FACULTY MENTORING IN KAIROS

In Kairos, each student's journey of discipleship is built around a mentor team that assists the student in customizing their unique context-driven, competency-based degree program. The mentor team is at the heart of what makes Kairos's educational model unique, relevant, and successful.

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SETTING THE COURSE

Globally networked. Locally connected. Contextually framed. Competency based. Jesus Centered. Kingdom focused. Mentor driven.

Every student who enrolls at Kairos University is joining a movement that is transforming theological education worldwide. It's a movement that spans over sixty countries on six continents involving students from over seventy different Christian denominations. It's a movement that involves an expanding global partnership of Jesus-centered, Kingdom-minded organizations and people that are committed to living out the one Great Commission.

Kairos is growing worldwide—rapidly. Yet, Kairos University is as local to each student as their own church, their own parachurch ministry, their own police station, their own firehouse, their own youth ministry, their own marketing agency, their own community, their own neighborhood. Each student's context is the primary classroom within which their educational journey is developed, and their faith formation is shaped.

Each student's journey of discipleship, therefore, is built around a mentor team that assists the student in customizing their unique context-driven, competency-based degree program. The mentor team is at the heart of what makes Kairos's educational model unique, relevant, and successful.

In fact, mentoring is so central and essential to everything that we do, it's our number one priority. That's why we supply each mentor team with a trained, committed faculty mentor to guide each student and their mentor team throughout the student's program. The faculty mentor is the main liaison between Kairos, the student, and our global network of resources and partners. Therefore, it is our primary goal to equip our faculty mentors with the tools, best practices, and creative and relevant skills to facilitate each student's educational journey.

In this white paper, we will look at both the "myths" related to the role of a faculty mentor, as well as what we're calling the Indicators of Faculty Mentor Competence.

First, a little bit of background . . .

As a pioneer in competency-based theological education (CBTE), Kairos University is an active participant in many organizations that are interested in enhancing the practices that flow from this educational philosophy. For example, Kairos team members Susan Reese, David Williams, and Greg Henson serve on the steering committee for a community of practice within the Association of Theological Schools that is focused on CBTE. Larry Caldwell will join others from Kairos at a CBTE consultation hosted by the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education, and the university is a co-founder of Symporus, an organization that helps

schools around the world develop and support CBTE programs.

As part of that work, members from the Kairos team often collaborate with staff and faculty from other schools. Sometimes that means serving as a conversation partner as another school thinks through an opportunity in front of them. Other times it means co-creating documents, workshops, and other materials that can be shared with the wider group of schools engaged in CBTE. Recently, many of those conversations have been focused on the work of faculty mentors. We have been blessed by several of those conversations and have had the opportunity to facilitate a few as well.

One such conversation took place in April of 2023. Greg Henson partnered with Aaron Einfeld, Director of Lifelong Learning at Calvin Seminary, to facilitate a workshop with a group of faculty, administrators, and partners engaged in the Empower program at Calvin Seminary. Kairos has been blessed to be in conversation with Calvin since the school began thinking about CBTE a few years ago. The goal of this workshop was to cultivate a list of outcomes and indicators of proficiency for faculty mentors using experiences and insights gleaned from Kairos, Calvin, and several other schools engaged in the work of CBTE.

The result was a list of indicators we think are a helpful starting place for thinking about the work of faculty mentors. The list has already been shared with a number of other schools that provide opportunities for students to enroll in CBTE programs.

In the rest of this paper, we will be taking each of those indicators, along with their individual targets, and applying them to our context. We want you to see first-hand not only the importance of the faculty mentor role in the student's education but also the level of competency that is built around the role. We'll start with "de-myth-ologizing" the role of the faculty mentor. Back to top.

DECONSTRUCTING THE MYTHS OF THE FACULTY MENTOR

Kairos University has been a pioneer in competency based theological education (CBTE). Recently, Kairos' Greg Henson partnered with Aaron Einfeld, Director of Lifelong Learning at Calvin Seminary, to facilitate a workshop with a group of faculty, administrators, and partners engaged in the Empower program at Calvin Seminary. The goal of this workshop was to cultivate a list of outcomes and indicators of proficiency for faculty mentors using experiences and insights gleaned from Kairos, Calvin, and several other schools engaged in the work of CBTE.

I will be taking each of those Indicators, along with their individual targets, and applying them to our educational context. We want you to see first-hand not only the importance of the faculty mentor role in the student's education but also the level of competency that is built around the role.

For many of us in the faculty mentor role, that may have meant that our methods of education needed to adjust to accommodate the shifting cultures and the diverse learning needs of our students. At the same time, our goals for equipping our students to be high-capacity leaders for God needed to remain strong. That's where the list of Indicators comes into play.

Before we share those Indicators of Faculty Mentor Competence, however, let's look at three primary "myths" about faculty mentoring that must be deconstructed.

