



Mentoring in  
Meaningful Relationships  
**ELON UNIVERSITY**

# MENTORING INITIATIVES AND DESIGN TEAM FINAL REPORT

Abridged Version

## VISION STATEMENT

When we mentor in meaningful relationships,  
we meet people where they are to help them  
find and achieve their purpose

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# MENTORING IN MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS

The Boldly Elon strategic plan aims to enhance mentoring and relationship-building initiatives, positioning the university as a national leader in these areas. This groundbreaking mentoring model will amplify the transformative power of student-centered relationships integral to an Elon education. All students will be encouraged to cultivate developmental networks that include peers, staff, faculty, and external mentors. This lifelong ecosystem of mentors will become a hallmark of an Elon education, guiding students in integrating their learning experiences and developing essential skills for the future.

Relationship-rich institutions value and champion the development and growth of multiple meaningful relationships, which fuel an engaged education (Felten & Lambert, 2020). Meaningful relationships have been defined as significant connections that contain mutual trust and respect, interest alignment, and an exchange of positive regard that not only signals appreciation but also makes the individuals involved actually feel valued ([Centerstone, 2023](#)). Meaningful relationships include a variety of influential roles, and the people, including peers, who serve in one or more of these roles share a commitment to creating pathways for sustained growth and future success by using their abilities, knowledge, and lived experience to generate moments of reflection, connection, skill acquisition, and character and identity development.

The goal of a collegiate experience is the successful navigation through the institution enroute to a unique, meaningful, and dynamic purpose, career, and life. While colleges and institutions are often celebrated for their numerous opportunities, meaningful connections, structured programming, pathways, and gateways, such as orientation and first-year seminars, these experiences tend to be concentrated in students' first and final years with the assumption that those relationships flow through the middle years. Additionally, historical exclusion in education has led to access and equity barriers, which means some members of the community may need more structured support at critical times (Longmire-Avital, 2020). The powerful benefits of meaningful relationships for overall well-being (Waldinger & Schulz, 2023) and inclusive belonging are consistently supported across various research studies and assessments. Multiple meaningful relationships that are intentionally constructed and maintained are often cited as factors in ongoing success (Lombardi et al., 2016; Van der Zanden et al., 2018), resiliency (Mai et al., 2021; McCray & Joseph-Richard, 2020), and life-long learning (Moore et al., 2022). Students, faculty, and staff have the potential to use these multiple relationships as anchors that support learning, retention, and personal growth in the pursuit of purpose and overall meaning-making. Furthermore, the skills required to be a successful relationship generator are in alignment with the goals and values that are central to an engaged and compassion-centered education.

Through facilitated listening sessions, the ACE self-study, and discussions leading to the Boldly Elon strategic plan, Elon community members consistently emphasized the importance of equipping all students, faculty, and staff with actionable skills for mentoring and being mentored. Through meaningful relationships, students should develop networks that support lifelong learning and transformation beyond graduation. These efforts aim to foster outcomes related to self-awareness, purpose and goal clarification, civic and global engagement, personal health and well-being, and the acquisition of essential skills such as writing, speaking, creative problem-solving, collaboration, intercultural learning, data competency, media literacy, ethics, and personal and professional agility.

The Elon University Mentoring Initiative Design Team ([MDT](#)) was tasked with developing, fostering, and elevating strategic partnerships and programs across the institution. The aim was to provide an attainable

path by which the university could be an exemplar of a relationship-driven ecosystem that is committed to providing all members of the university community with sustainable and equitably accessible skills and opportunities to build and benefit from mentoring in meaningful relationships. The MDT embraced the belief that high-impact mentoring in meaningful relationships, not only drives equitable student success, but success for a community composed of multiple stakeholders: students, faculty, staff, alumni, family members, and community partners.

Starting in the fall of 2022, MDT members engaged with multiple members of the campus community to build off the exploration and assessment work of the institution's Learner Success Lab [ACE Report, 2022](#). Findings from this groundbreaking work confirmed that engagement in meaningful relationships that foster mentoring is found across all levels of the institution. Elon has numerous opportunities and initiatives, such as fellows and cohorts, first-year experience programming, resource groups, and centers that play a significant role in generating opportunities for meaningful relationships to flourish. The campus culture endorses relationship building through the integration of curricular and co-curricular initiatives both on campus and beyond, as well as in the leveraging of high impact practices and student employment. However, in practice at Elon mentoring is often siloed and lacks consistent framing, intentionality, accessibility, and integrative transitions or touchpoints. Consistent language, training (skills and professional development), and shared goals and outcomes were the primary needs. During the first year of its work, the MDT, in collaboration with campus partners considered: How can we harness already successful programs and opportunities into intentional pathways to facilitate connection and network building across all years of an Elon student's career? In what ways can we refine our current assessment strategies to capture our efforts and outcomes? Where do members of our community, specifically students, begin to map and plot their relationships (Vandermaas-Peeler et al., 2023)? Building on the [definition](#) that our ACE Learner Success Lab developed for mentoring, how do we craft shared understanding to assist the cultivation of other types of dynamic and important meaningful relationships? The efforts to answer these questions led to the development of a Mentoring in Meaningful Relationships framework that we believe can challenge the campus community to craft new and/or better integrate current institutional systems that will both encourage students, faculty, and staff to join our community (recruitment) and subsequently to thrive here (retention). While there are many meaningful relationships that exist, **the crux of this framework was to define mentoring in seven essential meaningful relationships at Elon:** A pivotal step in the development process of building a sustainable infrastructure for mentoring in meaningful relationships was to identify who (e.g., advisors, experiential learning leaders, peers, resident assistants, faculty, and student life staff) in the current infrastructure were best positioned to do this and how must their work center access, equity, and inclusive excellence. The fact that many individuals support and offer mentoring who are not in traditionally expected roles (Wiggins, 2021) informed the decision to move away from distinct roles and to define instead types of meaningful relationships that any one role could fall within.



## Mentoring in Meaningful Relationships

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1. Mentoring in a **teaching relationship** involves a more experienced individual guiding and supporting a less experienced learner in their academic growth and development. In this context, mentors typically share their knowledge, expertise, and insights with the mentee, helping them navigate challenges, set goals, and refine their skills. The mentor offers constructive feedback, encouragement, and resources to facilitate the mentee's learning process and enhance their own effectiveness as an educator. This relationship often involves regular communication, reflective discussions, and collaborative problem-solving to foster a supportive and enriching learning environment. Ultimately, mentoring in teaching aims to empower students to reach their full potential and maximize their learning experiences.
2. Mentoring in an **advising relationship** involves an experienced individual providing guidance, support, and encouragement to a student seeking advice or assistance in a particular area, such as career development, personal growth, or academic pursuits. In this context, a mentor serves as a trusted source, offering insights, perspective, and wisdom based on their own experiences and expertise navigating the curriculum. Mentoring within an advising relationship generates space for the mentee to clarify their goals, explore various options, and develop action plans to achieve their objectives. Central to the relationship is a commitment to the advisee's growth and academic development. Overall, mentoring in an advising relationship empowers students to make informed decisions, overcome challenges, and realize their full potential as they navigate through the curriculum and their time at Elon.
3. Mentoring in a **coaching relationship** involves a mentor providing guidance, support, and feedback to help a mentee improve their performance, achieve their goals (both short-term and long-term), and unlock their potential. Mentoring in a coaching relationship focuses on facilitating the mentee's self-discovery, problem-solving, and skill development through questioning, active listening, and reflection. Mentoring in a coaching relationship is a collaborative and dynamic process aimed at helping individuals maximize their abilities and opportunities, overcome obstacles, and achieve their personal and professional aspirations. Overall, mentoring in a coaching relationship emphasizes self-awareness, self-directed learning, and the belief that individuals have the resources within themselves to succeed.
4. **Peer mentorship** involves a supportive relationship between individuals who are at similar stages of learning, development, or experience. Peers can offer guidance, encouragement, and assistance to each other based on their experiences, perspectives, and expertise. Peer mentorship is typically characterized by mutual learning and growth. When mentoring takes place within a peer relationship, the mentor can foster a culture of collaboration and support and empower individuals to achieve their goals and reach their full potential through guidance and encouragement. Peer mentors are also pivotal sources of emotional support, such as reassurance when obstacles are encountered and validation of identity as well as belonging.

