

A Time for Deeper Dialogue: Mentoring, Modeling, and Growing Your Own

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Introduction

We need deeper dialogue in order to learn, grow, and change as we extend a warm welcoming hand to individuals who aspire to join the professorial ranks. (Stanley and Lincoln 2005, 50)

Too often, new faculty members tackle teaching roles at an unfamiliar campus feeling lost and completely on their own. That is not a problem at Eastern Illinois University (EIU), where a rapidly growing faculty development program reaches out to new employees to encourage and support them in all facets of their lives, professional and personal. Eastern Illinois University began having deeper dialogue with faculty by creating the faculty mentoring circles connection (FMCC) program, a program that is relationship driven. Clearly new faculty members, like new students, arrive on most campuses highly stressed about the role of the professoriate and grappling with having found new jobs, new cultures, new goals, new adjustments, and new expectations. Many come from their graduate school experiences having never taught and are inundated with the demands of the department, learning how to write a course syllabus, participate in committee work, and offer university service while becoming acclimated into a new environment (Boise 1992; Sorcinelli 1994). In response to the overwhelming needs of new faculty members, institutions should ensure that a support system is in place.

Creating a faculty-friendly institution in which voices are heard, views valued, vocation appreciated, and victories celebrated requires establishing an environment that is inviting and nurturing. *Nurturing* in this context suggests an environment in which the academic climate focuses on issues beyond tenure and promotion. For increased job satisfaction, a new mentoring paradigm is essential. During new faculty orientation, it is critical to encourage all faculty members from diverse backgrounds to create an environment of collegiality and community building. It's time for deeper dialogue, a dialogue where gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and faculty of color, who often experience marginalization, can feel welcome and invited to participate in discussions of diverse issues, a dialogue where mentoring is at least offered.

Providing a mentoring program is critical, but before implementing a mentoring program for new faculty members, it is necessary to consider whether the program should be formal or informal and the purpose of the program—for example orientation, instructional improvement, or promotion of a specific institutional culture.

Setting Up the Program

At Eastern Illinois University, a formal mentoring program has been established to provide structure for the mentoring process and to ensure that the purpose of this program is followed. Mentors and mentees are initially paired at the beginning of the year. Relationships are organized across college lines, with no more than two individuals assigned to a mentor. Traditional programs usually include mentoring by tenured faculty only, but Eastern has included junior faculty, who can provide assistance to those working on their terminal degrees. Each partnership meets once or twice a month for coffee, breakfast, lunch, or dinner for at least one hour throughout the academic year. It is totally up to those in the partnership to work out the logistics of the relationship. After attending the first mentor-mentee training session, the partners determine the topics for the meetings, which may include teaching techniques, student academic integrity, strategies for achieving tenure, useful resources at the university, balancing teaching and research, maintaining a healthy balance between work and life, handling ethical problems, negotiating departmental politics, and navigating in the academy.

The FMCC set up the program goals to get university buy-in from all constituents. Program goals are as follows:

- To speed up the learning of a new job or skill and reduce the stress of transition
- To improve instructional performance through modeling by top academicians
- To attract new faculty in a very competitive recruiting environment
- To retain excellent mid-career and veteran faculty in a setting where their contributions are valued
- To promote the socialization of new faculty into the EIU learning community
- To create a collaborative environment and a relationship-driven program

The office of faculty development incorporated a space for deeper dialogue by creating panel discussions. The From Different Perspectives panel included faculty members (early-career, mid-career, and veteran) who discussed relevant issues for each development stage. The Diversity panel included members of various ethnic groups and covered a gamut of diversity backgrounds, and the mentor-mentee panel included voices of those who had been involved in the pilot program. After hearing the panelists share their lived experiences while navigating in the academy and finding their way with a mentor's guidance, many new faculty members chose to fill out mentoring agreement forms and request mentors. At the onset, a confidential agreement established a level of trustworthiness for both the mentor and the mentee. The mentees were assured of the mentors' requirements for matching. Faculty mentors and new faculty mentees filled out biographical profiles to assist with the matching-up process. Orientation and skills building (link-up) mentors-mentee data were provided four weeks later.

Requirements for Mentors

To mentor tenure-track faculty members and non-tenure-track faculty members who are working on terminal degrees, mentors are required to be tenured faculty members themselves. They must attend a maximum of three mentoring training seminars during the academic year; each meeting lasts an hour and a half. Each mentor must place a picture and a short biography on the faculty development Web site for new faculty members to read, and each is responsible for submitting a short report about mentor activities at the end of each semester. Mentors are not assigned mentees from the same department, though every attempt is made to match mentors and mentees from the same college.

Orientation and skill building education for both mentors and mentees is critical in order for the mentoring program to succeed. Mentors who are prepared for the role and who are confident that they know what to do and how to do it accept the mentoring challenge with more enthusiasm and commitment. Mentees who are well oriented to their responsibilities and know how to be influential in their own development are more prepared to begin the process and share the responsibility of making the relationship work. It was important for us to establish that we would provide the necessary materials and training for both groups. The director of the office of faculty development was supported by the administration and sent to training sponsored by Perrone-Ambrose Associates.

