The Case for Faculty-Student Mentoring

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The number of colleges offering mentoring programs is on the rise (Haring, 1997), and mentoring is increasingly being viewed as a tool for promoting student retention (Walker & Taub, 2001), particularly the retention of first-year students (Johnson, 1989). Mentoring has the potential to reduce students’ feelings of marginality, increasing their sense of personal significance—that they “matter” (Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989), and can provide an important “validation” experience for first-generation students, for whom the transition to college is not a normal or routine rite of passage (Rendon, 1994).

The importance of mentoring for contemporary college students is well expressed by the indefatigable leader of the first-year experience movement, John Gardner:

Students need mentors and facilitators. They need, in the words of Carl Rogers, authentic professional human beings who are worthy of emulation. They need models who exhibit professional behavior, a sense of commitment and purposefulness, and a sense of autonomy and integrity in a world that generates enormous stress. Students cannot be told how to do this; authenticity cannot be transmitted through lectures” (1981, p. 70).

The availability of exemplary, caring role models is valuable for all students, but may be especially critical to the retention and success of underrepresented, first-generation college students who do not have college role models at home. Vince Tinto (1987) notes that, “While role modeling seems to be effective in retention programs generally, it appears to be especially important among those programs concerned with disadvantaged minority students” (p. 161).

Research on mentoring indicates that it has a positive impact on the personal and professional development of young adults (Levinson, 1978). There is also a growing body of research in higher education that suggests an empirical link between student mentoring and student retention (Campbell & Cambell, 1997; Wallace & Abel, 1997). For instance, Miller, Neuner, and Glyn (1988) used an experimental research design in which students were randomly assigned to either an experimental group—who received mentoring, or a control group—who did not. It was found that students who received mentoring evinced higher retention rates than non-mentored students with similar pre-enrollment characteristics.

Despite the retention-promoting promise of mentoring, one of the major logistical stumbling blocks for implementing mentoring programs on a large-scale basis is the fact that mentoring is traditionally delivered via dyadic (1 to 1) relationships, thus making it difficult to find a sufficient number of mentors to sustain a mentoring program that reaches a significant number of students (Redmond, 1990). However, the results of one recent study reveals that “network” mentoring programs, in which multiple students are mentored by one college faculty or staff member, are comparable in effectiveness to traditional “dyadic” (1 to 1) mentoring arrangements—as measured in terms of student satisfaction with the quality of the mentoring relationship and the frequency of contact with their mentor (Walker & Taub, 2001). This finding suggests that traditional academic advisement programs have the potential to co-function as mentoring programs, because a ratio of multiple mentees
(students) to one mentor (advisor) may also enable the advantages of mentoring to be realized. While advising and mentoring have been traditionally deemed as distinctly different programs, even a cursory look at some of the criteria cited in the scholarly literature for effective mentors appear to be very compatible with the characteristics of effective advisors. For example, Johnson (1989) identifies the following characteristics as qualities of effective mentors: (a) more mature than the mentee, (b) interpersonal skill, (c) willingness to commit time, and (d) knowledge of the campus. Certainly, these are qualities that also characterize effective advisors.

Research on the perspective of students, as advisees, repeatedly points to the conclusion that they value most highly academic advisors who serve as mentors—who are accessible, approachable, and helpful in providing guidance that connects their present academic experience with their future life plans (Winston, Ender, & Miller, 1982; Winston, Miller, Ender, Grites, & Associates, 1984; Frost, 1991; Gordon, Habley, & Associates, 2000). Given the similarity of desirable qualities cited for mentors and advisors, in conjunction with the research suggesting that mentoring may be effectively delivered by networking multiple mentees with one mentor, it appears as if the retention-promoting potential of mentoring programs may be achieved as effectively (and more efficiently) through advisement programs, particularly if advisors are well prepared and adequately rewarded for this role. Since advisement focuses on an issue so central to the personal lives of students—the connection between their present collegiate experience with their future life plans—and is delivered by an experienced person who has already navigated a similar course, it appears that mentoring is an integral and inescapable element of academic advisement. As such, faculty-advising programs at some institutions may be restructured in a manner that enables them to co-function with, complement, and augment the development of faculty-mentoring programs.
References


First Year Experience and Students in Transition, 13(1), 47-67.


MENTORING: PRACTICAL MATTERS

• Working Definition of Mentoring:
“[A one-to-one learning relationship between an older person and a younger person that is based on modeling behavior and extended dialogue between them. A way of individualizing a student’s education by allowing or encouraging the student to connect with a college staff member who is experienced in a particular field or set of skills.”

--Cynthia S. Johnson (1989)

• Potential Roles/Functions of Mentors:

1. Advocate
2. Cheerleader
3. Coach
4. Confidante
5. Friend/Colleague
6. Guide
7. Resource-&-Referral Agent
8. Role Model

• Potential Benefits of Mentoring for the Student Mentee/Protegee:

1. Increased likelihood of persistence to graduation
2. Increased academic achievement
3. Increased satisfaction with the college experience
4. Increased educational aspirations

• Potential Benefits of Mentoring for the Mentor:

1. Revitalization/Vitality
2. Generativity/Fulfillment
Why Faculty-Student Mentoring Does Not Happen “Naturally”:

1. Faculty lack background *experience* and *training* in the skills needed for effective mentoring.

2. *Student-faculty ratios* for teaching and advising are often too *large* for personalized mentoring to take place.