5. Mentoring in **supervising relationships** involves a supervisor providing guidance, support, and professional development opportunities to their team members. When the supervisor takes on the role of a mentor, they offer advice, feedback, and encouragement to help their supervisees grow and succeed in their roles. Generating and investing in professional development is essential. Supervisors work with their team members to identify each member's individual strengths, areas for improvement, and professional goals, and then provide guidance and support to help them develop the skills and competencies needed to excel in their roles. Additionally, mentoring in the supervisory relationship includes advocacy and building relationship-rich cultures that sustain open communication, trust, and mutual respect. Mentoring in supervising relationships involves the supervisor taking an active interest in the professional growth and development of their team members, providing guidance, support, and resources to help them succeed in their roles and advance in their careers within the organization.
6. Mentoring in an **advocating relationship** involves a mentor actively supporting and promoting the interests, rights, and well-being of an individual or group, often within the institution. The mentor can be a champion, leveraging their influence, resources, and network to advance their mentee's goals and/or address systemic issues. Advocating focused mentorship prioritizes the amplification of mentee voices as well as their perspectives, the creation of opportunities, challenging inequities, and connecting their mentees to relevant stakeholders, allies, and other mentors who can further support their goals and aspirations. Ultimately, when a person mentors in advocating relationships, they are committed to using their position, influence, and expertise to empower others, drive positive change, and create a more inclusive and equitable environment.
7. Mentoring in a **sponsoring relationship** involves a mentor actively advocating for and promoting the career advancement and professional development of their mentee within the institution, their organization, or an industry. Mentoring in sponsorship relationships emphasizes the mentor's active role in creating opportunities and removing barriers to their mentee's success. Mentors who sponsor use their influence, network, and credibility to advocate for their mentees' visibility, recognition, and advancement within the institution. Sponsors ensure that their mentee's accomplishments, talents, and contributions are recognized and valued by key stakeholders, decision-makers, and other influencers within the institution. Mentoring in a sponsorship relationship involves a high level of commitment and investment in the mentee.

In the academic year 2023 – 2024, nine pilots and initiatives were launched to explore how the Mentoring in Meaningful Relationships (MIMR) framework could position mentoring as a vehicle for driving equitable student success. For example, pilots and initiatives included the development of a handbook to enhance the academic advising relationship, accessible professional development, and how peer mentorship can increase retention. Four major competencies essential to high-quality mentoring emerged from conversations on campus and proved their relevance across the multiple pilots. They include the ability to: (1) Cultivate empowered relationships with others, (2) support growth and learning, (3) develop a critical consciousness, and (4) enhance interpersonal skills. Efforts also aimed to address the following question: How can we harness already successful programs and opportunities into intentional pathways to facilitate connection and network-building across all years of a student's collegiate career?

In the following report, we detail the work of the Mentoring Design Team over the academic years 2022-23 and 2023-24. We begin by offering a status report on the state of mentoring at Elon, briefly explaining the work that preceded that of the MDT, and then explain efforts undertaken by the committee to respond to the Charge (Appendix A), noting successes and examining challenges represented by the various Pilot

Programs. We end by offering recommendations that stem from what we learned over the past two years. Importantly, the success of current, ongoing, and future pilots and initiatives is driven by the creation of language, clarity, and skills for mentoring in meaningful relationships. Shared understanding, awareness of opportunities, and ongoing access to skill development are critical for building a cohesive and sustainable mentoring ecosystem. While this work built off activities, identified spaces, and documented needs, it did not create new roles to support the work. This is a key next step in crafting a sustainable infrastructure. The coordination and alignment of efforts need institutional investment in the form of new lines, redistribution of reporting pathways, space, and recognition/compensation that foster cross-institutional synergistic work.

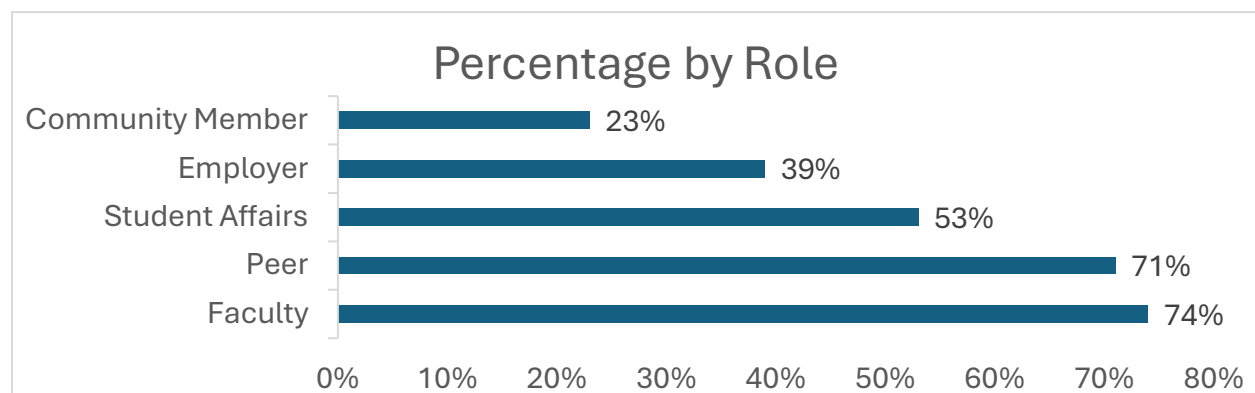
## STATUS REPORT OF MENTORING AT ELON

The Elon University mission statement reflects our commitment to transforming the mind, body, and spirit while fostering freedom of thought and liberty of conscience. Our vibrant learning community is built on meaningful relationships that span classrooms, global study, campus employment, residence halls, and student organizations, involving faculty, staff, coaches, advisors, peers, alumni, and advocates.

### Why Mentoring Now?

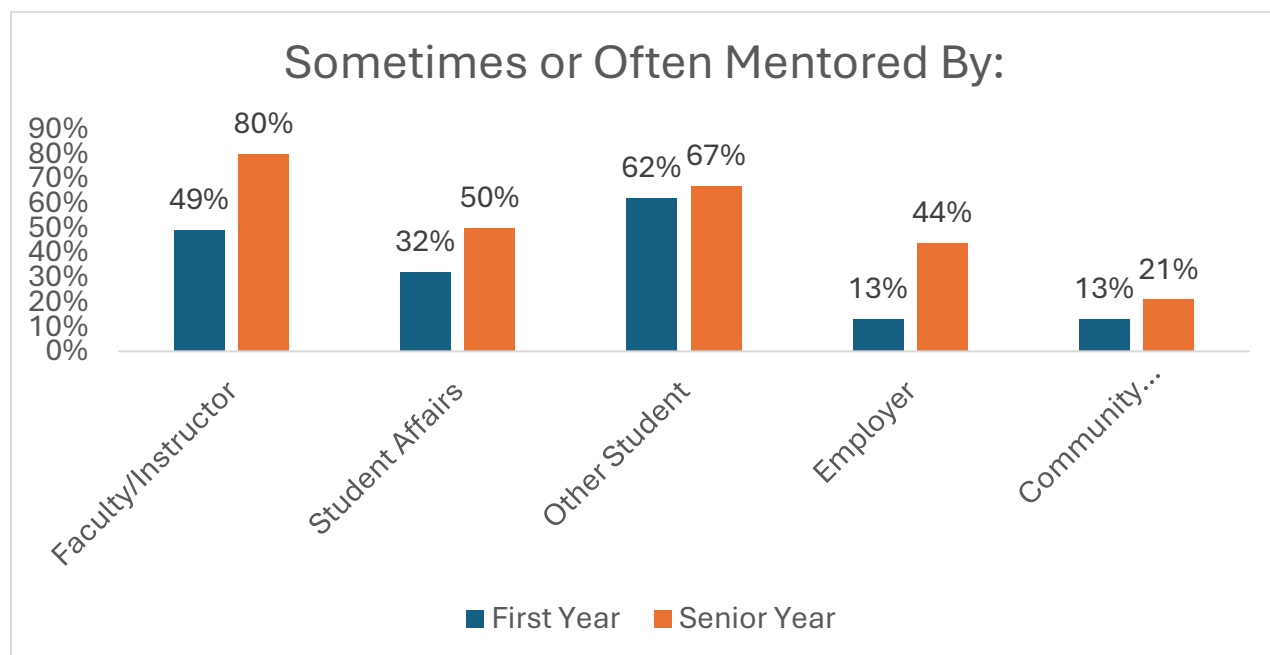
While mentoring is already a purposefully designed outcome of Elon's renowned engaged learning and high impact practices, discussion of enhancing relationships and mentoring dominated the 24-month planning process for the Boldly Elon strategic plan and throughout the work of the Mentoring Design Team. Recognizing and building on our leadership, Boldly Elon calls the university to advance student success by ensuring the outcomes of mentoring relationships are available to all Elon graduates by 2030. The Elon community echoed the value of Elon's relationship-rich environment and identified multiple ways in which this unfolds on our campus and around the world, including after graduation.

Data from the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MISL) and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) informed current benchmarks for access to mentoring at Elon as of fall 2023.



The MISL data revealed that across all undergraduates at Elon, the most frequently engaged with mentors were faculty (approximately 74% indicated that they frequently engaged with a faculty mentor) and peers (approximately 71% indicated that they frequently engaged with a peer mentor).

The NSSE reflected cross-sectional potential gains of mentorship over a four-year period.



