

# FACULTY MENTORSHIP

## Questions: Conversation Catalysts

**Mentors**, beyond the obvious recommendation to avoid questions with short or one-word answers, consider these suggestions to activate conversations with your mentee.



Energize discussions by finding out what matters to your mentee. Rather than starting your conversation with, "What do you want to talk about?", ask:

- What was the highlight of your week?
- What fun/exciting things are on your calendar?
- What passion project are you working on (do you want to work on) at UNO?

Learn more about your mentee's acclimation to UNO by asking questions that inquire about their reactions to their recent experiences and that tap into their emotions. Rather than asking, "What has your first month/year at UNO been like?", ask:

- What surprised you the most about UNO/Omaha?
- What's been the most challenging/rewarding experience you've had at UNO?

Check on your mentee's sense of belonging by inquiring about their interactions on campus. Rather than saying, "Tell me how are things going.", ask:

- In what campus setting do you feel the most comfortable, and why is that?
- What's something your colleagues don't know about you?
- When have you felt people didn't understand you, and what was your reaction?
- What UNO practice/policy or part of Omaha's culture leaves you shaking your head? Why?

Get to know more about your mentee's teaching and research using multiple "why" questions to encourage your mentee to share additional information. Rather than asking, "Do you enjoy teaching (research)?", ask:

- Why is teaching some classes more enjoyable than teaching others?
- Why do you think students enjoy your classes?
- Why were you interested in a career that involved teaching (research)?
- Why is some research energizing and other research frustrating/laborious?

Encourage reflection by asking your mentee about the early lessons they've learned. Rather than telling them, "What I've learned in my years at UNO, is that ...", ask:

- What have you learned by observing meetings/gatherings/events at UNO and in the community?
- What advice would you give someone who will be joining the UNO faculty?
- What explicit and implicit lessons about UNO have your students/colleagues already taught you?

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**Mentees**, take a few minutes to plan the questions you will ask your mentor. Help them to help you by asking questions that open up conversations and will uncover the information you want to know.



Ask your mentor to share a story that will help you learn about them and the campus. Rather than starting your conversation with, "Tell me about your work.", ask:

- What do you think will be your legacy at UNO?
- What was the best classroom experience you ever had?
- Did you ever have a course that wasn't going well (trust us - they have)? What did you do?
- What's your greatest research success story?
- What did you do when your research stalled (again, trust us - it happens to all of us)?
- What has been your most rewarding community connection?
- When has service energized you?

Build your skill set by asking for their assistance or for direction on where you might go to access the resources you need. Rather than asking, "What should I be working on?" ask:

- What book or other resources on teaching/writing/leadership/etc. do you recommend?
- What professional development did you find beneficial when you were starting your faculty career?
- What process or tool do you use for long-term planning?

Learn how your mentor solves problems. Of course, they can help you with a specific situation, but rather than focusing on a single issue, ask:

- What do you do when you see something in a policy/practice that seems inequitable or unfair?
- How have you handled difficult situations with students/colleagues?
- What resources help you navigate academia, UNO, Omaha, and/or Nebraska?
- How do you utilize your networks on and off campus to address personal, professional, campus, and community needs?

Use your mentor as a sounding board. Rather than stating, "During the last few weeks, I...", ask:

- I've been thinking a lot about starting a new project, would you give me some feedback on it?
- A colleague has asked me to work on a large project with them. It's both exciting and overwhelming. Can you help me identify the pros and cons of such a project?
- Can you review my calendar with me and share any insight on my time/task management?
- I need to have a difficult conversation, would you role play this with me?