3. Faculty tend to be *discipline*-centered and *content*-oriented, often lacking the college-wide and process-oriented perspective needed for effective mentoring.

4. Faculty interest in mentoring is often compromised by competing professional responsibilities that carry *more weight* in their *retention and promotion* (e.g., teaching, research, and committee work).

5. Faculty rarely are provided with *incentives or reward systems* that encourage professional pursuit of mentoring.

Logistical Issues: The Dirty Dozen

1. How will the *mentees* (proteges) be selected & recruited?

2. How will the *mentors* be selected & recruited?

3. How will mentors & mentees be paired?

4. What should be the *mentor:mentee ratio*?

5. When should the mentoring relationship begin and end?

6. How will mentors & mentees be prepared/oriented for their roles?

7. When & how often should mentors & mentees meet?

8. What "things" (activities) should they do together?

9. How should the program be assessed/evaluated?

10. What resources are needed to support or enhance the program?

11. Who should coordinate the program?

12. How can the program become most *visible* so as to stimulate institutional *awareness*, institutional *support*, or program *expansion*?
THE ART & SCIENCE OF MAKING STUDENT REFERRALS: SOME SUGGESTED STRATEGIES

* Describe the goals and services of the referred service. (Don't assume that the student already has a clear idea.)

* Personalize the referral: Refer the student to a person (rather than an office).

* Reassure the student of the qualifications and capability of the person to whom the s/he is being referred.

* Help the student identify what questions to ask or what approaches to take with the resource person.

* Make explicitly sure that the student knows where to go and who to ask for.

* Phone for an appointment while the student is in your presence.

* Walk with the student to the referred person’s office.

* Follow up the initial referral by asking the student if the contact occurred, how it went, and whether there will be future contact.
RAPPORT & RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING STRATEGIES:
A BAKER'S DOZEN (+ 2)

1. Always refer to your mentee by name.

2. Learn & remember personal information about your mentee.

3. Do something nice (and unexpected) for your mentee.

4. Show interest in the mentee's life and college experience: Ask focused, open-ended (divergent) questions.

5. Engage in active listening.

6. Be empathic: Acknowledge & inquire about your mentee’s feelings.

7. Share personal experiences with your mentee.

8. Be prepared for scheduled meetings (esp. the first meeting).

9. Be reliable & punctual for meetings with your mentee.

10. Schedule some interactions with your mentee in informal settings.

11. Be easily accessible/available to your mentee.

12. Provide effective, constructive feedback to your mentee.

13. Seek input from your mentee.

14. Provide your mentee with opportunities for personal choice and decision-making.

15. Remain positive & enthusiastic in the face of frustrations.
MENTOR PROGRAM ASSESSMENT/EVALUATION

1. Assessment Purposes:

* Formative Assessment: to help "form," shape, fine-tune, and improve the program.

* Summative Assessment: to "sum up" the program's overall worth, value, or impact.

2. Assessment Outcomes:

* Mentee (Student) Outcomes:
  - retention
  - academic achievement
  - satisfaction with the program
  - satisfaction with the college
  - use of campus services & participation in campus activities
  - quantity & quality of interaction with faculty
  - quantity & quality of interaction with peers.

* Mentor Outcomes:
  - satisfaction with mentor training program
  - satisfaction with the mentoring experience
  - continuing with the mentoring program (mentor retention)
  - recommending the mentoring program to colleagues (mentor recruitment)

* Institutional Outcomes:
  - cost-effectiveness of the program
  - institutional revenue generated by the program via increased student retention
  - impact of the program on stimulating campus partnerships and building campus community
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES FOR MENTORS

* Keep a mentor log or journal in which you record your specific experiences and reflect on how they could be improved.

* Talk with other mentors—collaborate with them, and learn from each other, by sharing your strategies, successes, stories, and frustrations.

* Solicit feedback from your mentees, both formally and informally, and use this information to improve your skills.

* Read the professional literature on mentoring. (Perhaps the program coordinator could secure funds to purchase books/journals to be housed in a mini "mentor library.")

* Attend professional conferences on mentoring, such as the annual "International Conference on Mentoring". (Perhaps a program budget can be established that would allow at least one mentor to attend an annual conference and return to share the information with other mentors.)

* Join the International Mentoring Association by contacting:

  David James, President
  International Mentoring Association
  Degree/Extension Centers and Special Programs
  Prince George's Community College
  301 Largo Road
  Largo, Maryland 20772-2199
  Phone: (301) 322-0495
  Fax: (301) 808-0418.
RECOMMENDED REFERENCES ON MENTORING:
THEORY, RESEARCH, & PRACTICE