Myth #1: Anyone Can Be a Faculty Mentor

While it is true that anyone can be a mentor (if they have a student to follow them), it takes a special person to be a faculty mentor at Kairos. For the sake of our students, as well as for the gospel that we represent, we want people of solid, Christ-centered character, who are competent at equipping students to engage their own learning processes, able to provoke theological inquiry and integration, and who are willing to hold both the student and themselves accountable to the content of the high standard of education Kairos is known for.

For Kairos, the greatest gift a faculty mentor can give to a student is themselves—their time, their attention, their focus, their prayers, their love, their care, their boundaries, their experience, their feedback, their encouragement, and their faith and life integrity.

Mentoring is based on life experiences, for sure. But the best mentors allow their constellation of life experiences to give them a deep, abiding patience as they walk among their student's questions, explanations, doubts, deliberations, reactions, and musings. In many cases, the faculty mentor has been where the student is now. But faculty mentors need to remember that this primarily is the student's journey, not their own.

Being a faculty mentor first requires preparation—not just from their life experiences, but by their commitment to what God may be birthing in the student's life and vocation. A faculty mentor's focus is not simply "how do I fit these meetings into my schedule" (although we understand the practical nature of the hybrid roles we lead), but "how do I establish an intentional rhythm that fosters a meaningful mentoring relationship."

That rhythm includes:

- **Praying**—for our students, for their discernment, for our ability to hear and see what they are facing.

Together, we remember it's all about Jesus first, and that the "work" of spiritual formation is an internal process nurtured by the Holy Spirit.

- **Encouraging**—regularly checking in on our students to see how they're doing, to let them know that we care.
- **Creating accountability**—regularly reviewing uploaded student assignments; sending them a reminder email a week before the scheduled mentor team meeting (at least until they take ownership of that process); coaching them, as needed, on best practices for running those meetings; getting to know the denominational expectations that will be imposed on the student so that we can ensure a positive educational experience for them; and assessing the learning that each student experiences on their path.
- **Listening**—for common themes from those connections to discern what we may need to research, learn, or get help to deal with, or for the broader issues that may be resolved through bringing multiple students together for peer interactions.

For example, I schedule that rhythm—putting reminders on my calendar, and blocking times each week, as needed, for any of the above.

Myth #2: Mentoring is Teaching

While some faculty mentors, in fact, are professional educators—whether professors at Kairos or at other learning institutions—by definition, faculty mentors are not meant to be creating didactic experiences for their students. Rather, faculty mentors have a rather unique equipping role.

A faculty mentor's primary tasks include (but are not limited to):

- **Facilitating** and assessing a student's fully customizable learning process within each of the outcomes in their degree program.
- **Asking** the appropriate questions that keep the flow of discernment and accountability moving the student forward in progress.
- **Equipping** the student's mentor team in understanding their role, how to follow and engage the student's progress via Pathwright, and how to ask questions that assist the student in navigating their educational process within their vocational context.
- **Facilitating** a student's master assessment and the reflection process it entails as the student and mentors discern proficiency in each of the learning outcomes.
- **Representing** the student to the Kairos network, and representing the Kairos network to the student and the student's mentor team.

For those of us who are wired to teach (professionally or in other contexts), we may need to deconstruct our traditional understanding of our role in order to (re-)construct our new understanding as a faculty mentor. Mentor team meetings are not classrooms, per se, and our role is not to educate our students in the traditional

sense. Instead, in the context of mentoring, we may be asking more questions than answering them, guiding thoughts rather than defending ours, and providing resources and creative ideas for alternative or adapted assignments that will equip the student to thrive in their vocational context.

Myth #3: Mentoring is Student-Driven

So, this myth is deceptive. Yes, the best mentoring is done when the student asks all the questions, drives their educational process, and takes responsibility for their learning goals, studies, schedule, and mentor team. But not all students know how to do so; and not all students will have the tools, knowledge base, temperament, or skills to be able to—at least, initially. In other words, students may not know what they don't know.

So, faculty mentors help to create a pathway for the students to be equipped for their journey. Initial modeling establishes and reinforces long-term effectiveness.

Mentoring is a transitional process rather than a transactional one. Certainly, faculty mentors transact their role on behalf of Kairos University. However, with respect to the student, faculty mentors create a safe place for the Holy Spirit to transition the student along the journey of their discipleship from where they are now to where God is bringing them next. Their educational journey is one of the vehicles that the Spirit uses to do so.

Next, we will look at the top five Indicators of Faculty Mentor Competence—Asking, Listening, Observing, Documenting, and Sharing Assessment Feedback. You'll get a "behind-the-scenes" glimpse at what our network of faculty mentors does to facilitate each student's educational experience at Kairos.

THE ART OF ASKING QUESTIONS

As discussed, mentoring is both central and essential to everything that we do here at Kairos. In fact, it's our number one priority. Our ongoing commitment is to increase our capacity to mentor by consistently adding the tools, best practices, and creative and relevant skills to facilitate each student's journey of discipleship.

Now, let's focus on the first of our *Areas of Proficiency for Faculty Mentors* — namely, *The Art of Asking Questions*.

