (Johnson & Griffin, 2024)
  - Faculty workshops on effective, inclusive, and collaborative mentoring.
- Launch graduate student PD workshops focused on navigating mentorship, building productive mentor-mentee relationships, clarifying expectations, and identifying mentorship needs. These sessions will be co-facilitated by faculty and advanced graduate students, drawing on lived experience and examples of best practices. (Johnson & Griffin, 2025)
  - Graduate student workshops on effective, inclusive, and collaborative mentoring.
- Launch graduate student PD workshops focused on navigating mentorship.
- Form two committees to serve as a proto-mentorship advisory board. The first committee will include staff and faculty (including PTK) to explore such things as compensation, recognition, and workload integration. The second committee will be a graduate student committee to think about mentoring, communicating needs and goals, and professional development.
- Collect mid-year feedback from faculty, staff, and students.
- Evaluate the initial implementation of the online mentorship network.
- Proto-advisory committees present draft recommendations.
- Plan adjustments and sustainability strategies for 2026–2027.

Conclusion

Through intentional listening, shared values, and concrete planning, the College of Education is taking meaningful steps to seed a culture of mentorship. Faculty, staff, and students have made clear that mentorship matters deeply to their success, sense of belonging, and professional growth. This initiative reflects not only a recognition of that value, but a commitment to do more — to make mentorship salient, equitable, and sustainable across the college.

What began with a core group of faculty and a graduate student representative has evolved into a college-wide conversation. The process of drafting this plan, holding workshops, and reviewing feedback revealed a deep desire to recognize the complexity and diversity of mentorship experiences. We heard clearly that mentorship cannot be left to chance, and that it must be supported through formal programs, informal opportunities, professional development, and institutional recognition.

The plan outlined here is not an end point but a beginning. As we implement the action steps — from building mentorship infrastructure on our website to launching new professional development experiences — we will continue to learn from one another and adapt. Faculty, students, staff, and administrators each have a role to play.

Looking ahead, the college will identify mechanisms for ongoing assessment of mentorship practices, with input from the Mentorship Advisory Board, the PTK and Staff Committees, and community surveys. This feedback will be used to refine strategies, ensure continued responsiveness to evolving needs, and align mentorship efforts with broader college goals. Together, we can cultivate an environment where mentorship not only exists, but thrives as a source of empowerment, connection, and professional growth for all members of our college community.