As of fall 2023, 80% of Elon seniors identified a faculty mentor in comparison to 49% of first year students. Seniors also identified a student affairs/campus life staff member who they believed was a mentor to them at a greater rate (50%) than first year students (32%). One challenge in interpreting this data is that it is possible that the gains in identifying staff as mentors would be greater than reported if other roles/categories were combined. Finally, the percentage of students reporting peer mentors remains stable over the four years; since seniors reported at significantly higher rates for other types of mentoring, additional attention to peer mentoring might be warranted to create a similar trend for peer mentoring. Important to note is that the rate for identifying a faculty and peer mentor at Elon is higher than the reported rates in the 2021 [Student Voices Survey](#) administered by Inside Higher Ed, College Pulse, and Kaplan. The survey contained the responses of 2003 students from 105 institutions. Approximately 56% of student respondents reported that they had a professor as a mentor and 53% reported having a peer. Overall, 55% of the survey reported having one or more mentors. The rate for reporting a mentor if attending a private 4-year school was 68%. This potential benchmarking data in comparison to available data at Elon, suggests that we are already exceeding national trends for access to mentors.

## Foundational Work: The ACE Mentoring for Learner Success Laboratory

Elon University was extremely fortunate, due to a grant written by Dr. Maureen Vandermaas-Peeler, Professor of Psychology and Director of the Center for Research on Global Engagement, to be accepted into the inaugural cohort of the American Council on Education's (ACE) Learner Success Lab to focus on mentoring. In her November 2020 charge to Elon's ACE steering committee, President Book noted that their efforts would lay the groundwork for the campus' efforts on mentoring, the central component of the Boldly Elon strategic plan. The ACE self-study final report provided a critical starting point for the Mentoring Design Team as it defined a common understanding of the continuum of meaningful relationships on our relationship-rich campus; included foci on how diversity, equity, inclusion must be enhanced; and

considered how the university curriculum, co-curricular offerings, and community partnerships are connected to these efforts.

## Benefits and Characteristics of Meaningful Relationships and Mentoring Networks

The 2022 [ACE self-study and report on mentoring at Elon](#), focused primarily on the characteristics of mentoring relationships within our institution. Increasing scholarly attention to mentoring in higher education environments suggests numerous benefits to everyone involved (Crisp et al., 2010, 2017; Vandermaas-Peeler et al., 2018). Crisp et al. (2017) report on several studies that isolate key benefits like greater retention and completion rates (e.g., Kena et al., 2016), better academic development within programs (Museus & Nevel, 2012), and adjustment to college (Smojver Ažić & Antulic, 2013). In sum, mentoring relationships improve individual and institutional outcomes. Existing studies tend to focus on the most recognized form of mentoring – one-on-one research mentoring – which is also the case for Elon. Some scholars call for more research on how best to perform mentoring, design mentoring infrastructures, and study mentoring effectiveness at curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular levels (Crisp et al., 2017).

Findings from the ACE study reveal that students concurrently craft and encounter supportive contexts, which include faculty, staff, other students, alumni, family, and others that give way to both meaningful and mentoring relationships. A robust definition package from the ACE self-study contained a powerful culmination of best practices and frameworks in research on mentoring in higher education settings. This definition and the accompanying mentoring relationships map are helpful tools in creating an understanding of and language for mentoring, particularly as the MDT worked to expand our campus understanding. The self-study report and our initial MDT work illustrate:

- There are many types of relationships and a vast number of connections currently thriving at Elon.
- Relationships at Elon are the result of explicit and implicit rules of engagement among those involved.
- Relationships within mentoring networks appear at their core to be uplifting, safe, and tailored to reflect the needs and identities of the individuals or groups involved.
- Mentoring relationships reflect a spectrum of intensity related to emotional work, knowledge, and time.

The outcomes of relationships are clear, with the report from the ACE Mentoring self-study committee, previous work of campus scholars, and the past two years of work with the Mentoring Design Team informing the next steps to design and build our mentoring in meaningful relationships infrastructure.

## THE WORK OF THE MENTORING DESIGN TEAM

### Year One

In May 2022, President Book charged the Mentoring Design Team (MDT) to:

- **Envision an infrastructure to provide all students with multiple pathways, skills, and agency to build meaningful relationships and mentoring networks**, and
- Design, pilot, and suggest steps for a multi-year plan devoted to supporting student, faculty, and staff capacities for high-quality mentoring, including but not limited to structures of support,



resources and budgets, integration with other programs and initiatives, and a scaffolded set of structures across the student experience.

## Gathering Campus Input

**Campus Listening Sessions:** During planning week for AY 22-23 and 23-24, the MDT held listening sessions with hundreds of faculty and staff, who shared examples of existing relationships and networks, as well as future needs and concerns. Areas of success regarding meaningful relationships and mentoring included:

1. Initial connection programs, such as first year programming and faculty-staff onboarding through trainings and orientations
2. Cohorted experiences that serve as ideal formats for high quality mentoring
3. Elon's commitment to engaged learning, which is seen as foundational to mentorship at Elon.

### **Four major takeaways related to areas of improvement also emerged:**

1. The need for infrastructure, specifically easing the ability to identify where mentoring is happening and how the work involved can be recognized and equitably compensated
2. Limitations on capacity: One participant asked, "How do we make space for these relationships to take place when we have so much on our plates?" This sentiment was echoed by another question, "when do we get the time and space to build on the deep relationships of mentoring?"
3. The need to increase access while simultaneously considering the burdens faced by historically marginalized/ underrepresented members of the faculty and staff who are often disproportionately tasked to support students, faculty, and staff with shared or similar identities.
4. Faculty and staff also need to be mentored and lack structures, professional development, and recognition.

Finally, these listening sessions also amplified a desire for common language, understanding, definition building, and professional development. There was also a clear call for more required mentoring opportunities and an ability to assess or track the use of mentor networking opportunities.

## Assessing the Current State of Mentoring

To address campus questions that were raised during the listening sessions and to build upon the recommendations from the ACE report, the MDT began with the following sub-committees in Fall 2023:

*The Integration Sub-Committee*, using a range of data collection efforts and working chronologically through the student experience, studied how students are navigating on-ramps and opportunities to seek out, experience, and benefit from short-term and long-lasting mentoring relationships (i.e., existing navigation, access, and integration). Initial recommendations included:

- Establish an early culture of mentorship for inbound students
- Provide universal access to structured mentoring opportunities in the first year
- Thread opportunities to develop relationships and reflect on integrative learning through the Elon experience
- Systematize peer mentoring opportunities as a central component of Elon's mentorship culture
- Centralize infrastructure and develop technology to support scaling of mentoring constellations.

*The Curricular Sub-Committee*, focused on how to engage more students in mentoring within the curriculum. The committee summarized existing findings from the ACE report on campus mentoring efforts

and added new information from additional data collection and analysis, including interview data. Initial findings suggest:

- The most consistent, systematic, and in-depth mentorship in the curriculum happens within structured programs (e.g., Honors, Elon College Fellows).
- Almost no departments or programs evaluate mentorship in a structured and consistent manner (beyond standard SPOTs, which cannot offer anonymity in 4998/4999 courses with single or few students enrolled).
- In many academic programs, staff members often provide essential mentoring and professional development opportunities, such as the Odyssey Scholars.
- Because graduate programs vary widely in terms of duration, structure, programming, and curricula, mentoring occurs in widely different ways.
- Compensation for faculty and staff mentoring of students varies widely across types of mentoring activities.
- Two areas of potential academic related mentoring opportunities are: Course-based Undergraduate Research Experience (CUREs), and Students as Partners work including the Teaching and Learning Apprenticeship model.

*The Co-Curricular Sub-Committee*, focusing on student mentored experiences outside the curricular and major structure, studied Elon and peer institution mentoring initiatives and on-ramps to identify best practices, barriers, and opportunities for synergy and growth. Initial committee findings included:

- High-quality peer mentoring programs now include pay, training, and supervision to ensure access, quality, and accountability; scaffolding or nesting peer mentoring relationships within larger mentoring families or systems; and mentor pairing based on shared experience or identity.
- Additional time and capacity investments or redistributions are needed to advance mentoring (Elon students noted they did not want to be a burden to busy faculty and staff).
- Shared mentoring language, tools, and skill development are needed as well as an understanding of the role that all students, faculty, and staff can play in high-quality mentoring.

*Comprehensive Mapping of Mentoring and Meaningful Relationships on Campus* was completed by Dianna Shandy, of Macalester College. This endeavor yielded robust documentation that mentoring, or mentoring-like activities, are woven throughout the university, which is visualized on the appended Mentor Map data set (Appendix B). High-quality mentoring relationships exist in pockets (some cohort programs, engaged learning programs, majors, co-curricular programs, etc.) at Elon. For example, undergraduate research clearly provides high-quality mentoring to those students who are involved.

