What is a Mentor?

Mentors are English MA students and PhD students whose primary duty is to help every English 100 student in your course do as well as he or she can. In the spring 2010 semester, we will have 11 mentors assisting faculty in courses. We have support for the initiative through spring of 2010.

We have been documenting this initiative very closely, to demonstrate its value to the Dean and the Chancellor, as a part of our research on the initiative, and to help us make it as useful as possible to us all— instructors, mentors, and students. Mentors log each conference with students on a standardized form, and we conduct bi-weekly roundtables with these mentors to troubleshoot and share ideas for further development. We also solicit mid-term freewrite evaluations by students, and end-of-term evaluations by students, mentors, and faculty.

Our observations thus far are very encouraging. If you would like to see some of the data and interpretations we have mustered of them, see our PowerPoint Colloquium Presentation of March 20, 2008:

http://www.english.hawaii.edu/mentors/Colloquium%2008.ppt

We have urged faculty to work with mentors closely and if possible to include information about the mentor on the course syllabus and to make it clear to students through that syllabus and class discussions that the mentor is an integral part of the class. In addition to attending all classes and taking notes on how they might help individual students perform well on assignments, in many cases mentors have helped faculty run in-class discussion groups, manage peer review, and in some cases try their hands at teaching a class session. For instructional faculty, mentors have thus provided valuable assistance in the classroom, all the while helping us renew and adapt practices (not to mention manage to connect with eighteen-year-olds). For mentors, this initiative offers them invaluable classroom experience as well as the benefit of an experienced instructor's knowledge and pedagogical practices.

Mentors are NOT TAs in the traditional sense—they do not grade, nor should they record your grades or function otherwise in any way that makes it seem that they are evaluating students. They SHOULD be integrated as much as possible into responding to students' writing—and to the many other aspects of the writing process that can help students move towards full authorship. In fact, our experience this semester has revealed that the most successful mentoring has emerged from strong faculty-mentor coordination that begins even while the syllabus is taking form. Our initiative is evolving semester by semester, so please consult our current Mentoring web page:

http://www.english.hawaii.edu/mentors/