

PROJECT TITLE: CAN I ASK YOU SOMETHING?

Sometimes, the mentoring relationship becomes a wonderful, productive thing without any apparent effort from either mentor or mentee. And then sometimes, the mentor and mentee don't hit it off. It may be that the mentor hasn't got enough time; it may be that the mentor doesn't think mentoring is a worthwhile endeavor; it may simply be a personality conflict. But whatever goes wrong, once it has gone wrong, what is the mentee to do? How will he find the answers to his questions? And then there's the mentor... we may like to think that there's nothing new under the sun, but almost every mentor has a story to tell of some situation that was so unusual, she didn't even know where to start in figuring out the solution.

My project, a discussion forum site for mentors and mentees, is intended to solve these problems. Given the format, users can both ask and answer questions. Responses can be rated, as they are on sites like stackoverflow.com, giving forum users a way to judge the answers they're receiving, and a way for community members to build trust. Users can create login IDs and upload profile pictures, as well as enter profile information – if they want to. Users may also want to visit the site anonymously, and even to ask questions anonymously.

The target users for this site are tenure-track and tenured faculty members – or really anyone who has an interest in mentoring or being mentored. Discussion topics and comments will be moderated, but there will be no effort to limit the site to the faculty of one institution. Down the road, ideally, there would be different forums for different kinds of questions, and users would identify the forum that best suited their needs.