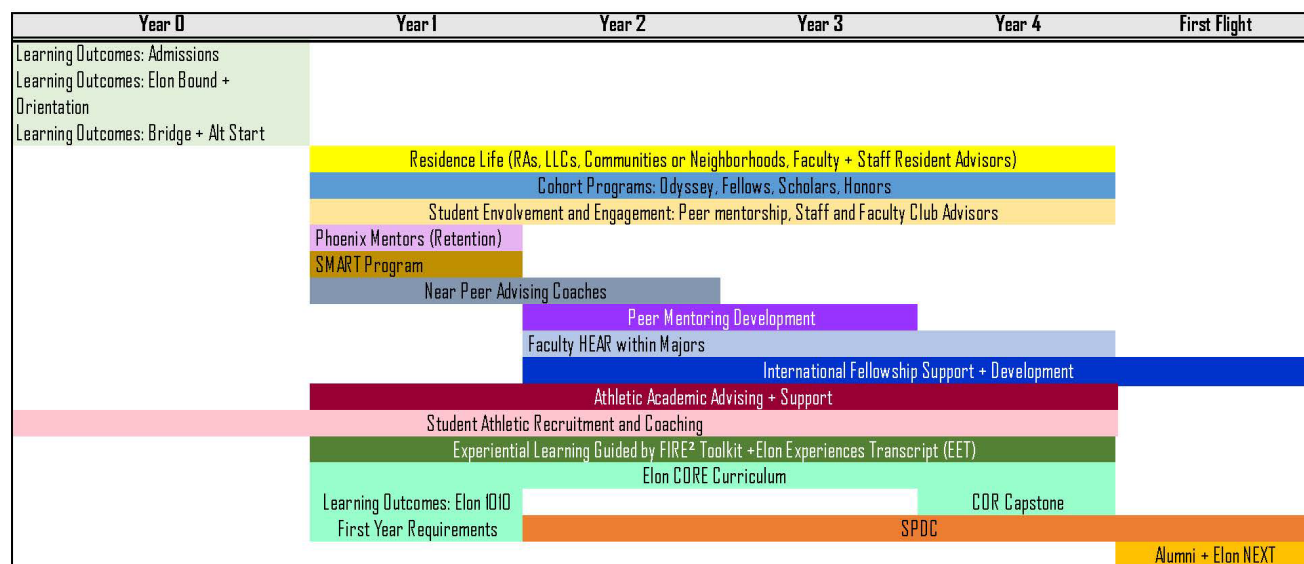
Shandy's work shows that myriad pathways exist that: a) could already be up and running well; and/or b) could serve as jumping off points for further development. Consolidation of programs may enable redeploying existing efforts (or at least counter what is perceived as a mentoring capacity shortfall) in reaching campus-wide mentoring goals. Shandy's work informed the next steps. This document showcases the extensive opportunities for engagement and served as the foundation for *the* dedicated Mentoring in Meaningful Relationships website. This resource will guide students, faculty, and staff in exploring impactful mentoring opportunities, including peer-to-peer mentoring for undergraduates. Here is an excerpt of that map highlighting peer-to-peer mentoring opportunities for undergraduates and how it connects to the framework:

Peer-led mentoring	Admissions Tour Guides	Peer
	Business Fellows	Advising
	College Access Team Mentors	Coaching
	Collegiate Peer Mentor	Coaching
	Course-based Team Activities	Peer
	Disabilities Resources (Peer) Mentor	Peer
	Elon 1010 Peer Educators	Peer, advising
	Elon Football Night of Networking	Sponsor
	Global Ambassadors	Advising
	Fraternities and Sororities	Peer
	Learning Assistance Tutors	Peer
	Mentoring with a major	Peer, advising
	New Student Programs	Peer
	Phoenix Leaders Program	Peer
	Phoenix Leadership Academy	Peer
	S.M.A.R.T Mentor Program	Peer
	Student Organizations (>250)	All dependent upon organization

Here is an excerpt of the map showcasing opportunities for staff:

Mentoring Programs for Staff	Office of Leadership and Professional Development (OLPD)		Coaching
	Elon Early Career Institute		Coaching, advising, sponsoring
	Facilities Management Apprenticeship Program		Coaching
	Identity Specific ERG's	Advocates for the Differently Abled (ADAs)	Coaching, advocating, sponsoring, peer
		Asian and Pacific Islander (API)	Peer, advocating, sponsoring
		Black ERG advising	Advising, advocating, sponsoring, peer
		Hispanic/Latinx ERG	Advising, advocating, sponsoring, peer
		LGBTQIA ERG	Advising, advocating, sponsoring, peer
		Native and Indigenous (NI)	Advising, advocating, sponsoring, peer
		Women's Forum at Elon	Advising, advocating, sponsoring, peer
	Mid-Level Professional Institute		Coaching, advising, sponsoring

Experiences integrated into the infrastructure for all undergraduates were mapped onto a four-year framework, highlighting the diverse pathways, opportunities, and gaps pilot programs addressed that are available to Elon undergraduate students.



These maps illustrate the wide range of mentoring activities at Elon, encompassing existing, planned, and aspirational efforts across campus. The Mentoring Design Team utilized these maps to identify key elements of the student experience shaped by relationships and mentoring, highlighting areas where mentoring, reflection, and integration could be enhanced. This process ultimately informed the pilot programs launched in 2023-2024 and the recommendations outlined in this report.

## Challenges and Barriers to Achieving a Sustainable Ecosystem Identified and Reported in Year 1 Mid-Point Report

Relationship and network mapping and the sub-committees identified the following tensions and barriers in fall 2022:

- **Deference to the 1:1 Relationship:** Despite the mentoring map identifying the existence of the multiple meaningful relationships as well as supportive contexts that thrive at Elon, the traditional roles and relationships of faculty-student, staff-student, and other 1:1 hierarchies have centered a top-down approach to mentoring.
- **Focused on the first-year:** Current programming relies heavily on assumptions that connections made in the first semester or year are sustained and built upon. It also assumes that students have the same opportunities to meet and make connections with fellow members of the community that share lived experiences.
- **Accessibility:** While most students have at least one meaningful relationship, not all students have access to mentoring networks of meaningful relationships, and several campus programs/models are built around students who already possess social capital to pursue such networks.
- **Equity Vehicle:** How does Elon shift to an ecosystem framework that foregrounds equity, acknowledges current inequities, and is likely to be sustainable when grounded in the pursuit of meeting holistic needs and experience development.

- **Limited Focus on the Graduate Experience:** Elon is rooted in undergraduate education. However, graduate education continues to expand, and the needs of graduate students and those supporting them require explicit consideration.
- **Lack of Shared Language:** A lack of shared language or role awareness impedes communication, connections, or systemic work around mentoring.
- **Limited Capacity:** Students, faculty, and staff are clear that faculty and staff have limited capacity if existing assumptions and activities are not reconfigured or reimaged. Specifically, course releases are often tied to service roles, which require shifting time to operational support or the roles, or they are tied to scholarly pursuits.
- **Limited Professional Development and Recognition:** Students, faculty, and staff identified the need for a range of supports, including professional development to enhance engagement, recognition, coordination, and funding.
- **Distinguishing Mentoring from Teaching:** The current Teacher, Scholar, Mentor model calls out mentoring as a core aspect the faculty role at Elon. However, the existence of an official “Teacher-Scholar Statement” without the explicit definition or expectation of mentoring leads to confusion. Additionally, mentoring is not articulated separately in the Promotion & Tenure process or any existing evaluation materials; instead mentoring appears as a part of teaching.
- **Recognizing mentoring within staff roles:** Equally critical is establishing a vision for how staff across all areas of the campus are included or have the potential to contribute to mentoring networks, specifically students’ networks. Listening sessions revealed that many staff felt underutilized, unrecognized, or unsure how mentoring fit within their role. Mentoring should be integrated into staff appraisals.
- **Assessment:** While systematic assessment is needed, we will need to remember that meaningful relationships, resulting networks, and the influence they have on lives are personal, contextually derived, and intimately subjective. Therefore, evaluation of outcomes may not be easily determined at a systemic level.

Reflection on the first quarter of MDT work necessitated a needed reconfiguration of the sub-committees. The three subcommittees became six working groups: First-year Experience, Graduate Experiences, Undergraduate Advising, Access and Equity, Shared Governance, and Peer Mentoring. These working groups were tasked with developing pilot proposals aimed at addressing immediate needs identified in the first quarter of work.

At the end of the 2022-2023 academic year, members of the Mentoring Design Team proposed numerous pilot ideas focused broadly on skill acquisition and increasing access to peer mentorship. The team knew from the mapping work that mentoring was happening all over campus, so they focused their pilot programs on areas to grow and expand opportunities and services and also on areas to deepen already engaging work. Additionally, institutional benchmark data indicated that most graduating seniors across the undergraduate programs could identify a faculty, staff, or student mentor. However, while the identification of faculty and staff members increased from first year to senior year, the percentage of students who identified a peer stayed relatively flat around 60%. Therefore, the skill to identify and maximize mentoring in meaningful relationships while concurrently building opportunities to increase peer mentorship seemed paramount.