Based on the list created by Greg Henson and Aaron Einfeld, this *area* has two main indicators of proficiency.

The best faculty mentors:

- **Focus on asking questions rather than giving answers, empowering the student to develop their own integrated knowledge for ministry leadership.**
- **Can frame useful questions that help students reflect on their experiences and integrate their learning.**

Asking good questions not only guides conversations to deeper levels of learning (thank you Socrates!), but also respects the other person's journey with God. Most especially, asking questions gives us the opportunity to stay *curious*—about what the Lord is doing in each of our lives and learnings, and what the Holy Spirit has in mind for our interactions with each other.

Curiosity is essential to the role of a faculty mentor. It provokes learning even as it empowers the "art" of asking great questions.

In his May 17, 2022, *Harvard Business Review* article "The Art of Asking Great Questions,"[1] Tijs Besieux argues that there are three consistent characteristics to what makes a great question. I'm tweaking those characteristics here to illustrate some of what a faculty mentor might do with their students to invite them deeper into the learning process.

1) "A great question should demonstrate that you're thoroughly prepared for the conversation."

> **Instead of**: "How have you been doing?"

> **We Might Ask**: "Hey, Dave, for the past three months, you've been canceling your mentor team meetings, and I've noticed that you haven't uploaded any assignments either. What's going on?"

> **Instead of**: "So, Judy, what courses do you want to take next?"

> **We Might Ask**: "Judy, last month, you shared that you're going to be meeting with your ordination board in November. Do you know what educational updates they're going to be needing from you? How can we help?"

2) "A great question illustrates the expertise you bring to the table, without showing it off."

> **Instead of**: "Jerry, do you think your supervisor really knows what he's doing?"

We Might Ask: "I can see that you've been frustrated at work, Jerry. What specifically have you tried in the past to address the conflicts? Would it help to talk through some additional options—especially based on what you've been studying?"

Instead of: "You seem to keep repeating certain behavior patterns at work. As a counselor, I tend to notice those kinds of things. So, what's that about?"

We Might Ask: "In what parts of your job do your weaknesses tend to show up? Does your current role help you utilize the strengths you're discerning from your Christian Spirituality learning path?"

3) "A great question invites others to deepen or broaden their thinking, and challenge held beliefs."

Instead of: "Betty, what do you want to do with your degree once you're done?"

We Might Ask: "Betty, what do you think God wants you to do with your degree once you're done? How are your studies impacting your view of God's call on your life?"

Instead of: "So, who wants to open our meeting with prayer?"

We Might Ask: "Debbie and George, when we started our meeting, you were sharing some pretty challenging situations that you are going through right now. You both are working within the Spiritual Direction certificate program, so I'm wondering, do you mind if we go a little deeper with what you were sharing? How have you been able to care for yourselves during these challenging times? What have your studies and prayer times been exposing in you about your need for sabbath rest?"

The best questions invite people to go deeper—beyond expected limitations of thought, deeper into our appreciation of God's creation (and especially ourselves as God's created beings), and fully engage in the value of the other person. Way too many times, we draw our own conclusions about what others are trying to say, rather than simply asking them.

Seven Types of Questions Faculty Mentors Might Ask:

Direct Questions – Direct questions ask for specific information or engagement within the conversation. Examples: "What specifically did you want to learn from your studies in Christian Spirituality?" "Can you please share with us your learning goals?" "What has this outcome been teaching you about your view of God?"

Indirect Questions – Mentors use indirect questions to engage the student from the sideline of their "field of play"—to acknowledge the student's capacity to not answer by putting the responsibility for the query on the mentor. Examples: "I was wondering why you chose to take Hebrew at the same time as Greek." "I'm interested in knowing how your studies in Christian Spirituality have impacted your call to ministry."

Open-ended Questions – Open-ended questions are a mentor's best friend. They are designed to keep the conversation flowing. Examples: "How would you describe Kairos to someone on your ordination board?" "If you only have time for one additional course, which one would you take and why?" "How do you want to proceed with your adapted assignment proposal?"

Hypothetical (What-If) Questions – Mentors use what-if questions to help the student move beyond perceived mental, emotional, or spiritual barriers. For example: "I know you've been worried about not getting a promotion, but what if you actually did? How would your life be better?" "You've been telling us that you don't know what you would do. What would you say if you *did* know?"

Rhetorical Questions – Mentors use rhetorical questions to get a reaction from the student using a playful tone. Examples: "Can you imagine life without ice cream?" "Has there ever been a church that hasn't faced conflict?"

Reflective Questions – Reflective questions utilize any of the above types to help the student take their learning to a deeper level of integration. Examples: "What skills do you want to develop within this particular outcome?" "In what areas of your life do you want to grow?" "How will you apply what you've learned in this outcome to your professional growth?"

