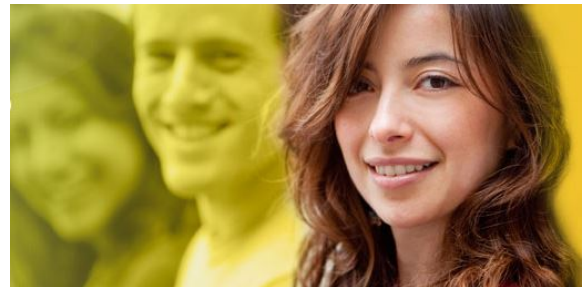


# DESIGNING A UNIVERSITY MENTORING PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS & ALUMNI

## PLANNING = UNIVERSITY MENTORING SUCCESS

Starting a mentoring program for your university's students and/or alumni is no small endeavor. Mentoring programs can be an essential component of the education experience, resulting in:

- ✓ Student career planning and improved graduate job placement rates
- ✓ Career networking for advice, knowledge, and connections for students and alumni
- ✓ Tighter alumni engagement with your university



Make sure your university mentoring program starts off right with these key program planning tips.

### 1. DEFINE YOUR PROGRAMS AND OBJECTIVES, AND SECURE LEADERSHIP SUPPORT

Will your program improve job placement rates for new graduates? Or will it connect alumni for the purposes of career development? Will you create multiple mentoring programs – student/student, student/alumni, and alumni/alumni? Whatever your program goals, you would be surprised by the number of mentoring programs without clear objectives or strong buy-in. Such programs often struggle because there is no consensus of what success looks like for student and alumni participants. Good objectives are SMART - specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound. For example, “The goal of our mentoring program is to prepare students to enter the workforce and have 90% of senior-status program participants placed in a full-time job within 4 months of graduating.” Objectives provide direction to program participants and help departmental staff and professors understand why they should offer their support.

*Some universities create a pipeline of mentoring for the entire university experience.*



## 2. FIND STRONG, PASSIONATE LEADERSHIP SUPPORT

Make sure to identify a senior leader such as a dean who strongly believes in the program and is willing to serve as its champion. This person will prove to be a critical resource and advocate. Selecting the right program director is also critical to your mentoring program. A strong program director doesn't guarantee success. But a weak one will guarantee underwhelming results. Program directors provide essential ongoing support, training and advising to participants. They identify opportunities to engage students and alumni and troubleshoot issues, working with others within career services to make ongoing adjustments to keep the program thriving. They also are instrumental in promoting the program to potential participants and serve as the programs' ambassador (along with the champion) to the department or college. Passion, excellent communication and organizational skills are a must. Those within career services will often have experience guiding and advising students to help them find professional mentors.

## 3. BUILD FLEXIBILITY INTO THE PROGRAM

Successful university mentoring programs balance the dueling needs of structure and flexibility. A level of formality is needed within the mentoring process, participant training, progress tracking, and communication to help the program run smoothly. Yet mentoring is about individual student or alumni learning and growth, which means participant needs will vary in outcomes sought and preferred methods of learning. When planning a mentoring program, identify areas that require flexibility and build them into the program. Areas to consider include: mentoring format (one-to-one, group), duration, and participant interaction tools. Many university programs have a blended structure, whereby they allow students and alumni more flexibility in scheduling, in order to build stronger relationships and open communication in less formal settings.



*Will your mentoring program be one-to-one or a group mentoring format?*

## 4. PUT YOUR MARKETING HAT ON

When new mentoring programs are introduced in a university, there is generally natural enthusiasm and interest. Yet this enthusiasm doesn't always translate into high participation rates. A common reason is the absence of effective promotion. Don't assume potential alumni mentors and student mentees understand the benefits. For many, this will be their first opportunity to participate in mentoring. You will need to convince them participating is worth their time and effort through testimonial videos and info sessions. Beyond participants, key leaders and faculty need to be educated on the benefits of the program and professional value to the students. Promotional avenues can include using a variety of

student and alumni media resources, such as student newspapers, websites, social media pages, and student organization partnerships.

## 5. THINK WIN-WIN

Consider the needs of your program mentors. Building a solid base of mentors can be a challenge. It is important to understand the positive and negative factors that impact mentor participation. If your mentors are alumni, connect with them through respective alumni organizations to identify their needs and issues. Once you have identified them, look for creative ways to reinforce positive drivers and lower the hurdles of negative ones throughout the mentoring process. For example, alumni mentors are often busy professionals with limited time to spend. How can you help mentors be more efficient with the time they have to dedicate to mentoring students? Also consider recognition and reward strategies for mentor participants. Formally recognizing mentor involvement can be very motivating to those mentors and help attract new ones. Communicate how mentoring can benefit their current job as well and how their organization will relate to a younger generation of future employees.