The programs included areas of focus such as academic advising, developing relationships and networks as graduate students, mentoring for first-year students, peer mentoring, supporting historically

underrepresented minority students, and faculty and staff professional development. Collectively, the pilot programs involved 476 students, faculty and staff, with each program concluding with an analysis of its impact and potential next steps. Each pilot aimed to serve as both a catalyst and assessment of where capacity could be built as well as form a foundation for a groundbreaking model and infrastructure for mentoring at Elon. We will detail their results below.

## Year Two

Based on the findings from its work throughout the 2022-2023 academic year, the MDT proposed and implemented one faculty handbook change and several pilot programs designed to address identified mentoring gaps.

### Updating the Teacher-Scholar Statement to a Teacher-Scholar-Mentor Statement

**Summary:** A faculty working group of six faculty members representing the various schools revised the handbook statement that defines what teaching at the university entails to include and recognize the importance of mentorship as a central component of the teaching role. This document declares the shared values and understanding of the faculty role and career at the institution. Faculty may use this statement to support and frame the development of materials that reflect on their activities, efforts, training, and role as educators for Elon University. The Academic Council voted to adopt the revised Teacher-Scholar-Mentor Statement after faculty voted 96% in-favor of accepting the document. In addition to creating a guide for framing the ways mentoring in teaching works at Elon, an added preamble clarified the purpose of the statement which was not included in the initial document. This statement now serves as a key values statement for all teaching faculty and the institution.

**Who was Involved:** Buffie Longmire-Avital, Professor of Psychology, Faculty Administrative Fellow, MDT Co-Chair, Bethany Brinkman, Associate Professor of Engineering, Michael Carignan, Professor of History, Paula DiBiasio, Associate Professor of Physical Therapy Education, Colin Donohue, Director of Student Engagement and Special Projects and Instructor in Journalism, David Scobey, Director of Bringing Theory to Practice and Visiting Professor and with initial support from Maureen Vandermaas-Peeler, Professor of Psychology and Director of the Center for Research on Global Engagement worked with the Academic Council to revise the current Teacher-Scholar statement. The working group shared intentions with the faculty at the November 2023 faculty meeting. A draft of the revised document was submitted for review from the Academic Council in early spring. In March a full draft was presented to the faculty and then the working group held drop-in hours for faculty to share their feedback. In addition, a survey was also launched. Revisions from faculty feedback were implemented and the statement was brought to a vote at the final faculty meeting of AY 2023-2024.

**Key takeaways:** The aim of the statement was to capture the many ways faculty engage in mentoring while aligning with the Mentoring in Meaningful Relationships framework developed by MDT. Revisions also directly supported calls to recognize the value and importance of advising and mentoring student organization leaders. The statement was revised to move away from third person (instructive) to a first-person voice. In addition to the revised statement, the following preamble was added: *The purpose of the Elon University Teacher-Scholar-Mentor Statement is to declare our shared values and understanding for the faculty role and career at the institution. Faculty may use this statement to support and frame the*

*development of materials that reflect on their activities, efforts, training, and role as educators for Elon University.*

## The Phoenix Mentors

Summary: The Phoenix Mentor Program aimed to help first-year students who did not have anyone else from their high school attending Elon transition to college by fostering a sense of belonging, providing academic guidance, and promoting personal development by connecting them with an upper-class peer mentor. This target population was chosen because retention data from Elon revealed that students with no other students from their high school are at a higher risk of non-retention than other students (85% compared to 89-90%) Mentors were selected and trained to provide peer mentorship and coaching to two or three mentees, with whom they met with biweekly. Mentors completed an assessment after each meeting where they were prompted to share an update on their mentees' transition, including any concerns they had. With a 93.1% retention rate for participants and an average GPA over 3.0, the program has shown significant success. Mentors and mentees met regularly to discuss campus resources, involvement opportunities, and personal growth, contributing to a higher retention rate and engagement in student organizations.

**Who was involved:** Assistant Director of New Student Programs Destiny Payne designed and executed the program. Peer Mentors were recruited from the 2023 Orientation Leader team. These student leaders expressed overwhelming interest in serving in this peer mentorship role. The 17 mentors were paired with 51 mentees. The mentees were first-year students who were identified as having no one else from their high school attending Elon.

### Key takeaways:

- **Mentor Development:** Mentors built connections and enhanced leadership skills, as evidenced by a post-experience survey.
- **Student Transition:** Mentees had a smoother transition to Elon, with higher average GPAs (3.45 vs. 3.04) and better retention rates (93.1% vs. 89.1%) compared to non-participants, such that students who participated in the program had a single digit loss rate of 6.9% in comparison to the double-digit loss rate of 10.9% for students with the same retention risk who opted out of participating. Mentees also joined two or more student organizations while participating in the program.
- **Program Impact:** The program significantly benefited first-year students who attended Elon without peers from their high school. Mentors were able to support their mentees as they navigated personal development, roommate challenges, their four-year plans, technology like Moodle and OnTrack, and health issues.

### What Phoenix Mentors said:

- "Overall, this meeting went great. [They] really seem to be finding a good community and has been enjoying their classes. They are also doing a great job at making plans for their future at Elon."
- "This was our third meeting and I felt it went very well, we continued to build off of our last meeting. We met in front of the lake in chairs, which I think really helped us to connect some more. Sometimes it gets overlooked but the setting of conversations can really impact the overall vibe and comfortability of a conversation. We talked more about how his social life has been going and his floor, he's joining Student Gov. which I'm also in so we talked about that, we talked about Greek



Life just in terms of whether or not he wants to do it and how to go through all that. We also talked about staying on top of attendance, how he did on his midterm (only had one), and then just some more stuff about his life before Elon.”

## The FYE Mentoring Learning Outcomes Assessment

**Summary:** The FYE Mentoring Learning Outcomes Assessment Pilot aimed to utilize the Mentoring in Meaningful Relationships framework to evaluate the extent to which mentorship and meaningful relationships were occurring within and across first-year experience programs. Representatives from various departments collaborated to identify existing efforts, develop and align learning outcomes and assessment strategies, and find gaps for cross-divisional collaboration. The pilot identified key areas for improvement and set the foundation for mapping initiatives and aligning learning outcomes across programs to enhance mentoring skills, awareness, and engagement for incoming first-year students.

**Who was involved:** This work was led by Brandy S. Propst, director of Elon 1010 and assistant director of academic advising. The work group consisted of seven representatives from the signature first-year experience programs: Admissions (Evan Sprinkle), New Student Programs (Emily Krechel), Elon 1010 (Propst and Janelle Ellis-Holloway), Core Curriculum (Paula Patch), and Living & Learning at Elon (Kirsten Carrier and Jennifer Stephens).

### Key takeaways:

- The workgroup created six learning outcomes for Mentoring in Meaningful Relationships (MIMR) to be used across the signature first-year experience programs. The learning outcomes address the following areas: Peer Leadership/Mentorship, Faculty/Staff Mentoring, Student Learning/Awareness, and Mentor Opportunities/Planning. They are:
  - Students will recognize first-year peer leaders as a potential source of mentorship.
  - Students will recognize faculty and staff connected to FYE programs as a potential source of mentorship.
  - Students will be able to recognize that mentoring is an overarching experience developed across all four years, and beyond.
  - Students will identify opportunities that will provide access to mentoring relationships.
  - Students will articulate a plan for establishing future mentorship relationships at Elon beyond their first semester.
  - Students will be able to identify significant areas of mentorship that are relevant to their experience at Elon based on personal and professional goals they establish (career, academic, personal support, social, etc.).
- In addition to the learning outcomes, the workgroup developed recommendations for mapped initiatives and programs to meet the recommended FYE MIMR learning outcomes and that align with the MIMR framework. These mapped initiatives also outline methods of assessment and campus partners/stakeholders.

**What pilot participants said:** “Mentoring in the first year occurs in a multitude of ways, in both curricular and co-curricular spaces, so it was impactful having a team of faculty and staff from across campus working together to pilot holistic mentoring outcomes for first-year students. The energy and creativity that came from this pilot leaves me excited for the ways this work will help to enhance the First-Year Experience at Elon.”



## Orienting Graduate Students to Mentoring & Meaningful Relationships

**Summary:** The graduate programs at Elon include 786 students. Building off the finding in the first year of MDT work that peer and near-peer mentoring could be essential for graduate programs. This pilot effort aimed to foster skills training for establishing meaningful mentoring relationships despite challenges such as varied program structures. The pilot initiative introduced a flexible mentoring framework to enhance student well-being and belonging, focusing on equitable access to mentoring opportunities. Skills training and the opportunity to build mentoring networks was the focus of the graduate student-centered pilot program. Two-hundred and eight students in the law school and business school attended two workshops designed to introduce the framework of mentoring in meaningful relationships and how to engage and identify mentors during their orientation programs. These workshops were then followed up with a networking event (Welcome Reception) for each program. The graduate students found value in the workshops as well as the opportunity for mentorship. Results from survey assessments revealed that many students wanted better awareness for how mentor matching programs worked (e.g., which social identifiers are used), and lists of potential mentors, specifically faculty they could approach.