Leading Questions – Mentors use leading questions primarily to guide a student past a learning obstacle. Examples: "It sounds like you're really struggling with writing the essays for that particular class. Might there be a different way of fulfilling this assignment that did not involve writing?" "You're creating a workshop on leadership for your team at work. Have you considered adapting that work and using it for one of your assignments in this outcome?" "What are you not doing well that's keeping you from fulfilling your goals?"

Of course, some questions can fit into several types of categories.

Questions offer faculty mentors a powerful tool for engaging students within their learning processes. Maintaining curiosity throughout the process keeps us from becoming patronizing, condescending, or presumptive—assuming we know the reasons for another's behavior or thoughts.

Questions also enable faculty mentors to maintain a "*balcony view*" of the student's learning process, giving us the capacity to see the bigger picture of their customized education.

[1] Tijs Besieux, "The Art of Asking Great Questions," in :Ascend, *Harvard Business Review*, May 17, 2022, accessed May 25, 2023, https://hbr.org/2022/05/the-art-of-asking-great-questions.

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THE THREE EARS OF THE FACULTY MENTOR

Now we'll explore our second *area of proficiency*—Active Listening—in a section I'm entitling, "The Three Ears of the Faculty Mentor."

Yes, you read that right—*three* ears.

When we engage in mentoring, the skills of active listening work hand-in-hand with the art of asking questions. The *area* of Active Listening has a primary indicator. The best faculty mentor:

Demonstrates active listening skills by identifying the underlying emotions, themes, questions, and key insights that are present in a conversation.

Curiosity, which we learned is the centerpiece of asking great questions, only engages the mentoring process when it is coupled with the full attention that comes with active listening. To do so, faculty mentors use all *three* of their ears.

In any mentoring conversation, faculty mentors use . . .

1) One ear to listen to the student

- What they're saying with their words (auditory)
- What they're saying with the body language (kinesthetic)

- What they're saying with their tone, with their emotions (emotive)
- What are the overarching themes being presented?

2) One ear to listen to the Holy Spirit

- What the Spirit may be saying to the faculty mentor within the conversation
- What the Spirit may be saying to the student—for example, are there any "a-ha moments," when a new awareness seems to dawn on the student?
- What the Spirit may be saying to or through the mentor team
- What questions does the conversation raise for the faculty mentor? Student? Mentor team?
- What key insights or "next steps" are emerging from the conversation?

3) One ear to listen to the Kairos process

- If *everything* is useful for the student's discipleship and growth, how might the student use the basis of this conversation to pursue their learning goals? (For example, a student shares that she is having a difficult time with her school assignments because she's been busy preparing a six-part presentation for her marketing firm on how to gain a global perspective on the use of their product. Instead of simply acknowledging her exhaustion, the faculty mentor might suggest that the six-part presentation could be adapted as an assignment for one of her learning outcomes.)
- How is the student reaching their targets for each outcome?
- How is the student's work within their program maintaining the educational integrity of a Bachelors, Masters, or Doctoral degree (i.e., are the assignments showing the appropriate level of quality, research, integration of learning materials, etc.)?

All three ears are vitally important. Faculty mentors certainly have a responsibility *to* the student as, together, they craft a fully customizable educational track that meets the student's vocational goals. At the same time, faculty mentors also are responsible *for* representing Kairos University's educational integrity. Both elements are part of the framework that faculty mentors bring into the student's process.

To exercise all three of our ears, faculty mentors need to engage fully the skills of active listening.

Active listening requires that:

We're present in the moment. Faculty mentors are busy people too. It's so easy for us to want to multitask when we're having our sessions with our students—especially when our meetings are on Zoom or FaceTime. It's important for us to silence our phones, close or minimize the other items on our desktop, and give our undivided attention to the student and their mentor team. One of the easiest, but critically important ways we can show our full presence while on Zoom is to keep our video on. When

our video is on, they can see us as much as we can see them. There is an accountability—and a gift of respect—connected to being fully present.

We're creating an environment of safety, compassion, and honesty. Faculty mentors set the stage for active listening by first engaging the "environmental factors" of the meeting. Even on Zoom, we may acknowledge body language, we may see facial expressions, and we may ask about what we see: "Jane, you keep rubbing your temples. Are you feeling okay?" "Bobby, I hear the frustration in what you're saying. Can you help me to understand what's going on?" Then, we challenge ourselves not to interrupt while the other person is speaking. Often our interruptions are to finish another person's sentence, or to usurp the conversation based on our opinions, or to prevent the other person from saying what's on their mind, regardless of what it may be. When we interrupt another person, typically it is because of our own anxiety, arrogance, or presumption, or reflects our own discomfort with what is being shared. Our interruptions always say more about us than about the other person—and what those interruptions communicate quite often is disrespect. When necessary, of course, the faculty mentor certainly can set boundaries on conversations—interrupting others who are being rude or demeaning, asking for clarification, and the like. But generally, we strive to create a safe place for the student's learning.

We're giving appropriate and encouraging feedback that shows we've heard the student. Before addressing the topic and continuing the conversation, faculty mentors seek to let the student know that they heard what was shared—not in "parroting fashion," but in genuine, integrated listening. It might sound something like this:

Instead of: "Joe, what I hear you saying is that you're really getting a lot out of your church history course. Is that what you said?"

