

The Mentor Role @ FSU

To ensure that "learning" is the operant word in distance learning, FSU has pioneered the mentor-supported distance-learning model, in which mentors are the bridge between students and their success.

What does a mentor do?

A mentor is a member of an FSU course Instruction Team whose primary role is to provide a personal contact for a small number of distance students. For these students the mentor serves as a learning coach:

- Monitoring student progress
- Maintaining a caring presence for the student
- Helping with administrative and content issues in the course

The details of mentoring a particular class are set by the Instruction Team and may vary from course to course. As a member of the Instruction Team, the mentor may be asked to participate in course-wide online activities. The mentor always has the backup of the rest of the team, especially the lead faculty member. When a student needs help to progress through the course, the mentor is there to provide the help directly or to forward the problem to the lead faculty member.

The mentor role has been created to support the progress of distance students and to help them connect to a learning community. In particular, the mentor helps students develop and participate in a student-centric learning community by facilitating contact with one another through collaborative activities and by encouraging peer critiques and study groups.

FSU currently uses mentors in most of its undergraduate distance offerings, including all courses in its Online Degree-Completion programs. The online programs provide students who possess an AA degree or higher the opportunity to complete all of their junior- and senior-level work online and from a distance.

Most of a mentor's communication with students takes place electronically, through one of the many tools on the course website, including e-mail, Announcements, Discussion Boards, and the Assignment feature. (A mentor is provided training on all features and tools available on an FSU course website.)

For which bachelor's degree programs and courses does FSU hire mentors?

Currently, online programs leading to bachelor's degrees are available in:

- **Computer and Information Science** (majors in Computer Science and Software Engineering)
- **Interdisciplinary Social Science** (majors in Economics, Geography, and Sociology)
- **Nursing** (RN-to-BSN)
- Additional distance-learning programs are under development.

The roll-out schedule of courses and course descriptions for online programs are available online:

- **Computer Science**
- **Interdisciplinary Social Science**
- **Nursing (RN-to-BSN)**

Ongoing opportunities for professional development and peer interaction among mentors is available electronically through the Mentor Team website.

When you have completed the Mentor Workshop, you will be automatically enrolled in the Mentor Team course website. To access this course website, go to <http://campus.fsu.edu>. The course should be listed on your Home page in the module entitled My Courses.

Navigate within the site by using the buttons in left-hand column.

Note: As a guest to the site, your access is restricted from viewing or using the Communication area.

How much is a mentor paid?

Certified mentors are appointed for pay on a course-by-course basis by Academic and Professional Program Services (APPS). These appointments are for one semester only and are contingent on course enrollment. The compensation rate for mentoring a 3-hour course ranges from \$1800 to \$3000. Given the flexible nature of the mentor role, mentoring duties should not interfere with primary employment with another academic institution or business.

Why is mentor-supported distance learning better than other types of distance education?

Past generations of distance learning often provided students with quality materials but did not support students with mentors who actively contributed to students' understanding of course materials. Experience has shown that when distance education is supported by mentors, students master course objectives more quickly and comfortably than when left without support. Equally valuable, in supported distance learning, students feel connected to their university and to their fellow students. Students who feel connected to this learning community are much less likely to drop out.

How much time does it take to mentor a section?

The workload for mentors will vary from course to course and will depend on the number of students assigned to the mentor. An average workload of 10 hours per week for a 3-credit-hour course is the intended average. The role of mentor allows substantial flexibility in the time of day that work is performed.

How many students is a mentor assigned per section?

A mentor is assigned no more than 25 students per section, with 20 being typical. (A mentor may assume responsibility for more than one section.) As part of the FSU course Instruction Team, the mentor works directly under the supervision of the FSU lead faculty member he or she assists.

The lead faculty member is analogous to the professor or instructor in an on-campus classroom. He or she has developed and selected the course materials, including the weekly objectives, readings, discussion questions, assignments, and other activities.

The lead faculty member offers the mentor clarification of course materials and provides the mentor feedback on evaluation of assignments and participation in threaded discussions. The lead faculty member has ultimate responsibility and authority for the course.

Does a mentor receive specific training in mentoring?

