



## Nurturing Academic Excellence: The FNU Faculty Mentoring Initiative

Torica Fuller, DNP, MSN, FNP-BC, FNP-C, WHNP-BC, CDP, CGRN, CPN, NRCME

### Background

According to the evidence, mentoring is instrumental to effective faculty growth and professional development, particularly for the novice nurse educator. An essential component of mentoring is fostering an inclusive environment. This approach not only strengthens communication and trust but also creates opportunities for personal and professional growth. Mentoring provides the guidance, feedback and support necessary to navigate the complexities of academia. Mentoring also provides framework to assist with instilling core values, ethical decision-making and a commitment to excellence. Ultimately, mentoring is a powerful tool that shapes future educators, enhance team performance and drive positive change in the workforce.

### The FNU Faculty Mentoring Initiative

The initiative is designed to foster a culture of accountability, collaboration, and continuous professional development among the faculty. Accountability is essential to academic excellence. This initiative strives to encourage the mentors and the mentees to take ownership of their relationship in the mentoring relationship and uphold shared responsibilities in the pursuit of individual and institutional goals. The faculty mentors will provide consistence support, guidance and feedback to the mentees. The mentee will in turn commit the mentoring process, identify and complete professional development activities and applying the feedback accordingly. The mentors and mentee will commit to excellence that reflects the mission and vision of the FNU. The initiative will not only promote individual goals but also enhance faculty retention, satisfaction and the overall outcomes of the university and therefore prepare the faculty to be effective educators and leaders.

### Problem Statement

As the demand for healthcare providers increases, there will be an equal need for qualified nursing faculty to educate the next generation. Universities are recruiting novice educators but often lack the structured mentorship to support their growth and development. To promote academic excellence, it is imperative to implement a formal Mentorship Program to foster support, collaboration, and professional development.

### Purpose

The purpose of the initiative is to offer structured mentoring for novice faculty to equipping them in teaching, scholarship, and service. It also seeks to cultivate an inclusive and supportive academic environment that fosters professional growth, leadership development, and long-term career advancement.



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### Theoretical Framework

The Novice to Expert Theory was published in 1984 by Patricia Benner. The theory provides a foundational framework for understanding professional growth (Billings & Halstead, 2024). Benner's theory outlines five stages of development: novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient, and expert (Benner, 1982; Billings & Halstead, 2024). The theory is typically used in clinical practice, but the model maybe equally applied to faculty professional development. Through structured mentoring, the theory provides insight into the professional growth and development of the novice instructor to expert academic leader.

### Initiative Goals

1. Provide support for the **NOVICE** Faculty. Ex. Outlined orientation and onboarding to the new role. Introduction into teaching, scholarship and service. A self-evaluation. Paired with mentor with common background and common interest.
2. Professional development for the **ADVANCED BEGINNER** Faculty. Ex. Encourage reflective self-reflection and journaling. Introduction into faculty workshops and committees.
3. Promote strategic goal setting utilizing SMART methodology to strengthen the **COMPETENT** Faculty. Ex. Encouraged development of measurable goals. Involvement in curriculum development and scholarly projects.
4. Empower the **PROFICIENT** Faculty. Ex. Involvement in Shared Governance and University Strategic Planning. Publications and potential involvement in mentoring.
5. Sustain the **EXPERT** Faculty. Ex. Scholarship, leadership, mentorship and lifelong learning. Seeking awards.

### 4 Phases of Mentoring Relationship



### Acknowledgements

- Thank you to the FNU Leadership for this amazing opportunity of growth.
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### Conclusion

Mentoring serves as a vital mechanism for fostering excellence among academic faculty. It provides a structured environment that nurtures professional growth, advances career development, and strengthens a culture of collaboration with the academic community. Through intentional and effective mentoring, faculty are empowered with the skills and support necessary to excel in their roles, achieve professional goals, and contribute meaningfully to the mission of the institution. The FNU Faculty Mentoring Initiative is designed to cultivate these essential relationships by connecting faculty with shared backgrounds and interests, ultimately promoting and supportive network that meets both professional and personal development needs. This initiative represents a significant step toward building a resilient, engaged, committed and forward-thinking workforce.

### Next Steps

- Request a formal meeting with the President and the President's Cabinet to formally present the FNU faculty Mentoring Initiative.
- Stakeholders: Share a draft of the proposal to the Department and Program Chairs.
- Development faculty mentee/mentor evaluation tools.
- Recruit faculty to participate in the mentoring program as expert.
- Provide training and resources to support the success of the expert faculty.

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### Biography

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Dr. Torica T. Fuller is a highly accomplished and board-certified Family Nurse Practitioner (FNP) and Women's Health Nurse Practitioner (WHNP) based in North Carolina. She holds dual FNP certification from the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) and the American Association of Nurse Practitioners (AANP), as well as WHNP certification from the National Certification Corporation (NCC).

Dr. Fuller earned her Bachelor of Science in Nursing and Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) from East Carolina University (ECU). She completed her Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) and Post-Master's FNP Certificate at Indiana Wesleyan University (IWU), and her Post-Graduate Certificate in Women's Health at Frontier Nursing University (FNU) in 2023.

In April 2023, Dr. Fuller joined FNU as the Family Nurse Practitioner Clinical Transition Coordinator, Course Coordinator, and Lead Course Faculty. She actively supports inclusive education as the 2024 Inclusive Faculty Volunteer of the President's Cabinet. She is a 2024 FNU Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Fellow. In 2025, she was selected for FNU's inaugural Presidential Academic Fellowship Program (PAMP).

Clinically, Dr. Fuller is a dedicated public health practitioner who provides care to uninsured and underinsured patients across various specialty clinics, including Women's Health, Pediatrics, Adult Health (Communicable Disease), and Epidemiology. She is also a CHAMP provider, playing a vital role in curing Hepatitis C in underserved communities.

Dr. Fuller is a leader in nursing advocacy and professional development. She serves on the Board of Directors of the North Carolina Nurses Association (NCNA), is the founder and chair of the Advanced Practice Provider (APP) section of the North Carolina Public Health Association (NCPHA), and co-chairs the Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN) committee of the National Black Nurses Association (NBNA).

Through her clinical expertise, academic leadership, and commitment to health equity, Dr. Fuller continues to make a profound impact on the advancement of nursing practice and the delivery of inclusive, community-focused healthcare.

## Contact Information

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