We Might Ask: "Joe, I think it's great that you're excited about what you're learning in church history. What's one thing that really impacted you?"

We're summarizing what we've heard at the end of the session and including a summary of "next steps" that were decided. Ultimately, the faculty mentor summarizes the encounter to let the student (and the mentor team) know that they've been heard, that they have accountability (also part of active listening), and that everyone's on the same page for what happens between this session and the next: "Okay, so Janelle, thank you for all the work you put into this Outcome. It was exciting to hear you share the different parts of your adapted assignment. Your PowerPoint presentation was so strong—I wouldn't mind using that in one of my own leadership meetings! I agree with you that you're ready for your master assessment—and based on their interactions with you tonight, it sounds like your other mentors agree too. Do you feel ready to set a date for that assessment and talk through what that assessment will look like?"

One of the greatest expressions of Christ-centered love that we can offer another person is our full attention and a genuine listening ear (or three). Empathy and respect require that we slow down our pace enough to truly hear one another—interacting with what is brought to the table of discussion. When we trust that God never wastes anything, then every conversation has the potential to be part of the discipling process for the student—and for the faculty mentor (and mentor team). Paying attention to one another opens all participants up to what God may be doing within the transformative mentoring relationship.

To value another person is to listen to them, to let them know that they have been really heard. In our context, active listening does not presume agreement. Rather it assumes that the other person is engaging in a learning process and we're there to help them do so.

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GOING TO THE BALCONY

We have been looking at some of the tools, best practices, and creative and relevant skills that faculty mentors need in order to facilitate each student's educational journey. Specifically, we focused on "The Art of Asking Questions," and listening with "Three Ears," each of which reflects what we are calling the main *Areas of Proficiency for Faculty Mentors*.

Next, we're going to look at the third *Area*—Observation—and what it means for us to "go to the balcony."

The *Area* of Observation has a primary indicator. The best faculty mentor:

Over time, can identify and summarize the underlying and overarching themes and patterns that emerge in students.

For me, the major boost in my own spiritual formation occurred in college—specifically, through the campus ministries of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (IVCF). It was largely through IVCF, and their resources from the Navigators and NavPress, that I learned how to study and apply God's Word. I still remember (and use often) their initial frame of "Observation—Interpretation—Application."

Observation taught me to look at what's going on in the passage, what do I see in the details, what do I see in

the larger sections within which that passage occurs? Laying out the observation details then allowed me to begin the *Interpretation* phase—what might this passage have meant back in its original context, what might it mean for me today? Commentaries helped with doing the Interpretation phase, as did Bible dictionaries, and other reference books (the internet did not exist pervasively back in the early 1980s!). Interpretation then would lead to *Application*—what am I going to do with what I've learned, what impact is this passage having on my daily walk with the Lord?

Since then, I have applied the principles of Observation—Interpretation—Application to many other facets of life and ministry. I have modified them for use when I lead within conflict situations, when I do pastoral care and counseling, and when I engage in leadership and strategic planning. It's really quite fascinating what I have been learning through these steps.

And it all begins with taking in the bigger picture of what's going on.

The skills related to Observation link directly, but not exclusively, with active listening and asking great questions. Within our Kairos context, Observation helps us look at the larger story, the bigger picture behind each student's discipleship journey. In relatively recent leadership language, it's the story that's best discerned by "going to the balcony."

In their brilliant 2002 *Harvard Business Review* article, "A Survival Guide for Leaders,"[1] Ron Heifetz and Marty Linsky introduce the leadership concept of "moving from the dance floor to the balcony." It's a concept that would return with greater depth in their Adaptive Leadership Theory posed in their 2009 book, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*[2] —an intriguing concept designed to help leaders and organizations adapt to change, especially in seasons of conflict or significant transition.

In a nutshell, their theory suggests that it's often best for leaders to "get above" the situation at hand, to sufficiently distance themselves from the reactive levels of their own anxiety within that situation, and to discern the "story behind the story." Moving to the balcony, they suggest, alters a leader's perspective on their situation, giving them a better vantage point to determine what's going on and what is the most productive next step to take.

In other words, they suggest that leaders do the Observation and Interpretation steps before launching into Application to "fix" the problem.

In the context of their work with students, faculty mentors work hard at "going to the balcony." They not only understand that each student has a life, a faith, a job, a ministry, a family (with all of its family dynamics), a history, and a calling beyond their studies, they also strive to "connect the dots" of all those contexts *with* their student's studies. Competency-based theological education assumes that each student comes with a constellation of life experiences within which the Lord has been working already to prepare the student for the next phases of their life and ministry.

Faculty mentors, therefore, are challenged to "go to the balcony" with their students as they engage in conversations with them, or within their post-meeting reflections.

