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# Campus Engagement Tip: Take Students Out for Lunch

To promote authentic relationships between faculty members and students, colleges offer discounted or free meals in the dining halls for those looking to dine together.

By [Ashley Mowreader](#)



Faculty mentorship has proven benefits for retention and the long-term success of young people. Meeting for coffee or lunch can build connections between staff and students.

For many students, interacting with a professor [can seem intimidating](#), but there are ways campus leaders can promote building connections. One common program among colleges and universities is encouraging students to take their professors to lunch or coffee at on-campus dining locations or near campus for free.

Take a Professor to Lunch programs provide students with the resources to meet with faculty members on their own time to discuss academic or career interests, as well as share their personal interests and experiences.

**Why lunch?** Students who have educational relationships with professors outside the classroom are more likely to be successful in their collegiate experiences, according to the [University of Kansas's](#) College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Lunches also feel less formal, removing barriers to genuine relationships, according to the [University of South Carolina](#) Student Success Center.

“We know that if we could get a student to engage one professor, that’s a game changer,” says Wayne Fletcher, associate provost for academic success at California Baptist University. CBU offers all

incoming students a card that they can redeem for two cups of coffee (or something of equal value) at the cafes on campus to share with a professor.

Sharing a meal with a faculty member can also make a big institution feel smaller. The [University of Minnesota](#) launched its Take Your Professor to Lunch program in 2001 to encourage personal interaction among students in large classes.

Informal conversations are also ways for students to learn about experiential learning or research opportunities their professors are involved in and potentially connect on a larger project or formal mentorship later.

### **The Value of Social Capital**

Mentorship has [proven benefits](#) for students' academic and career knowledge, but not every student has the same opportunities to be mentored.

**How it works:** Colleges tackle payment for lunches a little differently.

Some, like [Dartmouth College](#) or the [University of California, San Diego](#), require students to request in advance a voucher that they can redeem during the meal. The [University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School](#) offers off-campus dining opportunities, so the undergraduate division pays the restaurant directly. Other universities, like the [University of Virginia](#) and [Princeton University](#), give students charge cards to use at dining locations.

College leaders set a dollar amount for total food purchased and often exclude tipping and alcohol purchases from the meal. Many also require students to designate a certain day and time or to get the professor's sign-off, to make sure the program funds are not being misused.

**Steps for success:** Despite the prevalence of Take Your Professor to Lunch programs at institutions across the country, some remain underutilized. Cal Baptist has yet to see its program take off, Fletcher says, which could be related to student anxieties.

- **Set the stage.** Often, the hardest part of creating relationships between professors and students is the introduction. [Ohio State University](#) offers tips for students requesting a meeting with their professor, including how to address them in an email and best practices when scheduling a time.
- **Broaden the crowd.** Some students may be uncomfortable meeting with a professor one-on-one, so some colleges allow small groups of students (three or fewer) to dine with a professor.
- **Provide topics of conversation.** One of the primary reasons students do not seek out a mentor is they don't know what they would ask that person, according to [Student Voice](#) survey respondents. Campus leaders can provide suggested talking points to get the ball rolling for both students and faculty to ease into a more natural conversation.

### **Written By**

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