Yes. As part of the contract, a mentor agrees to participate in two phases of training:

- A Mentor Training Workshop (completed on campus)
- An online mentor-training course (completed from a distance)

The Mentor Training Workshop is held each term on the FSU campus in Tallahassee, Florida. The sessions include:

- Technology training in using the course website
- Focusing on the course content
- Training in general mentoring skills

What qualifications must a candidate have to be considered for employment as a mentor?

Candidates must have a master's degree or higher in a field related to the course of study. Examples of related fields include, but are not limited to:

- Communication
- Computer Science
- Economics
- Geography

- Higher Education
- Mathematics
- Nursing
- Political Science
- Public Administration
- Sociology
- Software Engineering
- Statistics
- Urban and Regional Planning

Some courses may have additional requirements.

Professional experience and/or licensure can substitute in part for formal higher education. Some courses may have additional requirements.

Candidates must be eligible for employment (e.g., U.S. citizen or I-9) and willing to complete required employment paperwork, including loyalty oath, Employment Qualification Statement on Controlled Substance Conviction, etc.

A mentor must commit to continue employment for the full semester for which she is appointed. Florida State University will employ a mentor as a Visiting Assistant Instructor in the school or department that offers the course: Information Studies, Computer Science, or Interdisciplinary Social Science. The mentor position at FSU is non-tenure-earning.

What kind of person are lead faculty members looking for to mentor classes?

FSU is recruiting professionals or instructors who enjoy being facilitators and learning coaches. The ideal candidate relates well to people and is genuinely concerned about the experiences and success of students. Fundamental computer and Internet literacy are essential, along with strong written and oral communication skills. FSU mentors must be able to meet course deadlines and keep records on the progress of each student.

What computer equipment and services are needed for mentoring an online class?

Mentors must own or have full access to a computer that can support course materials, communication packages, and other software relevant to and/or required for completion of the courses being mentored. FSU recommends **minimum specifications for computers** used in distance-learning programs. Full access includes the ability to save data to the computer's primary drive. Mentors must also have an Internet service provider (ISP) to accommodate e-mail and web-supported applications.

What are the Online Degree-Completion programs?

The online programs enable virtually anyone with a Florida community college AA degree (or the equivalent) or higher to earn an FSU bachelor's degree without moving to Tallahassee. Online programs offer junior- and senior-level courses so students with AA degrees can complete their bachelor's degrees. Graduates of FSU degree programs delivered via distance learning earn the same course credits and degrees as those students who complete equivalent courses and programs on campus.

Why are bachelor's level online programs at FSU called Online Degree-Completion programs?

FSU's online bachelor's programs are also called degree-completion programs. These programs only offer the upper-level courses online.

How do online courses work?

Each student in an Internet-supported distance-learning program receives access to a course website and the email address of everyone associated with the class. Students use materials, which may include videotapes, CDROMs, textbooks, and study guides, as well as the course websites, to progress through the course. Students follow a typical semester-long course calendar but complete coursework primarily at times and places most convenient for them.

How do students turn in assignments and take tests?

Students use multiple media such as e-mail and other tools on the course website to deliver assignments.

How do students contact their mentors and communicate with other students?

Mentors are available to answer student questions via e-mail. Students are encouraged to communicate with fellow classmates via e-mail, group discussions, and chat on the course website.

Do students receive the same credit for a distance-learning course as they do for an on-campus face-to face course?

Yes, the credit is the same. The learning objectives, assignments, and performance standards are the same as those for on-campus sections of the same courses. A student's transcript lists a distance course exactly as it would list an on-campus section. However, students often report that success in online learning requires more focus and discipline than traditional classroom learning.

Are FSU Online Degree-Completion Programs accredited?

Yes. FSU is accredited by the [Commission on Colleges -- Southern Association of Colleges and Schools](#) to award associate, bachelor's, master's and doctorate degrees. The [Florida Community College System](#) endorses these online programs. In addition, the Computer Science and Software Engineering majors are accredited jointly by the Computer Science Accreditation Board (CSAB) and Accrediting Board of Engineering and Technology (ABET).

What kind of technical support is provided to students in online programs?

FSU provides an [Online Support web page](#) on the online course technology students will use. The web page includes links to instructional manuals and Quick References. FSU continues to update and improve its technical support for students to make online learning as seamless as possible.

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