## 6. PREPARE PARTICIPANTS FOR SUCCESS

Productive mentoring doesn't just happen. Provide training and administrative support to mentors and mentees regarding the programs' and individuals' goals, participant roles, mentoring best practices, and your mentoring process. Help mentors and mentees develop and clarify their own objectives. The need for training and guidance doesn't end after the initial orientation. Provide tips and best practices throughout the mentoring program to help participants stay on track and get the most out of the program. Utilize platforms like social media, group lectures and webinars for alumni and students to participate in as opportunities for further engagement and learning from the mentoring process.

## 7. EMBRACE THE ROLE OF MATCHMAKER

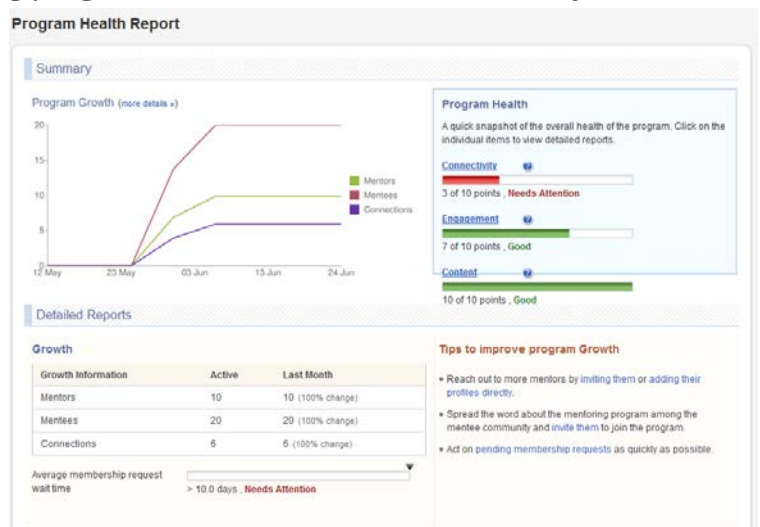


For mentoring to thrive, a solid relationship needs to form between a mentor and mentee. A critical step in the mentoring process is matching mentors to mentees. For example, in a student-alumni mentoring program, consider giving students a say in the matching process by allowing them to select a particular mentor or list their top three choices based on their desired career industry. Mentoring management software like

Chronus Mentor can improve and speed up the matching process for any size program, especially with a large volume of students. Through intelligent profile matching functionality, suitable mentors are recommended based on students' professional career aspirations and personality compatibility.

## 8. TRACK, MEASURE, LISTEN AND TUNE

How will you know if your university mentoring program is a success? You won't unless you track program and connection metrics and ask for feedback. At the program level, build metrics around defined program objectives and mentoring relationship goals (see Tip #1 above). Also, be sure to assess the outcomes of individual mentor and mentee connections. One of the easiest ways to measure success and capture feedback is through surveys. Ask all participants how well the mentoring program met their personal and professional development goals. Also ask them for their ideas for improving the program for future students and/or alumni.



*Software like Chronus Mentor can help you track program progress and generate metrics.*

## 9. BRING CLOSURE TO INDIVIDUAL MENTORING CONNECTIONS

The end of the school year signals a transition period for students, as they often return home or find an internship or job for the summer. While this is a natural ending point for a mentoring program, it doesn't necessarily mean the mentor relationship has to end there. Ending a program with a reception or recognition event is a more formal way to end the program for the year or term. Provide an opportunity for both mentors and mentees to reflect upon what was learned, discuss next steps for students, and provide feedback. It is important as an administrator to encourage lasting relationships among students and their mentors that can extend beyond the formal mentoring program and into their professional careers.

## 10. BROADCAST SUCCESSES

After a mentoring program begins, the focus naturally shifts into operating the program and keeping it running smoothly. Keep in mind, there are likely many more potential participants out there waiting for signs that joining the program is worth their time and effort. Continually demonstrate the value of the program, recognize participant contributions and spotlight successes. Update websites and social media pages with highlights from effective student and/or alumni partnerships. These efforts will bring energy to the program, expand participation and increase overall support within the university.



## CONCLUSION

Now that you've learned a few best practices for making your university mentoring program a success, we hope you'll consider Chronus Mentor software as your mentoring program management tool. Chronus Mentor is software to easily start, manage, and measure mentoring programs online. With Chronus Mentor, you can drive participant engagement while simplifying program administration, resulting in a more engaging, cost-effective student and alumni mentoring experience. This configurable, cloud-based solution is ideal for use by corporations, government entities, and associations in addition to academic institutions.

## ABOUT CHRONUS CORPORATION

Chronus is a leading provider of talent and career development software for enterprise-scale organizations. Chronus empowers mentoring, coaching, and continuous learning initiatives by combining cloud-based software and program best practices to provide a complete talent development solution. Chronus Mentor facilitates student and alumni mentoring partnerships worldwide at leading academic institutions including the University of Colorado's Leeds School of Business, the University of Washington, MIT Sloan School of Management, and Georgetown University.

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## MORE INFORMATION



For further information on starting a mentoring program, or to schedule a demo of Chronus Mentor, visit [www.chronus.com](http://www.chronus.com).

