A Guide to Mentoring Faculty

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Introduction

"*The nature of the mentoring relationship itself varies, reflecting the function it serves for the individuals involved*" (Yaffe, Bender, & Sechrest, 2012, p. 35)

Mentoring is a well-established method for ensuring the success of new faculty at a higher education institution. The Instructional Development Center at UCA hopes this information will help departments establish their own successful mentoring programs that are individualized for the specific faculty and function of that department. Our goal is not to make a campus-wide, one-size-fits-all mentoring model, but rather to provide departments with the information and resources they need to establish their own mentoring systems that work for their individual settings.

What is mentoring?

- Mentoring is a "…top-down, one-to-one relationship in which an experienced faculty member guides and supports the career development of a new or early career faculty member…" (Sorcinelli & Yun, 2007, p. 58).
- Mentoring is interaction between a mentor and mentee to transfer the lessons of experience, and which involves support, assistance, and guidance but not judgment.
- It is a developmental, caring, sharing, helping relationship where one person invests time, know-how, and effort in increasing and improving another person's growth, knowledge, and skills.
- Mentoring solves some sort of knowledge gap.
- Mentoring is an ongoing relationship based on trust.
- Mentoring is a continuation of one's development as defined by life cycle and human development theorists in terms of life sequences or stages, personality development, and the concept and value of care.
- Faculty mentoring should be a long-term relationship and include classroom/educational processes in the beginning, as well as tenure and promotion, professional development, and management of the expectations to be active in research and scholarly activities.

Rationale: Why should we be concerned with mentoring?

Not only does mentoring develop the profession, but "by not mentoring, we are wasting talent. We educate, and train, but don't nurture" (Wright & Wright, 1987, p. 207). The literature overwhelmingly points to benefits to the organization, the mentor, and the protégé through mentoring relationships. Mentoring is useful and powerful in understanding and advancing organizational culture, providing access to informal and formal networks of communication, and offering professional stimulation to both junior and senior faculty.

Retention rates for all full-time faculty in institutions of higher education throughout the 2000s has been low, with approximately 50% leaving the institution within five years. This high turnover rate results in inexperienced faculty, high economic costs, and a lack of continuity and connectedness (Monk, Irons, Carlson, & Walker, 2010).

Therefore, a more focused mentoring process may be the appropriate action to counter this dilemma. In colleges and universities, faculty perceptions regarding less than satisfactory collegial relationships, supportive environments, and mentoring have been given as reasons for leaving the institution.

Challenges and added responsibilities face new faculty in education. Obtaining tenure poses significant investment in human resources and if new faculty members are not assisted and guided with mentoring activities, the likelihood of retention is weakened. If, however, new faculty members receive access to knowledge and resources for career development through mentoring, the institution benefits by retaining valuable resources. Additionally, mentoring is a necessary skill for a successful academic career. As the population ages and more faculty retire, inexperienced faculty replace experienced faculty, also necessitating mentoring. Creating a culture of supportive faculty development could very well be imperative for the future of higher education (Bland, Taylor, Shollen, Weber-Main, & Mulcahy, 2009; Cowin, Cohen, Ciechanowski, Orozco, 2012; Gazza, 2004).

What are the benefits of mentoring?

To the mentee

- *Receiving help in identifying strengths, talents, and abilities*. Yakamoto (1988) suggests that a major benefit of mentoring is that the mentor sees potential and helps highlight what makes the mentee special. Similarly, Dodge (1986) found that a significant benefit to mentees is having an advisor help them discover, intensify, and clarify their needs, objectives, and goals.

- *Knowledge transfer*. One of the benefits most often noted is the transfer of knowledge from more experienced to less experienced faculty. This knowledge may be about campus or department life or may include introducing newer faculty to campus members who are important to know. Often, however, it includes the actual sharing of knowledge related to their specific field, which increases professional development as well as individual productivity.

- *Path to tenure*. Junior faculty face complex challenges in securing tenure; learning the campus culture and community, while guided by senior faculty, can be almost limitless in its helpfulness.