There are a few important parameters that faculty mentors engage when making Observations from the balcony:

1) Anxiety is often an invitation to curiosity. Not everything presented by a student or a mentor team is to be resolved by the faculty mentor. In fact, some conflicts, some questions, some doubts are all part of the student's learning, discipleship, and leadership development. A student's anxiety about a situation may provoke the necessary steps in their spiritual formation; to resolve it for them might inadvertently sabotage their opportunity for growth. Therefore, faculty mentors need to gauge the "barometric pressure" of the situation. Going to the balcony allows the faculty mentor to see the bigger picture of that student's capacity—what should be the student's responsibility in spite of their seeming unreadiness versus what level of anxiety may push the student toward emotional, spiritual, mental or existential paralysis.

2) Faculty Mentors may need to resist their own problem-solving skills. Jumping in to troubleshoot, teach, or solve problems is not only exciting, it's also enticing for faculty mentors. Our faculty mentors are great people who are highly skilled in their own right. Yet, we must remember that rather than being problem solvers, our role is to create safe environments for students to rise to the occasion or to fail—and to learn from both.

3) Balcony Observations inform the questions that we ask and the reflections that we make. There is a reason that each student is asked to "define proficiency" early on in their development path. Doing so sets a direction for mentoring. One of the best ways a faculty mentor can guide students on their educational path is to help them gain and maintain a larger view of their journey:

> From the assignment to the course objectives
> From the course to the outcome's targets
> From the targets to the student's definition of proficiency
> From proficiency to the degree or certification
> From the degree to their ministry, life, work context
> From their context to Kingdom mission
> And all of that in reverse as well!

Faculty mentors maintain a balcony view of the student's larger journey and, over time, can *identify and summarize the underlying and overarching themes and patterns that emerge.*

4) Observations are best made:

With humility. We might be wrong. We might be right. We need to walk prayerfully, yet directly into the sacred space of each student's discipleship. All Observations must be filtered through the sieve of love and grace as, mutually, we stand at the foot of the Cross of Christ.

In the form of a question. It's not our life story, therefore our observations are one form of feedback that the student receives to facilitate their discernment, self-awareness, and growth. We ask so that we may respect the student's readiness to receive, reflect, and respond.

With the intention of adding value to the student, not to ourselves. If our observations do not add value to the student, their educational process, or faith development, then perhaps they do not need to be shared.

The skills of Observation equip us for the next competency *Indicator*—Documentation, which we will tu.rn our attention to next.

[1] Ron Heifetz and Marty Linsky, "A Survival Guide for Leaders" in Harvard Business Review, June 2002, accessed May 31, 2023, https://hbr.org/2002/06/a-survival-guide-for-leaders.

[2] See Ron Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* (Harvard Business Press, 2009).

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TELLING THE STORY

We have been dissecting some of the tools, best practices, and creative and relevant skills that Faculty Mentors need to facilitate each student's educational journey. Specifically, we focused on "The Art of Asking Questions," listening with "Three Ears," and making "balcony" Observations—each of which reflects what we are calling the main *Areas of Proficiency for Faculty Mentors*.

Now, we're going to look at the fourth *Area*—Documentation—and the value of telling the educational story of our students.

The *Area* of Documentation has a primary indicator. The best faculty mentor:

Consistently identifies and summarizes student progress toward indicators and competence using an organized note-taking system.

Kairos University focuses on competency-based theological education. Therefore, our goal is to assist our students in developing proficiency within the parameters of their degree program. One of the most significant ways faculty mentors assist students in doing so is by collecting the appropriate data that will quantify and qualify student progress. When we take the time to do this, we help to tell the student's educational story.

There are a number of ways that faculty mentors may *quantify* student progress. For example, we may:

- Assess Prior Learning—obtaining documentation (written, visual, and/or digital) that offers evidence that such prior learning adds dimension to the student's proficiency within a given Outcome.
- Compile sample and/or final assignments from scheduled learning experiences, or other learning experiences, that the student has completed.
- Compile digital examples of any adapted assignments.
- Keep a record of master assessments for each outcome—detailing levels of proficiency obtained in content, craft, and character.
- Discern and notate patterns discerned from interactions with the student's mentor team.
- Make note of any expectations connected with the student's ordination, certification, or other professional context—to gauge their progress toward protracted goals.

Here's an example of a faculty mentor's progress note on a student named "Boyd":

June 3, 2023— Received an email from "Boyd" requesting a master assessment for his Skillful Biblical Exegesis outcome. Reviewed his definition of proficiency and each of his SLEs and other learning experiences to date. Based on a previous conversation with him, I notice that his United Methodist Board of Ordained Ministry requires that he takes a survey course in OT and in NT. He's done the OT, but has not completed the NT yet. Even though he's excelling in all his assignments (according to his professor's feedback—consistently receiving 10/10 for quizzes, and high praise in comments), and has met all of the other targets in his proficiency definition, his Board's requirement is going to require a delay in his master assessment for at least two more months. I plan to communicate that to him tomorrow but also to set a date for doing the assessment as soon as his course is over. His mentor team has been thrilled with his progress. "Catherine," his vocational mentor, is his district superintendent. She commented that his preaching has dramatically improved—saying that his sermons are "showing greater depth without losing applicability for the average listener." He did a 6-week series on the Book of Joshua that showed evidence of higher-level competence in exegetical work. Once he finishes the NT course, he'll definitely be ready for the master assessment.

