

## Faculty FAQs About UNST Mentors

### *Who are the UNST Peer Mentors?*

The University Studies (UNST) Peer Mentor Program is the largest mentor program at PSU with approximately 100 mentors each year. We hire top students from across PSU who also demonstrate excellent mentoring potential to become your FRINQ and SINQ mentors. Our mentors come from a variety of disciplines on campus and reflect the interdisciplinary nature of UNST. They are trained specifically to support student learning in the UNST general education program and foster connections for students to the PSU campus and its resources. Toward this end we have designed an efficient method for training, hiring, and scheduling mentors to your FRINQ and SINQ courses.

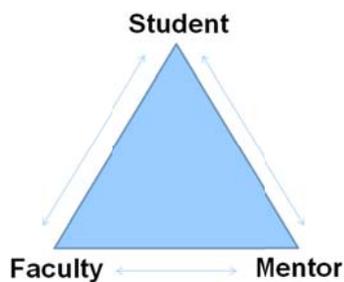
### *Why do we utilize peer mentors?*

UNST Peer Mentors have a unique perspective and powerful proximity to an experience that is the foundation of student learning—being an expert student. Peer Mentors are part of a larger curricular structure aimed at retention and success for all PSU students. In UNST’s mentor sessions, mentors offer an individualized bridge and connect all students as members of a learning community by helping students “learn HOW to learn,” and guide student in becoming successful in your courses.

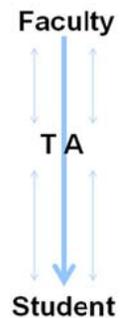
### *What is the difference between a mentor and a TA?*

A Teaching Assistant (TA) is traditionally someone whose work assists the *faculty* to ease workload (e.g., such as grading, making copies, etc.), and is viewed as an extension of the faculty role. (See diagram on the right.)

Peer Mentors, in their UNST roles, have a unique relationship shared with *both* faculty and students that is based on curricular research in education emphasizing interconnected roles in learning spaces. (See diagram on the left.) Mentors are specifically positioned in UNST to serve in a guiding capacity,



and integrate learning processes that affect students’ lives in and beyond the classroom. One key difference is that our Peer Mentors *do not grade* or assess student work in a formalized way. This helps align mentors more equitably to serve as co-facilitators for all students in the class, and not as evaluators of individual learning.



### *So if a mentor can't help me grade, then what is the mentor for?*

Mentors can design and support any faculty activity and course goal through these types of engagement:

- Assist students in understanding UNST and higher education.
- Support student writing, research, reading, and critical thinking.
- Help students use basic technology and create ePortfolios.
- Generate group discussion and increase student participation.
- Provide active learning in the classroom toward student success.
- Help students understand unfamiliar “jargon” in a field.
- Connect students to resources at PSU to help with degree completion.

*Can I pick my own mentor?*

Due to program size of nearly 100 mentors, the short answer is no. However, you may help in identifying and recruiting students to become mentors each year through our annual hiring process. UNST Faculty and Peer Mentors are often our best advocates for finding potential mentors.

*I loved my mentor last term. How can I get this mentor again for my class?*

Contact your mentor and say you would love to work together again next term and for which class. The mentor can then select your class as his or her top-ranked option in the scheduling survey. This optimizes this possibility within other parameters that impact the scheduling of multiple mentors for UNST courses each term. If you do not end up with your mentor again, you will be scheduled another one of our well-trained UNST Peer Mentors. We do our best to meet your needs.

*When and how do I get my mentor assignment?*

This happens in late summer or at the end of each term (usually after finals). You will receive an email from UNST with your Mentor Assignment. [\*How Do I Get My Mentor?\*](#) describes the complexity and timelines of mentor scheduling. While we know teaching requires advance preparation, mentors are also students and must successfully complete their course deadlines and final projects each term to remain mentors. Additionally, mentors are neither paid, nor on contract during their breaks or over the summer.

*Why is my mentor from a different discipline or department other than mine?*

UNST is an interdisciplinary program. Our mentors are trained to support students across all classes in the program and to help students become “expert learners” in all subjects. They can help break down (and make accessible) the “jargon” of academic fields, which is a primary skill set mentors emphasize with your students. It is advantageous to have mentors from a variety of disciplines because they can help students from differing backgrounds relate to your course materials. Sometimes mentors do end up in a theme that is familiar to them.

*I know a student who would be a great mentor. Where do I send this student?*

Please have the student check out the criteria and application process on our website ([mentors.unst.pdx.edu](http://mentors.unst.pdx.edu)). We recruit mentors each January for the following academic year. The UNST Front Desk can provide more details.

*What do mentors get from doing this?*

Mentors get these very tangible benefits: (a) significant tuition remission and a stipend award each term, (b) an incredible leadership experience that many of them describe as “life changing,” (c) real work experience to have on their CV or resume before entering the job market, (d) and the creation of a mentoring ePortfolio documenting their experiences. They also participate in a learning community with 100 other mentors at PSU, as well as complete over 140 hours of professional development and community-based leadership hours.