- *Career advancement*. Having mentoring relationships can help younger faculty navigate the complexities of campus life, including issues such as teaching new courses, developing individual research, getting published, sitting on committees, etc. Mentoring helps new faculty more quickly sort out the uncertainties regarding the issues necessary to master in order to advance.

To the mentor

Although much is made of the benefits to mentees, the benefits to mentors are often overlooked. There are many advantages, however, which make mentoring an endeavor in which more experienced faculty should be eager to engage.

- *Satisfaction from reinvesting in others.* Faculty members who mentor younger or less experienced faculty often report a high sense of satisfaction from positively influencing others and helping motivate them creatively.

- *Increased influence*. Faculty mentors gain influence in the organization through the development of future leaders.

- *Staying involved and connected*. Mentoring allows senior faculty to engage in a truly helpful way, on a regular basis, to new faculty, which also exposes senior faculty to new, fresh ideas and new ways of doing things and approaching problems.

- *Rejuvenating one's career*. Working with younger faculty can revitalize a mentor's career as it allows them considerable influence in assisting and shaping a mentee's professional development.

- *Receiving assistance*. Mentors can receive assistance from mentees on projects and in research, and mentors can enhance their own skills and learn fresh viewpoints and perspectives from the mentee.

- *Positive personal benefits*. Mentoring can offer positive personal growth as well, including increased confidence, intellectual stimulation, and personal fulfillment.

To the institution

- *Retention of faculty*. New faculty who are mentored by experienced faculty are far more likely to stay at that institution than to seek other outside opportunities.

- *Having highly skilled faculty*. New faculty who are mentored can learn significant information from mentors, not just content, but the culture of the campus and administrative concerns. This benefits the institution and departments through the development of highly trained and knowledgeable faculty.

- *Team-building and better connectedness between faculty and between faculty and institution*. Mentoring builds networks and connections between faculty -- often between individuals of different generations who might not otherwise have opportunities to interact. This builds a sense of community and raises the overall feeling of attachment one feels toward his or her institution. This can increase productivity and efficiency as well, as faculty are both made aware of potential working relationships and have a feeling of fellowship that can enhance faculty's ability to work together successfully.

- *The "Ripple-Effect."* Faculty who were mentored often have a strong desire to mentor others in the future, which continues this beneficial cycle.

Common Mentoring Strategies

Mentoring relationships are inherently individualized; no two relationships are likely to be the same or use the same processes. Mentoring does, however, have certain features common to most relationships and some core strategies that are frequently used. For academic mentoring relationships, the list below, adapted from Bland et al.(2009), provides some examples of how these strategies can be utilized and goals for each area of targeted growth.

1. Role modeling of appropriate faculty member attitudes, values, and behaviors.
    a. Discussion of how to build a professional network
    b. Discussion of how to negotiate with a difficult colleague
2. Direct teaching of academic skills and norms
    a. Discussion of the unwritten rules of departmental, university, or discipline behavior
    b. Discussion of the academic values of and roles they play in maintaining the academic endeavor
    c. Discussion of ways to manage funding or possible conflicts of interest
3. Providing research-related guidance
    a. Managing data
    b. Reviewing and synthesizing literature
    c. Developing a research design
    d. Selecting journals for publishing opportunities
4. Offering the mentee a collaborative role in research
    a. Co-authoring articles
    b. Contributing to research design
    c. Identifying and recruiting research participants
5. Providing advice
    a. Discussion of the benefits of serving on committees or review boards
    b. Discussion of strategies for balancing work life and personal life
    c. Discussion of how to work toward tenure
6. Reviewing work and career progress
    a. Reviewing curricula and teaching materials
    b. Discussion of work goals
    c. Observing and giving feedback on teaching
7. Advocating for the mentee's success
    a. Recognizing mentee's talents
    b. Exposing mentee to important contacts
    c. Mediating and intervening to facilitate the mentee's advancement
8. Providing encouragement
    a. Nurturing the mentee's goals
    b. Providing counsel for a variety of mentee concerns
    c. Giving moral and emotional support
    d. Showing confidence in the mentee's abilities and skills

What makes an effective mentoring relationship?

