Making the Most of Higher Education Partnerships

Local colleges and universities have always been valuable resources for youth mentoring programs, providing an abundant source of potential mentors and access to a wide variety of services, facilities, and even funds. College students, in particular, have long been tapped to serve as mentors—recent research by the Corporation for National and Community Service found that almost 24 percent of college students served as mentors in 2005 and that volunteers age 20–24 are the most likely demographic group to engage in mentoring youth (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2006; Foster-Bey, Dietz, & Grimm, 2006). College campuses also have many diverse cultural, educational, and recreational resources that can support your mentoring match activities. Throughout the mentoring field, there is a growing trend toward involving not only student mentors, but other significant higher education resources—a trend that Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools (OSDFS) mentoring grantees can build on to expand and enhance their programs.

However, making connections to higher education institutions is not easy. Universities are often large, labyrinthine entities, and it can be difficult for programs to find an "in" to the campus and its institutions. Even when programs do make a connection to a local college or university, they often think in terms of limited support, mostly focusing on recruiting college students as mentors. This fact sheet examines some of the nuances of creating meaningful partnerships with higher education institutions, exploring the many different "entry points" to a university campus that can lead to collaborative activities and the diverse resources that universities can bring to bear on local youth mentoring programs.

Collaboration Is a Two-Way Street

All collaborations between organizations must be mutually beneficial to be successful. But partnerships created with youth mentoring programs are too often thought of as uni-directional: the program has certain needs (mentors, funds, etc.) and the partner—be it a business, service organization, or college—can fill them. Certainly, higher education institutions have a lot to offer a local mentoring program (see the sidebar on page 2 for a listing of the types of support a university partnership can provide). But mentoring programs also have a lot of benefits they can provide to higher education partners:

■ Connecting the university's mission to the community

■ Providing college students with real-world learning opportunities

■ Creating interest in the university among potential future students

■ Generating positive public relations and marketing opportunities

■ A chance to validate new academic and youth development theories in a live program setting

■ Retention of college students through the provision of meaningful volunteer opportunities

The key to creating effective partnerships with universities is to develop collaborative activities that meet the motivations and needs of both parties. Regardless of which of the following campus groups you work with,

always ask the question, "Are we giving our higher education partners something meaningful in return for their support?"

Campus Groups You Can Approach for Collaborations

Looking at the sidebar on this page, it becomes clear that no single approach can access all the resources that a college might be able to provide. Maximizing higher education partnerships depends on working with multiple campus groups to access the many types of support your program needs. The following campus groups are those most commonly approached by youth mentoring programs, as they align most closely with the types of collaborative support they may need.

Community Service Office (or equivalent entity)

Most colleges and universities have created a Community Service or Volunteerism Office that arranges, approves, and monitors campus-community collaborative activities. These offices represent a logical starting point in maximizing your partnerships as they often have in-depth knowledge of what the institution can provide and the authority to allocate resources or agree to formal partnerships. Even if you find other "entry points" into a university, you may have to go through this office to formalize your partnership. These offices are especially common at colleges and universities that have a community service requirement for graduation. Some university departments have their own community service programs, so you may want to do some research on the school's Web site.

If the institution you are approaching does not have a formal community service office, the Office of Student Affairs can often provide similar support. When contacting these offices, always have a clear idea of the type of support you would like to receive (for example, 50 students signing up as mentors, or access to the campus library for your matches), but be sure to ask for their suggestions on additional types of support and resources they can offer.

Types of Support a University Can Provide

Universities are incredibly resource-rich environments and there is almost no end to the types of support they can provide a youth mentoring program. The following list covers some of the more common types, while the worksheet in this fact sheet can help programs identify specific collaborative activities in these areas, as well as selling points that can help facilitate the partnership.

