NSHE Prompt Summaries

STEM Mentor Institute 2024

At the NSHE Mentoring Institute 2024, Haroon Sahotra, Faculty Director of the Teaching & Learning Commons and UNLV Professor of Engineering and Julie Cohen, Assistant Director of the TLC led faculty participants in a workshop titled "Connecting Conversations: Bridging Learning & Educators. Thirty participants, divided into three groups explored targeted prompts about their experiences, challenges, and aspirations in professional development and mentoring roles. The following summaries capture the key insights from these rich discussions, highlighting common themes and innovative suggestions for advancing mentorship in higher education.

Prompt 1:	**What professional development has been of value/benefit in your roles as teacher and mentor?**

Workshop participants collectively emphasized the importance of collaborative and experiential learning approaches to professional development. They valued structured opportunities for peer mentoring and interdisciplinary partnerships, while highlighting the need for systematic feedback collection from students, mentees, and colleagues to inform their practice. The groups also stressed the significance of continuous improvement through reflection on personal experiences, advocating for sustained access to both local and external professional development resources that connect them with role models and effective practices in teaching and mentoring.

The main takeaways and calls for action for this prompt include: a) the importance of network opportunities; b) formalized training and c) team building.

Prompt 2:	**What is lacking in terms of professional development support?**

Participants identified several critical gaps in professional development support, with resource constraints (including funding, leadership commitment, and time limitations) emerging as a primary concern. They emphasized the need for stronger networking infrastructure that would enable collaboration among colleagues facing similar challenges, alongside better data systems to track and demonstrate the impact of professional development initiatives. The groups also pointed to a systemic issue regarding motivation and engagement, suggesting that professional

development needs to be both incentivized and personalized, potentially through formal integration into evaluation processes.

Prompt 3:	**What opportunities would you like to see available to you as an instructor and mentor?**

Participants expressed a strong desire for more structured and institutionalized mentoring support systems, particularly emphasizing the need for formal collaboration opportunities at both departmental and institutional levels. They highlighted specific needs for professional development focused on mentoring skills, including exposure to new technologies and strategies, along with practical support for mentoring logistics such as follow-up and scheduling. The groups advocated for systemic changes, including modifications to state-level funding structures and the establishment of dedicated mentoring groups within institutions that could facilitate the sharing of best practices and resources.

The key takeaways of this discussion focused heavily on systematizing and institutionalizing mentoring support through strategic resource sharing and formal training structures. The groups emphasized the importance of leveraging existing programs while advocating for new initiatives, including the implementation of mentoring software programs, establishment of mandatory mentorship training, and development of cost-sharing arrangements at the NSHE level. A significant emphasis was placed on practical implementation strategies, such as shadowing experienced mentors, compiling and sharing current mentoring resources across units and universities, and developing better feedback mechanisms through student and alumni surveys, all while exploring ways to better incentivize and value mentoring activities.