As there is no exact definition of the requirements of a mentor, it is crucial for both partners of the mentoring relationship to define what it means to them individually and their specific arrangement and for partners to ensure their goals are compatible. It is also possible to establish small groups for peer mentoring rather than one-on-one relationships.

Broad guidelines for establishing mentorships

Guidelines for the mentee: Creating a relationship with a mentor

What a mentee should do	Steps	Further questions
1. Get to know each other	Try to obtain a copy of your mentor's bio and CV before your first meeting	What information could you exchange with your mentor that would help you get to know each other better? What do you have in common? What else would you like to know?
2. Talk about mentoring	Share any perceptions or experiences you have about mentoring	Were there positive things from past mentoring experiences that you would like to replicate? Or negative experiences you want to avoid? What do you expect to like or dislike about mentoring? What assumptions do you hold and how might those affect your response to mentoring? What limitations might you bring to the partnership?
3. Share your professional and intellectual development goals	Discuss your plan for your career, what goals you hope to accomplish, and why these goals matter to you	Why do you want to be in a mentoring relationship? What do you think you will gain from it? How will mentoring help you accomplish long term goals?
4. Discuss needs and expectations	Remember that the relationship should benefit both partners, so listen to what your mentor needs as well	Do you fully understand what each partner wants, needs, and expects from this relationship?
5. Be open and honest about your personal styles	Discuss work and learning styles and personality types	What effects might your styles have on the relationship? Do you feel compatible with your mentor? What aspects of your styles complement or conflict with the other partner's style?

(adapted from Zachary, 2000)

Suggestions for both partners:

- **Set "SMART Goals" about what each participant hopes to gain or accomplish: SMART** goals are *Specific, Measurable, Action-oriented, Realistic, and Timely.* Without a clear path and agreed-upon objectives, it will be hard for either mentor or mentee to gain much from the arrangement. This should be one of the first things discussed between partners or even before agreeing to a mentoring relationship. With no clear objectives or with divergent goals, the mentoring relationship faces many obstacles, and success is unlikely. Here are some questions to consider:

  What do I want to learn/accomplish as a result of this relationship, and what are the steps to reach these goals?
  How do we ensure accountability?
  How will we know if I am successful, and how will we measure and evaluate success?
  What are the norms and guidelines we will follow in the relationship?
  What do we need to do to ensure confidentiality?

- **Aim for compatible work & learning styles**: Learning styles can have a dramatic impact on a mentoring relationship. It influences how you work with your mentoring partner and also helps you discern what kinds of learning opportunities would work best for you. Likewise, similar work styles and habits can significantly improve the relationship, as even small issues like when or where to meet can impact the success of the relationship. It won't always be possible to agree with each other on everything – nor would you want to – but it is crucial that the partners get along.

- **Have open and frequent communication:** No mentoring relationship can succeed without open and honest interaction between the participants, and this interaction must occur on a regular basis. The mentoring partners can work out a schedule that suits them both, but it must be frequent and regular. Meeting once a term is not typically sufficient to support the mentee's development. Most experts suggest once a week or several times a month is the appropriate frequency. It's vital to establish some ground rules in the beginning about how often and for how long the partners will meet, as well as who will schedule the meetings and set the agendas.

- **Strive for a relationship with a person you like and respect:** If you plan to spend a significant amount of time with a person working on something as important as your career or professional development, it is essential to work with someone for whom you have appreciation and a positive opinion.

Other Considerations:

- **Evaluating mentoring relationships:** Will the mentoring relationship be evaluated? If so, who will do it? Will it be an outside supervisor? Or the participants themselves? Agreeing upon evaluation terms before you begin can be very helpful.

- **Creating mentoring relationships:** Will the mentoring relationship be voluntary or assigned? Sometimes a department or supervisor will set up the mentoring relationship, and partners are assigned to each other. In these cases, it's a good idea to make the first meeting a casual, relaxed opportunity for partners to get to know each other on a personal level, before starting the "work" part of the relationship. Establishing camaraderie early on will make the other elements of the relationship more pleasant and fruitful.

- **Setting time frames for mentorships**: As SMART goals are timely goals, it is important to clarify up-front how long each partner expects the mentoring relationship to last and what the time frame is for accomplishing each goal.

