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Student Mentoring: Sharing a Legacy

by Dr. Michael W. Firmin

In the Cedarville Department of Psychology, mentoring is more than an idealistic concept. It goes to the core of who we are as professionals. Our aim is to develop relationships with students, building into their lives the character, knowledge, and expertise they will need for future ministry and professional development. Additionally, helping students set their compasses on due north — spiritually, academically, and vocationally — is an important objective we work diligently to accomplish on a weekly basis.

For many professors, mentoring is one of the true joys of ministry at Cedarville. We meet students and discover their aims, ambitions, and interests, and find out what they wish to accomplish in life for God's glory. We help them generate plans in order to see those goals accomplished.

As professors, we don't set the direction for students. They must figure out for themselves — in conjunction with their parents and other godly counsel — what they want to accomplish in life. Certainly, we will give input into these significant decisions. But, in the end, students need to make their own choices, because they are the ones who will live with the results of those decisions for the rest of their lives.

Unfortunately, some students have tendencies to sell themselves short. They cannot yet envision all God may do through

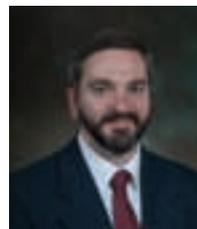
their lives. As faculty members, part of our role is to help students see the bigger picture and challenge them to go beyond their present thinking. Scripture tells us that God is able to do “exceeding abundantly above all we could ask or think” (Ephesians 3:20). We desire to help students capture a clearer vision of their capabilities and then set them on an appropriate track for turning possibilities into realities.

Often this involves extra effort. We as faculty members spur students toward excellence. Of course, excellence is personally defined for each student, given their individual aptitudes, skill sets, and talents. One University alumna told me: “Every Cedarville student needs someone like you in their life. You won't let people settle for less than what God knows they're capable of doing.” Not pushing too hard, however, requires delicate efforts, as sometimes mentors have to back off, letting the Holy Spirit do His work in helping students make the vocational choices that are right for them.

As teachers and mentors to this generation, we work to see students go beyond us in what they achieve in their professional, vocational, and personal lives. Having completed 20 years of college teaching, it is exciting to see former students accomplish professional feats they never dreamed possible. God is working through their lives. In the last 10 years at Cedarville, I have had the honor of helping more than 40 students gain admission into doctoral programs. Many, if not most, of these students initially did not have such high aspirations. However, with close mentorship and hard, diligent work, these students all achieved more than they had originally envisioned.

Beyond Cedarville graduation, it is fulfilling to keep up with students and see what they are doing on our Lord's behalf. Alex is a statistics professor at a tier-one research university. Jeremy practices law in a successful firm. Kim serves troubled children as a psychologist. Krista administers tests to learning-disabled students. Each of these Cedarville graduates — and many more — has gone beyond their mentor. As a result, the impact we can have on the world on Christ's behalf is multiplied, not just added to, as a result of mentoring young people. By helping students accomplish their utmost, we have an opportunity to touch lives beyond what any of us could ever realize on our own.

Student mentoring is the means of sharing the Cedarville legacy with generations to come.



Dr. Michael Firmin serves as chair of the Department of Psychology. He earned his Ph.D. from Syracuse University and has been a full-time psychology professor since 1988. Dr. Firmin came to Cedarville in 1998 and is a National Certified Counselor and licensed psychologist. You may contact him at firmin@cedarville.edu.