- College students serve as mentors (be sure to explore ways of keeping college mentors involved through times when school is not in session and across multiple school years, as these have been shown to be key to school-based mentoring success [Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, Feldman, and McMaken, 2007])

- Evaluation of mentoring program outcomes and services

- Development of curriculum for training mentors

- Designing meaningful activities for mentors and youth to engage in

- Assisting with program management (commonly tied to practicum or internship programs for graduate students)

- In-kind resources such as office space or equipment

- Access to campus libraries, athletic facilities, or other spaces where matches could meet

- College exploration opportunities for participating youth

- Formal student-led service learning projects (often coordinated with faculty members or in conjunction with coursework)

- Assistance with developing marketing materials (print or electronic)

- Providing professional development training for your program staff to improve their skills and abilities

Presidents and Deans

University administrators, especially presidents of specific colleges or schools within a university, can be excellent champions for your mentoring program. They exert tremendous influence on a campus and their buy-in can create opportunities to work more directly with faculty and students. They can act as advocates for mentoring, both on the campus and in the community, by setting service requirements for students, allocating resources, publicly recognizing students who mentor, and even doing simple things like writing letters of support or op-ed pieces for the local newspaper highlighting the need for mentoring in the community. Administrators can be tough to contact or get support from directly, but if you can find an "in"—perhaps through other organizations or philanthropic activities they are already involved with—their support can make a huge difference in leveraging resources throughout the campus. Be sure to send administrators you are "courting" ongoing information about your program's success (especially if it involves positive media coverage) and keep asking them to consider how their campus and students can contribute to the meaningful impacts your program is already producing.

Faculty and Students

Faculty members and students (especially graduate students, who often can take on more advanced projects) can work with your program to provide highly skilled, hands-on support in a number of ways, often by integrating collaborative activities directly into the content of a course, such as:

- Providing graduate students to help run your program as part of a practicum or internship

- Conducting program evaluation services as part of a student research project

- Helping design curriculum and mentor training materials

- Developing marketing materials and other business communication pieces

- Encouraging students to implement a service learning project with your mentees

Faculty members can also allocate meeting space, provide access to libraries, computer labs, and other campus resources, and simply encourage their students to serve as mentors. Common departments, or schools, within universities that mentoring programs collaborate with include:

- Social work
- Education
- Sociology
- Psychology (particularly child or adolescent)
- Business management/marketing
- Public administration
- Art/design

If you explore a collaborative project with a faculty member, make sure that you go through all the proper channels (such as the Community Service Office or equivalent) to ensure that you have the institution's full support. The sidebar on the previous page can give you some ideas about the types of activities you may want to pursue with the help of a faculty member or graduate student.

Student Government and Clubs

Student groups are also an easy entry point into a university's resources. There are many diverse student groups on a typical campus—some may simply provide the types of mentors you have targeted while others may be able to help with program marketing. Student groups can help recruit mentors on campus by putting up fliers, making presentations, staffing a booth, sending messages on student listservs and message boards, or even organizing a campus-wide "Mentor Day" celebration (Maxwell, 1994). They may be able to help in other ways, such as taking groups of mentees on tours of the campus or showcasing career options. Working with many different student groups is a great way to add diversity to your program, especially if you are recruiting mentors from cultural-, ethnic-, or religious-themed student organizations. Once again, these groups can also provide your matches with access to campus resources such as meeting space or help organize special events or recreational opportunities for the youth you serve.

Fraternities and Sororities

"Greek" organizations often have strong community service components and can be an excellent source of mentors and other support. Often, fraternal organizations sponsor "adopt-a-cause" efforts, where the entire house rallies in support of a specific community program or problem. These efforts can be excellent fundraising and marketing opportunities for your program. You may be able to get broad support from many fraternal groups by soliciting the school's Pan-Hellenic Council or other organizing body.

Alumni Associations

Alumni associations can be a great source of both mentors and support from the business community. Through their business connections, alumni can provide career exploration or summer employment opportunities for the youth you serve. They can also speak to groups of mentees about the value of education and the role mentors played in their own journey.