- **Choosing formal or informal arrangements**: Mentoring arrangements can be formal, with a structured approach, or informal, which often develop on their own. Both can be successful and have numerous benefits. Choosing formal or informal depends on the personalities and work/learning styles of the participants.
    - *Formal arrangements*: With formal mentoring, the institution or department will often provide training for mentors and tie the mentoring outcomes to official institutional goals, with measurable results and periodic evaluations.
    - *Informal arrangements*: These may include the same elements as formally-organized arrangements, but are often less structured and consist mainly of casual interactions between mentor and mentee.

Mentee Skills: Self-awareness about your skills is an important step in preparing for a mentoring relationship. Think about your personal skills before and during the mentoring process. These skills will dramatically improve your mentoring experience.

- Giving and receiving feedback
- Self-directed learning
- Building relationships
- Communication
- Goal setting
- Effective listening
- Follow-through
- Reflection
- Initiative
- Valuing differences

(Zachary, 2009)

If the mentee chooses the mentor, following these steps can be helpful:

Steps
1. **Clarify your goals.** Why do you want a mentor? What qualities do you want in a mentor? What do you hope the end result will be?
2. **List your criteria.** State the qualities you need and want in a mentor. Cast a wide net at this stage. You can narrow your list later.
3. **Decide which qualities are most essential.** Which qualities are non-negotiable requirements? Try to highlight three to five "musts."
4. **Evaluate the remaining criteria.** What are your "wants" and how important are they to you? Assign a number value to each.
5. **Begin to consider possible mentors. This is the most important step, as you are now focusing on who can mentor you best.** Think about faculty members you know well, whose research areas are compatible with yours, whose work interests you, or any other category. It's important at this point to think broadly and consider as many options as possible. To find the right mentor, you should look beyond the obvious. Do some research on faculty; read bios, CVs, or recent or important works by faculty members or get to know them personally if you aren't sure whether or not they might be a good mentor for you.
6. **Begin to eliminate "bad fits."** If a prospective mentor cannot meet your "musts," cross his or her name off the list. Do not consider this candidate any further. Be realistic and firm.
7. **Rate the remaining options on "wants."** Evaluate the possibilities you have left. How do they compare against each other? Assign each a number rating (i.e., 1-10). Assuming that they are comparable on the "musts," the "wants" will now be critical in determining the best option(s) for a mentor.
8. **Decide.** Count the score of each. Choose the two or three who rank the highest for your criteria. It is wise to have more than one option, in case your first choice is not willing or able to commit to a mentoring relationship.

(adapted from Zachary, 2000)

Personal Reflection Exercise

Mentoring is improved by personal reflection, particularly on the part of the mentee. The following exercise can help you reflect on the mentoring venture and note the specific milestones, highlights, and events you experienced while on this journey. Think about challenges, disappointments, *a-ha moments*, and other important aspects, and focus on how mentoring has impacted you.

1. List three or four milestones on the mentoring journey that enhanced your personal development. Which of these affected you the most and why?

2. What were the major challenges you faced during the mentoring process? Why were these difficult? What did you do to overcome them?

3. How are you different now than before you started the mentoring journey?

4. List your current personal and professional assets and liabilities. Have the assets increased since being mentored? Have the liabilities been reduced? Which barriers do you create yourself?

5. Describe your top few personal or professional successes over the past several years. Explain the role you played in these and why each was successful. Of which are you most proud? Why?

6. What false beliefs might you hold about yourself and abilities?

Additional Tips

Questions for Mentees: Is mentoring right for you? Asking yourself these questions can help you decide.

- Do I have a sincere interest in learning?
- Am I willing to commit time to developing and maintaining a mentoring relationship?
- Am I willing to work on my growth and development?
- Am I willing to be open and honest with myself and another person?
- Am I willing to listen to critical feedback?
- Can I participate without adversely affecting my other responsibilities?
- Am I committed to being an active mentoring partner?

(Zachary, 2009)

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NOTE: The sources with an asterisk (*) are those recommended for faculty interested in more in-depth reading.