Qualifying student progress looks at how the student's content, character, and craft proficiency is impacting their overall competency based on the level of education they are pursuing (i.e., bachelors, masters, or doctorate). Qualifying progress may require different matrices. These matrices are discerned mostly through conversations—with the student individually, within the context of the student's mentor team, and anecdotally through each of the mentor's interactions with the student in real-time vocational and personal contexts. Qualifying matrices might revolve around the following example reflective questions:

- Specifically, what evidence is there that the student has increased their proficiency within a given outcome by applying what they have learned?
- What "fruit" within the student's life testifies to the fact that they have attained competency in character or leadership?
- Is there consistency between the quantified evidence of learning with the student's self-awareness, self-presentation?

Data collection and documentation are important for capturing the salient elements related to the student's progress and telling the student's educational story—in both tangible and narrative forms. Consequently, it is best done systematically, over time. All interactions with the student become part of that student's narrative journey. Within each outcome, the summative expression of the student's progress is the master assessment. The summative expression of the student's degree or certification program is their final "project."

So how does a faculty mentor go about systematic documentation? Here are a couple of suggestions:

- Develop a file system—either "old school" with paper, pen, and file folders, or digitally.
- Use simple Word documents that are saved within individual student files.
- Use any of the tech apps that accommodate note-taking, file uploading, and interaction. For example: Notion, Google Keep, Asana, Obsidian (for the higher tech-minded), Microsoft's OneNote, Apple Notes.

Whichever method is used, the faculty mentor is challenged to make progress notes on their students to inform the ongoing assessment processes related to the student's educational journey.

Documentation is a discipline that faculty mentors use to enhance the student's experience of feedback and assessment—the subject of the next section.

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TYING IT ALL TOGETHER

During the previous five weeks, we have been dissecting some of the tools, best practices, and creative and relevant skills that faculty mentors need to facilitate each student's educational journey. Specifically, we focused on "The Art of Asking Questions," listening with "Three Ears," and making "balcony" Observations, and documentation—each of which reflects what we are calling the main *Areas of Proficiency for Faculty Mentors*.

Next, we're going to look at the sixth, and final, *Area*—Sharing Assessment Feedback—the *Area* that sums up the main goal for living out all the others.

The Sharing Assessment Feedback *Area* has several summative indicators. The best faculty mentor:

- Is able to use *evidence-based documentation* to analyze and assess student progress toward competence—drawing from their familiarity with indicators and interacting with the data and documentation collected.
- Based on that evidence, shares formative and summative feedback with their student—to support continued progress in developing and demonstrating integrated indicators and competency.
- Demonstrates responsiveness and availability—both in terms of their time as well as their ability to be emotionally present with the student and the Kairos community.
- Demonstrates emotional intelligence through self- and social awareness, and in managing relationships.
- Demonstrates openness and commitment to explore their own areas of personal growth and formation as a sojourner with students.

Let me briefly explain each target individually . . .

Is able to use *evidence-based documentation* to analyze and assess student progress toward competence. Drawing from their familiarity with Outcome indicators and interacting with the data and documentation collected, faculty mentors assist the student and their mentor team in analyzing and assessing student progress. The metrics used to do so include:

- Is the student achieving the goals expressed in their definition of proficiency? How, or how not?
- Is the student attaining competence in the specific target goals of the outcome and/or the comprehensive contextual project? How, or how not?
- Is the student sufficiently prepared for a master assessment? If not, what needs to be done to be prepared?
- If completed, does the master assessment show evidence of the student's proficiency and competence

within the outcome?

Based on that evidence, shares formative and summative feedback with their student—to support continued progress in developing and demonstrating integrated indicators and competency. Faculty mentors (and mentor teams) provide two main types of feedback: informal and formal.

Informal feedback is best offered through ongoing interactions, Mentor team meetings, vocational observations (when available), and the like, as we give encouragement and suggest directional guidance. Though it is "informal," feedback is a natural part of the rhythm of the faculty mentor's interactions with the student. Those interactions need to be regularly scheduled (e.g., monthly mentor team meetings, weekly or monthly "check-ins" with the student, etc.) to develop a rhythm of trust, mutual expectation, and anticipation of growth.

Formal feedback occurs more specifically through evaluations of assignments, case study presentations, and master assessments. Evaluations of assignments can offer connecting points of feedback for the student—even when the assignment is officially evaluated by an SLE instructor, for example. The master assessment for each outcome, along with the comprehensive contextual project at the end of the student's program, are meant to be the most summative and formative sources of feedback. Preparing for each can assist the student in showing their mentor team how the content of their learning has been integrated into their character and vocational craft. Therefore, much expectation goes into those discernment vehicles.

