

Shunny Parikh
TLC Student Summit
Topic: Mentoring
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Mentoring is extremely important. It should not be viewed as a proposal, but a requirement, an obligation or a duty. In my mind, there should be one professor and 4-5 students along the similar or same major. They would meet once, twice, or thrice a week during the professor's designated office hours. Actually, make these office-hours, mentoring-hours. You want only 4-5 students and not a large batch because you want the attention, the concentration of the professor to be sharp, to be potent. Too many students and the professor's attention will most likely dilute or be diffused. Also, with 4-5 students, these students can form a more tight-knit group that can support one another as opposed to a large group that will behave something similar as seen in regular classes – detached. The purpose of this mentoring is not only for the students, but also for the professors.

When one teaches semester after semester, year after year, it has the ability to burn someone out. Now, all professors teach for an altruistic purpose: the chance to “pass it on,” with the “it” referring to the knowledge, experiences, and insight honed in their personal journeys. However, when one teaches for so long, there is a tendency to view students, not as individuals, but as statistics. For the most part, there will always be exceptional students one remembers. A great student last semester, or a batch of them a few years ago. However, for the most part, the majority fall by the wayside. In order to reinvigorate the professors, in order to reignite their passion for learning, there must be a recognition of each student as an individual. And *this* is why professors will find it beneficial to mentor.

For the students, they should be taught along academic, mental, and emotional lines. By academic lines, I mean they should understand how higher education and academia is APR – applicable, practical, and relevant. It is not enough to throw students to the wolves by saying, “you are an adult;” “this is your responsibility now;” “figure it out for yourselves.” The reason is that if you leave questions open and empty, for the students to answer, they will most likely remain unanswered. You must explain to them how higher education can help them in their lives – and in the lives of the people around them. By mental lines, I mean, teach them how to read textbooks, read journals, write research papers. Teach them how to deepen their creativity and refine and sharpen their critical thinking skills. Get them prepared for the next part of their journey, whether it be transferring to a 4-year university, going for their Masters, Doctorate or entering the workforce. By emotional lines, I mean give praise and words of encouragement and support to positively influence them and help them realize their own worth. Some people seem to believe that emotional support is only needed when one is 5, 10, or 15. But no one wants to work in a toxic workplace. And no one wants to learn in one either. So, help them to establish themselves in such a manner because it is important that they are **seen**.

And what are the fruits of this labor? My professor, an untenured professor, mentors a lot. She has cut back on it nowadays, but her efforts are proof as to what mentoring can achieve. Her students, most-if-not-all, have entered 4-year universities and graduated from there. Her students, most-if-not-all, are employed well. Her students have transferred to Ivy Leagues and Private Universities with full scholarships. And when these students came back and spoke to us, as guest speakers, they stated that the only reason why they are where they are currently standing, is all thanks to this professor. So, *this* is the practical effects of mentoring – and mentoring well.

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The only thing that I feel is unfortunate is that because my professor is untenured, she does not have the resources or the pull, in order to scale this up. And so, I appeal to the tenured professors to create, or institute a board or a panel, to research and to gather statistics and data, and publish the findings of how beneficial, practical, and far-reaching mentoring is, in reputable journals. This is to increase both their own and CUNY's esteem and prestige as well as to bolster the credentials of CUNY. For we really need to have something that is more unique than others if we wish to bring students to CUNY. We **need** to focus on mentoring because there is nothing worse, in my perspective, than a person without purpose. We can clothe people, house them, feed them, and support them financially. But if there is no purpose, then I would call that a wasted life – and I speak of myself in this regard. **Create** a mentoring program to build individuals because in building individuals you can change the culture, the community and society. You can incite a good and lasting change, but it can only happen with one individual at a time.