**Who was involved:** Helen Grant and Elena Kennedy, members of the Mentoring Initiative Design Team, led the development and execution of this pilot. Additionally, the pilot involved four key partners: Elon Law, Love School of Business, Center for Design Thinking, and Student Professional Development Center. The key participants of this programming were incoming JD (168 students), MBA (14) and MSBA students (26).

### Key takeaways:

- **Positive Reception:** Despite logistical issues, both training sessions were well received, with dual workshops adding more value but needing separation for better engagement.
- **Evaluation Results:** Most participants already had mentoring relationships, but expressed a need for more guidance on building these connections and desired more interaction opportunities with mentors, faculty, and alumni.
- **Graduate Student Needs:** Greater support for mentoring, more frequent connection opportunities, advising improvements, and professional mentorships are necessary. There is a call for additional resources like dedicated spaces, events, and specific staff for graduate students.
- **Resource Requirements:** Successful implementation of the mentoring program requires increased personnel and financial resources, as well as consistent programmatic coordination and support from the university.

## Handbook for Elevating the Advising Relationship (HEAR)

**Summary:** The Advising Working Group developed the Handbook for Elevating the Advising Relationship (HEAR) to enhance faculty advising at Elon University. The HEAR, launched as a Moodle course, includes resources (e.g. email templates for communicating with advisees, surveys that could provide real time assessment of advisees' needs, struggles, or concerns prior to registration meetings, etc.), tools, and prompts aimed at deepening faculty-student connections, particularly during the sophomore and junior years. A pilot program in Spring 2024 involved 36 faculty members, with feedback indicating that centralized resources and pre-advising surveys improved the efficiency and depth of advising sessions.

**Who was involved:** Jeff Carpenter, Professor of Education, Director of the Elon Teaching Fellows Program, convened the group; Kenneth Brown Jr., Assistant Director, First-Generation Student Support Services; Jen Hamel, Associate Professor of Biology and Associate Director of Undergraduate Research;

Scott Hayward, Associate Professor of Management; Karen Neff, Assistant Director, Elon Charlotte; Paul Tongsri, Assistant Dean for Student Success and Retention

**Key takeaways:**

- Centralizing advising resources is valuable but challenging due to varied needs across majors and units.
- Survey information on advisees enhances advising meetings by clarifying goals and discussion topics.
- The required system of faculty advising creates a significant opportunity to support the mentoring initiative.
- Inconsistent department-level advising training exists.
- Initial communications between advisors and new advisees need improvement to strengthen relationships from the start.
- Further development and assessment of advising resources are necessary.

## Meaningful Relationships as an Equity-Driving Support System for Historically Underrepresented Minority Students Summary: SMART

**Summary:** Increasing access and equity through peer mentorship was driven by deepening the resources, tools, and integration of faculty and staff within the SMART mentoring program. The primary goal of the program is to support first-year students of color as they transition into and navigate a PWI. This is a 30-year-old program. The current pilot required peer mentors to take the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) Assessment and develop learning plans to help determine how increased cultural agility can positively impact peer-to-peer mentoring. Mentors meet regularly with their “head of family” student coordinator to discuss their mentees, their overall experience, and their respective learning plans. Thirty peer mentors, 63 mentees, 23 faculty and staff members, and four student coordinators participated in the year-long pilot. While the IDI was informative to all participants, the capacity to fully utilize it as framing tool for engagement was not available. Peer mentors benefited the most from a structured mid-year review of the learning plans from their mentees. SMART mentors used the time to identify response patterns and inform subsequent programming. At the end of the pilot year, 50% of the mentees were able to identify a faculty and or staff member as a mentor. This is greater than the identification rate of the overall first-year class gleaned from institutional benchmark data.

**Who was involved:** The pilot was led by Sylvia Muñoz, assistant dean and director of the CREDE and Jonathan A. McElderry, dean of student inclusive excellence, CREDE as well as four student coordinators, 30 mentors, 63 mentees and 23 faculty/staff members during the 2023-24 academic year.

**Key takeaways:**

- Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) Use: IDI helped mentors deepen self-awareness of cultural biases and assumptions. It facilitated the creation of personalized intercultural development plans.
- Engagement Levels of Mentors: Some mentors actively followed their Intercultural Learning Plans, sharing and reflecting regularly. Others were less engaged, hesitant to share experiences or pursue development goals.
- Challenges with Support and Capacity: Capacity constraints limited personalized support from student coordinators and CREDE professional staff. This affected the intended effectiveness of IDI

as a developmental tool. Leaders of SMART decided not to use IDI next year due to these challenges.

- Integration of Faculty and Staff in SMART Program: Initial enthusiasm and active participation of faculty and staff in family events. Decreased involvement over time due to availability constraints. Successful off-campus event improved relationships and understanding among all participants.
- Overall Program Direction: Focus on finding tools and methodologies that better align with program capacity and goals. Aim to foster stronger and more consistent relationships between mentors, mentees, faculty, and staff.

## Expanding the Peer Mentor Model

**Summary:** How or why do students come to see themselves as a mentor or someone who is responsible for and capable of cultivating meaningful relationships with their peers? Through two communities of practices (COPs) comprised of students, faculty, and staff, this question (and others) was explored with the goal of enhancing the leadership development journey for Elon students. Additionally, these COPs sought to gather tools, best practices, thoughts and ideas about peer-to-peer mentoring at Elon. The COPs stressed the need for training, clarity of roles, a centralized hub of opportunities available, and an expansion beyond transition focused peer mentoring programs.

**Who was involved:** The COPs were led by Jodean Schneiderer, dean of student development, and Brooke Buffington, assistant vice president for Student Professional Development Center.

### Key takeaways:

- Many formal peer mentoring programs focus on new students' university transition and are often social in nature. Mentor training varies, with assumptions about student knowledge and emphasis on skill development or resource education.
- Some new students struggle to engage with assigned mentors or utilize available resources like orientation leaders, Elon 1010 peer educators or resident advisors.
- Effective peer mentoring requires clear roles and comprehensive mentor training.
- Many students take on mentoring roles due to a lack of mentors who share their identities.
- Few programs extend peer mentoring beyond the first year or into professional and academic guidance, which is crucial for sophomores selecting majors.
- Student organizations, like fraternities/sororities, AKPsi, and club sports, often foster authentic peer mentoring. Enhancing guidance and training in these groups can strengthen mentoring culture.
- Advising organizations could redefine their purpose to include mentoring organization leaders, encouraging faculty/staff to mentor and model meaningful relationships, and teaching upper-level students mentoring skills.

## The Student Advising Mentor

**Summary:** The Student Advising Mentor program supported first- and second-year students within specific majors (Love School of Business, Psychology and Public Health Studies) by offering academic guidance, identifying resources, and assisting with faculty advisor interactions. The selection of these specific majors was primarily based on programs that had the highest faculty advising caseloads. Mentoring sessions focused on major-specific success strategies, advising preparation, graduation planning, experiential learning, and fostering a supportive community among peers within each major. While the engagement

from students was less than anticipated, students who utilized this peer advising program sought support for class registration, study abroad planning, graduation planning, and selecting minors. Most of the participating students, when surveyed, mentioned that they would seek out these students again. A major consideration for expanding the program is to move away from major-specific student advisors and to increase marketing. Many students reported that they were unaware of the resource.

**Who was involved:** Director of Academic Advising Kathy Ziga led this pilot development and implementation. She partnered with the Love School of Business, Psychology and Public Health Studies majors to help offset large advising caseloads in those areas.

**Key takeaways:**

- **Participant Motivation:** Student advising mentors joined the program primarily to share their knowledge and provide guidance to newer students. One mentor highlighted the opportunity to get involved and offer insights they wished they had received.
- **Student Engagement:** Meeting frequency with students varied. The fall semester yielded the most engagement. Mentors who met with students reported positive outcomes from peer-to-peer advising conversations.
- **Marketing and Communication Challenges:** Lack of awareness among students about the program was a significant issue highlighted by mentors. Suggestions were made to improve advertising through professors and school communications to increase program visibility.
- **Capacity Challenges:** Running the program effectively would require significant dedicated effort, covering activities from recruitment, quality assurance training for the student advising mentors, to assessment.
- **Impact of the Program:** Benefits include providing first- and second-year students with valuable advising and planning insights, developing mentoring skills in returning students, and offering additional resources to faculty advisors. The potential impact is substantial, though requiring substantial investment to achieve at scale.