One of the best examples that I've seen on how to do a master assessment came from Kairos's professor and Faculty Mentor, Dr. Laurie Mellinger. I have the privilege of serving as a Personal Mentor for a student in the Doctor of Ministry program. In assisting the student to prepare for his first master assessment, Laurie gave him a template of a PowerPoint presentation that she modeled after one done by another student. The template guided the student in summarizing his definitions of proficiency for content, character, and craft, along with the evidence of integrated learning for each, so that the mentor team could assess and support the student's advancement in his program. The process, which is student led, helped to create a positive 360-degree feedback loop that gave evidence to the student's competency. The PowerPoint presentation then could be used as additional documentation for the student's educational narrative.

In simple form, the PowerPoint slides were as follows:

- Slide 1: Title, outcome, student's name;
- Slide 2: Definition of proficiency – content;
- Slide 3: Bullet points of specific prior learning that connects with this outcome;
- Slide 4: Bullet points of specific learning obtained from scheduled learning experiences, additional assignments, standard path content – all in summary fashion;
- Slide 5: Bullet point highlights of how such content has helped them achieve competence with respect to their definition of proficiency and the targets of the outcome;

- Slide 6: Definition of proficiency – character;
- Slide 7: Bullet point highlights of how the outcomes targets were transformative in the area of the student's character and faith development; Slide 8: Definition of proficiency – craft;
- Slide 9: Bullet point highlights of how content and character have impacted their craft, met their definition of proficiency and impacted their vocational competence;
- Slide 10: Simple list of areas of additional study that could be pursued (optional).

A similar process might also be used for any of the outcomes, and most especially for any summative final project for the student's degree or certification. It can be adjusted to accommodate the student's individual program and learning preferences. Whether as a PowerPoint, a video rendering, or a classic comprehensive "term paper," a summative format gives the faculty mentor and the mentor team a tool to use for offering feedback.

Demonstrates responsiveness and availability—both in terms of their time as well as their ability to be emotionally present with the student and the Kairos community. Feedback is best received from people that we trust. Faculty mentors (and other mentors too) are in positions of authority—academically, and often professionally and personally as well. In those contexts, the power of feedback can be intimidating to a student (and even to the one giving the feedback!). Therefore, it's important that faculty mentors engage the relational work necessary to build trust with the student and the mentor team and to "share power" with them for the sake of the student's discipleship and growth. We're all busy—faculty mentor, other mentors, and student. Time is valuable. So is the student's learning environment. Faculty mentors strive to be fully present in their interactions, even anticipating what the Holy Spirit will do within those sacred moments of learning.

Demonstrates emotional intelligence through self- and social awareness, and in managing relationships. Emotional intelligence is "our ability to discern and manage our own emotions, as well as recognize and influence the emotions of those around you."[1] As stated above, the sharing of power is essential for the creation of a safe learning environment. Our words matter. Our attitudes matter. Our emotions influence. Faculty mentors work diligently at discerning what we bring to the table within our interactions with students—inclusive of our anxieties, our discomforts, and our own post-traumatic stress triggers. We may need to face our own "stuff" when it comes to helping a student face theirs. Faculty mentors need to be comfortable with the discomfort that comes with the relational growth process. We need to learn how to set appropriate boundaries—on ourselves, on the student's interactions, on the situations that unfold. And we need to know when it's time to get additional support to navigate the situations that are especially difficult or beyond our scope of addressing.

Demonstrates openness and commitment to explore their own areas of personal growth and formation as a sojourner with students. As discussed, faculty mentors cannot give away what they do not have. Personally, being a faculty mentor has challenged me to stay current with my own educational and spiritual development. In addition to being a full-time pastor, as well as a faculty mentor, I'm also a writer. My role as a faculty mentor has kept my writing relevant to what's going on in the lives of those who are engaged in both learning and vocational worlds. It has impacted my preaching as well. Staying fresh and current with my own learning has

helped me to realize that the more I know, the more I really don't know. I'm consistently reading, taking continuing education classes, and seeing myself as a life-long student. Faculty Mentors are at their best with students when they themselves are being stretched by their own growth—academically, vocationally, and in spiritual formation.

Ultimately, this openness and commitment show itself in a faculty mentor's:

- Patience;
- Humility;
- Approachability;
- Lifelong learning, developing wisdom and maturity;
- Being mentored themselves;
- Demonstrating a commitment to lifelong learning by continuing to practice self-assessment, self-monitoring, reflection, and the pursuit of new perspectives.

As we have demonstrated, the role of the faculty mentor is central and significant to what we do here at Kairos University. Having persons of competence is critical. It's an exciting journey of mutual learning designed to help both the student and the faculty mentor work in tandem with the Holy Spirit in the ongoing advancement of the mission movement of God.

[1] Lauren Landry, "Why Emotional Intelligence is Important in Leadership," Harvard Business School Online, April 3, 2019, accessed June 8, 2023.

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