Spiritual Mentoring Initiative Frequently Asked Questions

What do we mean by spiritual mentoring? Spiritual Mentoring includes the sharing of life together in intentional, Christ-centered, discipleship-focused relationships, in which mature Christ-followers assist students in becoming fully devoted followers of Christ through regular, spiritually-focused conversations (Garber, 1996). We are suggesting that spiritual mentoring take place on at least a monthly basis, preferably weekly, for at least a year. Ideally, an APU undergraduate student could meet with their spiritual mentor for their entire four year experience.

What is the history of spiritual mentoring programs on campus?

Spiritual mentoring is a part of the core mission and ethos of APU, and has been since its inception. Spiritual mentoring happens informally in all kinds of settings, and it is our desire that a more intentional, comprehensive approach to spiritual mentoring will only enhance the faithful efforts of many faculty, administration, and staff. In terms of formal mentoring programs, Heart to Heart women’s mentoring is the longest formal program, currently in its 20th year, currently ministers to approximately 125 female students. Discipleship groups (D-groups) have been in place for approximately 7 years, currently involving approximately 1,000 students in formal D-groups, and likely several hundred more in informal small groups (many D-groups are peer-led and there is a large need for faculty/staff led D-groups). Many of the other initiatives are at least several years old. Blueprints men’s mentoring, which was started by several Residence Life staff in 2007, and currently ministers to approximately 50 male undergraduate students.

What is the current need for spiritual mentoring of undergraduate students on campus?

Students report a need to be known on a personal, individual level...to have someone know their name, hear their story, and help them recognize where God is at work. In a study of CCCU institutions, including APU, the Faithful Change Project (2003) on spiritual development indicated that ‘mentoring relationships with persons of mature faith’ were among the experiences in college that led to the greatest spiritual growth (along with personal crises, commitment to purposes beyond oneself, cross-cultural experiences, and supportive community), while a lack of mentors was associated with less spiritual growth. The need is significant for APU’s student body of approximately 4500. The informal mentoring that happens on campus, even when combined with the existing formal mentoring programs, do not appear to be meeting the current need.

- In 2010, 42% of undergraduate students reported that APU faculty and staff give them a sense of belonging at APU (41% in 2008), while 25% reported that their D-group gives them a sense of belonging (17% in 2008).
- In 2010, students surveyed reported that they gained the following from their D-group (in order of highest percentage): friendships (75%), support (65%), prayer (63%), accountability (47%), and Bible study (43%).
- 58% reported that they did not participate in a D-group (68% in 2009)
- In 2010, 27% of students surveyed reported that they had been ‘engaged in a significant mentoring relationship with an APU staff or faculty member’ (30% in 2009). Another 41% reported that they would like to be mentored (37% in 2009). In interpreting survey results, we estimate that approximately 500 undergraduate students do not have a spiritual mentoring relationship, but would like one.
- In 2008, 58% of APU students reported that they had been ‘mentored in a significant and positive way’ by an APU faculty or staff member, while 29% did not feel this way.

**Do I need to stop the informal spiritual mentoring that happens as I naturally interact with students in the context of my work at APU?** Absolutely not! The informal spiritual mentoring and support that happens in a myriad of contexts on campus is what makes our APU community so special. Spiritual mentoring happens along a continuum (see attached). We are simply asking that you take some of these spiritual mentoring relationships to the next level of focus and intentionality. We also ask that faculty and staff be mindful of the power that we all have in students’ lives, and exercise Christian wisdom and discernment in these relationships.

**Should I let the Campus Pastors office know if I have already been meeting with an individual student or group of students for regular spiritual mentoring?** Yes! We would love to know about your ministry to students, and invite you into pooling resources and wisdom. Spiritual mentoring relationships often happen organically in a variety of contexts on campus. Operating under the new umbrella of this initiative ensures best practices and protects staff and faculty from a liability perspective. And finally, as we create a personalized web of care for students, we like to know who else they are connected to as safe places of support, so that we can all coordinate pastoral care together – particularly when students are in crisis.

**Should I invite students into spiritual mentoring relationships?** Absolutely! Undergraduate students often seek out spiritual mentoring relationships, but they may be reluctant to approach a staff or faculty member for a variety of reasons…and, they love to be invited into these kinds of relationships. Please feel free to ask students if they have a spiritual mentor, or would like one. You can offer to fill this role yourself, or send them to the Campus Pastors office to be thoughtfully and prayerfully matched with someone. If you do not interact with undergraduate students often, or do not know any students who may be a fit for you, the Campus Pastors can match you with a student as part of the process. Just fill out a spiritual mentoring application and we will lead you through the process.

**Why do we need to formalize spiritual mentoring with new policies and procedures?**

Faculty, administration, and staff members at Azusa Pacific University have a desire to become involved in students lives and are being encouraged to become involved on a daily basis. By doing so, an employee can make an amazing impact by creating a spiritual mentoring relationship which is focused on Jesus Christ. Spiritual mentoring program directors report that
they have a growing need for more qualified, equipped spiritual mentors. One intention of this proposal is to pool resources, as these programs have historically operated independently of one another, and are now all in need of more spiritual mentors. While many staff, administrators, and faculty are continually involved in informal mentoring relationships, our initial goal is to increase staff and faculty involvement from current numbers (about 25% of staff; and 20% of faculty) to 50% of workforce within 2–4 years. This initiative provides supervisory support of spending time in ministry with undergraduate students, frees up time of staff and faculty to have these kinds of relationships, and standardizes best practices across campus to ensure a quality spiritual mentoring experience for our growing student body. This comprehensive initiative could be conceptualized as analogous to a lay counseling ministry in a large congregation.

What are the benefits of this new initiative?

- By participating in spiritual mentoring opportunities, we will continue to create community, and make a positive impact on a student’s life as a Disciples of Christ, facilitating their spiritual growth.
- Increased participation in spiritual mentoring by staff, administration, faculty, and students will increase pastoral care and connectedness for our overall community, which has the potential to reduce the number of students in crisis (an ever-growing concern), address concerns before they reach crisis level, and thereby reduce the waiting list in the Campus Pastors office and University Counseling Center.
- Empower faculty, administration, and staff who may not feel equipped to engage in conversations with students about spiritual life.
- Reinforce co-curricular education between the academic and student life sides of the university, creating a more seamless experience for students, and providing a model of how the academy and church may relate to one another.
- Improve quality control of both informal and formal spiritual mentoring experience through best practices, including screening, training, and supervision, reducing liability issues.
- Increase the retention rate for our undergraduate student population as students feel known and cared for.
- We would likely see reverse mentoring take place between staff, administrators, and faculty and a student where the mentor learns and grows from the experience and the process, which may lead to increased job satisfaction, productivity, and retention.
- Training and ministry experience will lead to spiritual growth of staff and faculty, which will generalize to coworker, family, and community relationships.
- Potentially increase student involvement in local churches.
- Increasing ‘soft money’ financial resources as a result of increased student and employee retention.