**What participants said:** “[My student advising mentor] is so sweet and extremely helpful. I feel so much better about the courses I’m taking and have planned for the rest of my time at Elon. She also helped calm my nerves regarding research and how to get started. I will definitely reach out to her again if I ever have any more questions.”

## **Bolstering Your Mentoring Skillset Professional Development Pilot**

**Summary:** This pilot program aimed to enhance the mentoring skills of staff and faculty from across campus through a structured experience consisting of a pre-assessment, the completion of a LinkedIn Learning Pathway, participation in two community of practice sessions, and a post-assessment to measure their growth. Participants engaged in the asynchronous and self-selected learning within the LinkedIn Learning Pathway aimed at developing their skills in the four competency areas: cultivating empowered relationships with others, supporting growth and learning, developing your critical consciousness, and enhancing your own interpersonal skills. These competency areas relevant to mentoring were synthesized from both research and multiple brainstorming sessions with campus partners engaged in staff and faculty development. The community of practice sessions of the pilot served as a time for participants to gather, meet colleagues, deepen connections, discuss what they were learning, and any challenges they were experiencing within their meaningful relationships. The benefits of this approach to professional

development are that it can easily be integrated into onboarding materials and can be customized to the participants' desired skill development.

**Who was involved:** Director of New Student Programs Emily Krechel led the creation and implementation of the pilot for 41 participants: 7 from Academic Affairs, 6 from Admissions & Financial Aid, 2 faculty (psychology and strategic communications), 7 from Finance & Administration (5 of whom are from facilities), 1 from Inclusive Excellence, 1 from the Law School, 1 from the Office of the President, 4 from Student Life, 3 from University Advancement, 4 from University Athletics, 5 from University Communications. 7 of the 41 staff are hourly. Position ranks everywhere from entry-level through mid-level, no senior leadership.

**Key takeaways:**

- Participants greatly appreciated having the opportunity to engage in self-paced, asynchronous courses where they could learn, take notes, and digest the information before coming to the Community of Practice where they connected with colleagues and discussed how the modules applied to their meaningful relationships.
- From the post-assessment, participants overwhelmingly felt the four mentoring competencies identified captured the skillsets required to bolster meaningful relationships.
- For participants who had more experience mentoring, they felt the LinkedIn Learning Pathway courses were too basic and would have appreciated more structured Community of Practice sessions.
- Most participants found the Community of Practice sessions invaluable and enjoyed connecting with colleagues from across the institution.

**What participants said:**

- "This was a great program and I hope to keep revisiting these modules to help not only myself grow as an Elon employee and person but to also share what I have learned with those I surround myself with daily."
- "I REALLY enjoyed this pilot. With due respect to the many trainings on campus, often I leave wishing we had talked about the application of the information we had reviewed and find that most of the time is spent telling us what we are about to learn than actually learning it. This was very different. I have completed this with steps toward practical application, key phrasing that is easy to implement, and some self-reflection on my own competencies and opportunities for growth. It was great!"
- "I am grateful for every opportunity I have to connect with people across campus. I find it so valuable to hear from different divisions about their strategies around mentorship and development. I appreciate the connection for my own benefit, and the value different perspectives bring to honing my mentorship skills."
- "The community of practice sessions were IMMENSELY helpful in applying what I learned from LinkedIn to my real-world relationships. I found that taking notes while watching the videos helped me learn the material but having groups of people to talk about the videos with helped me think of real-world applications for what we just learned. It also helped me gain even more perspectives and ways of thinking about the competencies by hearing what my peers took away, also knowing that we all could have watched different videos."

## Campus Engagement with MIMR

To spark community-wide engagement and reflection on mentoring in meaningful relationships, the Truitt Center for Religious and Spiritual Life agreed to center the Numen Lumen theme around the team's work. For academic year 23-24 nearly all Numen Lumen speakers reflected on the meaningful relationships in their lives. Professor Olivia Choplin organized a community reading program in fall and winter 2023-24. Elon community members (faculty, staff, and students) were invited to read one of two books (*Lessons from Plants* by Beronda Montgomery and *Connections are Everything* by Leo Lambert, Peter Felten, Oscar Miranda Tapia, and Isis Artze-Vega) and participate in small group book discussions. Twenty-six members of the campus community read one of the two books, and one participant commented: "It has been an outstanding experience to connect with two amazing colleagues at Elon that I might not have otherwise met. If the goal was to bring diverse groups together to share thoughtful conversations, then this was a successful venture." Members of MDT worked in collaboration with SPDC, the CREDE, and other affinity support areas on campus to provide greater resources to the Elevate your Network event. The SPDC run event brings students of color together to discuss professional networking and mentoring. A key component of the event is the partnership with Alumni Engagement, local alums, staff, and faculty offer an opportunity for the students to practice the skills they just received in a presentation. MDT efforts also included providing additional financial resources to the iBelong program which provides opportunities for mentoring among male students of color, current staff and faculty, as well as members from the community.

## Engagement beyond Elon: The Mentoring in Meaningful Relationships Summit

In June 2024, members of the MDT in collaboration with other campus partners (President Emeritus, Dr. Leo Lambert and Offices of the President and Provost), hosted an inaugural Mentoring in Meaningful Relationships Summit. Nearly 60 participants from 16 institutions across the country participated in the 2-day summit held at The Inn at Elon and various locations throughout the campus. Invitations were initially sent to provosts requesting them to build institutional teams of 3 – 4 members. While students were listed as possible participants, no institutional teams brought students with them. Thirty-one participants came from outside North Carolina. Three HBCUs were represented (Spelman, North Carolina A&T, and Bennett College). Participating institutions included a community college, R1s, STEM focused, and nationally ranked liberal arts colleges). In addition, Bringing Theory to Practice and their latest endeavor, the Paradigm Project was also represented among the participants. All participants were asked to describe their roles in relation to mentoring efforts on their campuses. Ten themes or aspects of building systemic mentoring initiatives on college and university campuses emerged from the descriptions participants gave:

1. Focusing on creating and/or identifying institutional leadership synergies
2. Running or creating signature mentoring programs
3. Implementing or creating sustainable design for mentoring efforts
4. Student success efforts and outcomes
5. Campus integration
6. Nurturing faculty engagement and development
7. Development and leading training and skills development
8. Developing cultural capital (i.e., avoiding deficit-based approaches) and increasing access
9. Assessment of mentoring efforts and student success outcomes



## 10. Identifying infrastructures and needs

Participants attended panel discussions (including an opening discussion on the MDT pilots and lessons learned, as well as a Provost fireside chat moderated by Provost Kohn and featuring the provosts from Spelman, Muhlenberg, and Mary Baldwin). Roundtable discussions provided rich reflection on mentoring in student employment and student professional development, the experience of graduate students, nurturing a healthy sustainable culture for mentoring, undergraduate advising, faculty roles, capacity building and professional development for faculty and staff, peer mentoring, and retention.

### Key Takeaways from Roundtable Discussions Included

**Student Employment:** On-campus student employment provides the institution with a substantial opportunity to embed mentoring into the student experience. This could yield another high-impact practice provided supervisors are skilled (such as Elon GROWS) and there is a framework that maps onto nationally recognized best practices, such as the NACE competencies. Additionally, student employment opportunities could increase with the strategic engagement of alumni. Finally, student employment in a decentralized format remains a barrier.

**Graduate Student Experience:** There is no one-size-fits-all approach to crafting an intentional and inclusive graduate student experience that involves mentoring. An awareness of the types of graduate students and the diverse experiences and backgrounds is essential. Graduate students need access to the cultural capital gained from the undergraduate experience. Specifically, increased belonging, development of trust, recognition of their unique experiences and space, amplified empowerment and agency, and access to resources. Graduate student experiences can be enhanced by intentional coordination by some “body.” Social interactions need to be curated to ensure graduate students have access to faculty, staff, peers, and alumni. Cultural capital space is tied to physical and/or virtual space as well.

**Nurturing a Healthy and Sustainable Culture for Mentoring:** This work must consider the enduring impacts of the pandemic on higher education, specifically the faculty and staff that navigated it. Mentorship requires that we meet people where they are, however, it must consider the previous experiences with mentoring that both the mentee and the mentor bring with them into the relationship. This work can’t survive being siloed. It requires alignment and integration with strategic priorities and its sustainability is connected to having a system that is not tied to individual knowledge. Mentoring efforts can’t be sustained if linked with individuals; they must function at the institutional level, and accountability is paramount. Tracking and connection to other institutions engaging in the work to share responsibility is critical.

**Undergraduate Advising:** Academic advising has changed. The needs are more comprehensive and that is in tension with faculty who have reached the limits of their bandwidth or are just resistant to change. A key onramp for academic advising was the first-year seminar course. However, this course needs reorientation. How do we get students and faculty excited about FYS courses? Advising may be the most successful when integrated with other forms of advising on campus, such as career and peer mentoring within a single launch course. FYS advising is a common practice but the transition to faculty academic advising is fraught. Peer advisors may be the bridge.