Campus Media

Student newspapers, radio stations, blogs, and other print and electronic media can all be valuable tools for recruiting campus mentors and generating interest in your program. Media campaigns can coordinate nicely with other recruitment efforts to maximize your exposure across the campus. These media outlets may offer free or reduced price public service announcements or ad space. One effective method of using campus media is to have current or former student mentors give testimonials about the experience, encouraging other students to experience the benefits of mentoring a child. Alternatively, campus media can be an ideal place for university presidents and administrators to advocate for student involvement in mentoring.

Quick Activities for Exploring Campus Connections

The following strategies can help you identify various campus resources and potential contact points to begin exploring partnerships:

1. Go through each semester's course catalog and look for courses (especially graduate level) that might have a direct tie-in to youth mentoring or for faculty members who do a lot of work in a related youth area.

2. Frequently read student newspapers and other campus media for student activities and groups that might have a mentoring or youth development tie-in.

3. Inventory your staff, mentors, program partners, and even parents of participating youth to see if any of them have campus connections that could be the spark for a new partnership.

4. Research local higher education institutions to see which require service projects as a graduation requirement (or simply sponsor service learning activities for students).

5. Create a timeline that charts the school's calendar and identifies specific points where mentor recruitment drives and other activities would have maximum impact.

6. Invite a faculty member or administrator to join your Board of Directors or Advisory Council.

7. Call or send an introductory letter to the Office of Student Affairs or the Community Service Office asking for an exploratory meeting to see how your program can partner with the university to provide students with unique learning and volunteer opportunities.

8. Periodically review the campus events calendar to identify campus events that invite community involvement, especially ones where you might be able to have a booth or make a presentation. Finding reasons to simply be on campus can help open doors to new partnership opportunities.

Worksheet: Exploring Campus Connections

University/College: _____

Contacts we have to the campus:

Program person	University contact/ connection	Resources/support contact can provide	Next steps for partnering
Example: Sammy Johnson (mentor)	Brother-in-law (Jeff Jones) works in the graduate school of social work	Can approach other faculty members about incorporating a practicum for graduate students in which they work for our program in some capacity (ideally conducting an evaluation or assisting in revamping our mentor training curriculum)	Jeff has arranged a meeting with 4 interested professors on July 14th. We need to develop specific project ideas in preparation for the meeting.

Worksheet: Exploring Campus Connections (con.)

Campus groups to approach:

Group	Specific contact/ partners	What they can provide	What we can offer them	Next steps for partnering
Community Service Office				
Presidents/ Administrators				
Faculty/Grad Students				
Student Government/Clubs	Example: Latino Student Union Main contact: Angela Alvarez, 909-808-1234	Can provide: Latino/a mentors (ongoing) Organize group outing for matches to the on-campus exhibit of Latino art and culture (museum, June) Mentors and youth can meet at the student union Assist with campus-wide recruitment by putting up fliers and writing about mentoring in the student newspaper	Chance to give back to the local Latino community Service credits toward graduation (for mentors) Recognition in our mentoring program newsletter and at annual banquet	Work with Angela to develop a presentation to be made to the group about ways they can support our program Contact Student Affairs Office to let them know we are making these arrangements
Fraternal Organizations				
Alumni Associations				
Campus Media				
Campus Ministries/Pastor				

Campus Pastor or Ministries

Many campus ministries have a strong tradition of serving the community and providing students with an opportunity to "give back." As with approaching any religious group for support, it is critical to get the initial buy-in of pastors, ministers, or other religious leaders as they can provide encouragement for others to become involved. When approaching campus religious groups for partnership opportunities, try to match your program's outcomes and values to theirs—there are likely to be many logical connections between the current community involvement of the ministry and the types of social, economic, and educational impacts your program is trying to achieve.

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As you begin researching colleges and universities in your area, keep in mind that some may be more naturally inclined toward community service than others (Jesuit universities, for example, often have strong service requirements and make it a real campus priority). These "partnership ready" institutions may bring the most success right away, but just about every potential college or university partner has something valuable to offer. Finding the right fit between what you need and what they can offer will maximize their involvement and strengthen both your program and the university.

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