**Faculty Roles:** Mentoring is an assumed role of the faculty but current dialogue and pushes to increase access to mentoring have framed it as an additive to an already burnt-out faculty. What then is the core role

of the faculty member, and how is this framed or introduced to new and current faculty? There is clear inequity in who among the faculty are engaging in mentoring. Institutions need to reflect and engage in ways to be supportive of faculty engagement in mentoring and concurrently access to mentoring for themselves across all stages of their career. Money can't be the only reward and incentive, but faculty face limited resources and/or a lacking awareness of where to obtain resources. If faculty are essential, what then is the role of students in this work? What happens when the focus of the faculty engagement in mentoring shifts from the individual being convinced or required to a more communal effort at the departmental level. The mitigation of burn-out and access to trusted mentorship may be linked with faculty retention.

**Professional Development and Capacity Building:** PD-CB must be intentionally crafted with strategic partnerships, coordination that does not duplicate but enhances ongoing efforts. The work can't be siloed; there need to be supportive networks for this work within and across institutions. This work is sustained through collaboration and the concurrent work of identifying what programs no longer serve their purposes fully and could be eliminated alongside the building of new programming. Perhaps the frame is that professional development adds to efficiency, which may generate more time for other creative and innovative aspects of the job. Connecting and identifying what is already in play does not generate the newness tax of adding on. Finally, how do the institution and the individual reflect on a process that doesn't work? The university is a "developer of people." This includes the intentionally holistic engagement of campus learning opportunities for faculty, staff, and students.

**Retention:** Efforts for retention included focusing on the value of the cohort experience for students. Using grants to focus on increasing the retention of students historically marginalized and implementing new technological tools (e.g., mentor connector software) to support the engagement of populations that have increasing disengagement, such as males, might be foundational approaches. Additionally, mentorship-driven retention efforts included the use of wrap-around services such as success coaches and recovery programs for students with retention risk because of academic probation. Faculty and staff capacity coupled with students' lacking awareness of agency are ongoing challenges. Despite many focusing on retention, it is still a lagging indicator of meaningful relationships.

**Peer Mentoring:** A critical aspect of establishing a culture of peer mentoring is the integration of training. There is no room for the assumption of skills, expectations, and boundaries needed for healthy and ethical mentoring. There needs to be an understanding of what peer mentoring is NOT, how it differs from advice-giving or peer education. Peer mentoring may be best situated within groups where the relationship can be dynamic and fluid. This aligns with the understanding that peer mentoring has varying lengths. It can be long-term, but time-bound efforts may be the most effective for certain types of mentorship. Recognition of peer mentors starts with awareness that a good student leader is not always the ideal candidate to be a peer mentor. Students may have different motivations for mentoring, and this knowledge can inform highlighted benefits and/or compensation. Incremental growth and growth mindset might be key to establishing sustainable and strong peer mentoring programs. Specifically, peer mentors need not know all or have all the answers to be a good mentor. The small relationship wins that nurture trust and ongoing engagement are pivotal.

**Resonating summit reflections** were offered on the final day of the event. While all attendees celebrated the opportunity to engage with colleagues, future efforts **should include the student voice** either in a concurrent summit or integrated into the current program frame. The efforts to build a sustainable



mentoring in meaningful relationships culture needs **cross-institutional mobilization**. While no two campuses are exactly alike and a direct replication model is not feasible, participants could see where overlaps and adaptations could be brought back to their institutions. At the heart of this work is **reclaiming the importance of relationships** and relatedness to others, which is in direct opposition to isolated siloes and disjointed programming. The change imagined at the summit was not easy, but cultural changes do not happen quickly. We need to **embrace the culmination of institutional efforts**. We also must **acknowledge, accept, and enjoy the discomfort** because we can't stay where we are if we want to be ready for all who will come.

## FINAL BOLD CONSIDERATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS OF MDT WORK

The integration and culmination of MDT efforts over 24 months, including surveys, listening sessions, pilots, research, and the final summit has generated a dynamic feedback loop that has informed the following considerations and recommendations in response to the charge presented in May 2022.

Offering faculty and staff opportunities to engage in experiences that nurture meaningful relationships will further enrich the university culture and strengthen our relationship-rich community. Recognizing the contributions of faculty and staff to mentoring is crucial. Prior to spring 2024, faculty were guided by the Teacher-Scholar Statement, which will now officially become the Teacher-Scholar-Mentor Statement with strong faculty support, thanks to the collaborative efforts of the Mentoring Design Team and Academic Council. Additionally, in spring 2024, the Mentoring Design Team established four foundational competencies for effective mentoring in meaningful relationships:

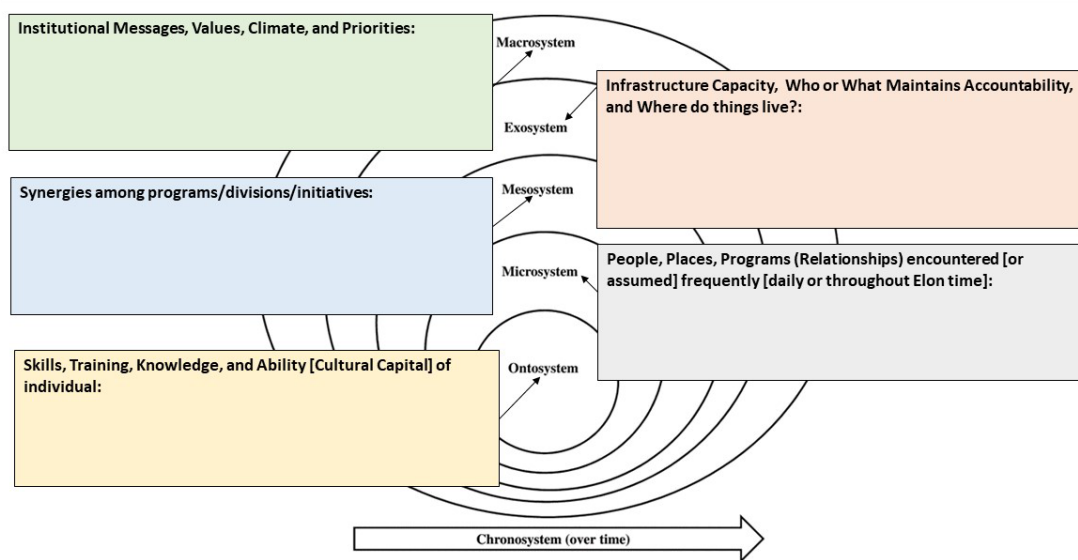
- Cultivating empowered relationships with others
- Supporting growth and learning
- Developing your critical consciousness
- Enhancing your own interpersonal skills

These competencies will help provide a common language within the mentoring framework, guide peer mentor training for undergraduate and graduate students, faculty and staff development, and the creation of pathways for all Elon community members to establish and nurture meaningful relationships.

To provide all members of the community pathways, skills, and agency to build meaningful peer, faculty, and staff relationships and mentoring networks, a close analysis and stocktaking of existing documented strengths and the careful cultivation of **a mentoring in meaningful relationships ecosystem** is necessary. Advancing relationships and networks at Elon is not simply a function of creating additional mentoring programs. Rather, access to high-quality relationships and networks for all members of the Elon community requires a strategic and systematic approach to designing and institutionalizing shared understanding, resources, skills, and aims across and between all institutional initiatives, communications, programs, divisions, and levels. To foster an ecosystem where all community members contribute to a relationship-rich environment, we must invest in staff, faculty, and students to help them develop the necessary skills for effective relationship building and mentoring. This systematic approach (see Figure 1 below) is based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) work on the context of systems that impact human

development and more recent work of Mondissa, Packard, and Montgomery (2021) that explained various levels of mentoring ecosystems that support relationships and networks.

Figure 1. An Ecosystem that institutionalizes meaningful relationships on all institutional level



### THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF THE MDT:

**TO CREATE A SUSTAINABLE MENTORING IN MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS ECOSYSTEM THAT DRIVES EQUITABLE COMMUNITY SUCCESS FOR STUDENTS, FACULTY, AND STAFF BY 2030**

After building this comprehensive framework, the strategy for realizing these goals falls in one of the five categories below. Numerous stakeholders including human resources, academic advising, the Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning, and several offices in the Division of Student Life will collaborate on next steps.

## Recommendations and Considerations



**Enhance **Student** Culture and Experience**



**Reframe **academic** advising as a mentored conduit for meaning making and purpose-driven curricular pursuits.**



**Enhance effectiveness of **student peer** mentoring and recognize it as a pathway toward completing ELRs**



**Enhance **faculty and** staff culture and experience.**



**Create **infrastructure** and **human(e)** resources to support a mentoring and community success ecosystem.**