Orientation and skill building includes the strategic intent of the mentoring program, the goals and objectives of the program and the way they relate to the goals of the organization and institution, the roles and responsibilities of the mentors and mentees, how to prepare for a mentoring relationship, and how to shape and communicate mentoring agreements. The key competencies of mentors and mentees are also covered. For mentors, this involves supporting, challenging, pathfinding, empowering, double-loop learning focus, and managed learned. For mentees, the key competencies are receptivity, self-management, self-awareness, growth focus, resilience, and double-loop learning focus.

The link-up process follows the orientation and skill building process for mentors and mentees. During skill building, both mentors and mentees prepare preliminary plans for their relationship; during link-up, they negotiate the beginning of their partnership and reach agreements on how they will work together. This face-to-face agreement is essential for the long-term success of the partnership. The objectives of the link-up process are to define what each partner wants from the mentoring relationship, reach agreement on the expectations of each partner, develop clear objectives and activities to be pursued, define the communication guidelines for the relationship, and formalize the mentoring plan.

It was also important to articulate the mentor's roles or duties, the matching and link-up procedures, the workshop requirements, and the transition process. The first strategic training after the link-up was with the mentors only; the second training session was with the mentees only; and the final workshop, called the Transition, was for both mentors and mentees and was the final celebration.

There is growing evidence that professors want to be appreciated, to feel needed for the wide range of information, talents, aspirations, and commitments they bring to the academe (Boyer 1990). This resonated even more as the program progressed. We began to ask veteran faculty members informally to share their stories or to serve on the From Different Perspectives panel and share their lived experiences. New faculty members expressed great appreciation for hearing these stories and expressed interest in those who had made it through the ranks of the professorate. Veteran faculty members offered a different kind of mentoring vicariously at a different stage in their career. They also discovered how much they appreciated their own developmental group; therefore, we implemented a new group called veteran circles. Veteran faculty members shared how much they valued having a group they could call their own. Cafella defined mentoring as an "intense caring relationship in which persons with more experience work with less experienced persons to promote development and personal development" (1992, 37). Mentees are looking to become better, well-rounded academicians and to receive guidance from an experienced person. Mentors want to share their experience and knowledge and share their passion for their work as they themselves learn and create new friendships.

Fostering a Relationship-Driven Program for Existing Faculty

It is important for institutions to understand that, while creating a nurturing environment for new faculty members, mutually beneficial relationships are being created. Relationships and empowerment of faculty are vital to any institution. The past two years the FMCC has been taking steps to make connections among faculty on campus. In 2005 faculty members were given informal surveys, and what began with thirty-five mentors soon increased. Below are comments and reflections from mentors and mentees about their experiences during the pilot year in response to the question, "What do you believe has been the most rewarding experience thus far?"

We have had wonderful discussions about everything! I shared my portfolio with my mentee to give her an example. I discussed the Achievement Contribution Award process and how to apply. We had great lunches! Communication is easy and plentiful! Talked about balancing children, work, and relationships. I provided my mentee with opportunity to vent concerns, and frustrations. What a great match!

My mentor has been excellent. She is definitely able to keep me on task and is so helpful when it comes to understanding the dissertation process. She also seems to like my dissertation topic and provides me with so many great ideas. The mentoring program is wonderful. Thank you so much for this opportunity.

When asked to "write (1) negative and (2) positive things that have happened in connecting with your mentor/mentee", one negative, time, became an emerging theme. The many positives included meeting faculty outside the department in other disciplines, making connections with a colleague and being able to share in the success of someone else, partnerships, and writing grants together.

In 2006 the program grew to approximately fifty mentors and became more structured and formalized. As outlined previously, participants in the FCCC program interacted during the workshops. Mentors and mentees filled out self-assessment forms to assist them in the development of their roles. Now in its second year, the program is designed to build relationships between new and existing faculty members. It offers a first-quarter checkup and provides feedback on the progress of the relationship. This process tends to be most effective when it is mentee-driven and includes active participation of the mentor and the mentee. The first-quarter checkup gives mentors and mentees an opportunity to identify and learn from the initial three or four months of the mentoring experience so that there is a summative assessment of the formal mentoring program and their link-up experience. Additionally, it is a time to plan for the remaining part of the relationship.

The FMCC indeed made connections, and relationship building became apparent in an exceptionally autonomous environment. During the workshop, a mentor asserted:

I wish the program was in effect when I first came here. Encouragement and validation are things the mentees need. They need to know that they are doing a good job so they don't feel like they are not spinning their wheels. The most critical part of being a mentor is listening.

Transitioning the mentoring relationship is the final step of the formal mentoring process. It is just as important as the orientation. The transition process ensures that the relationship ends on amicable terms or common ground. The FMCC has a formal mentors wine and cheese reception for all involved. Mentees and mentors receive certificates of completion signed by the president and provost. Mentors and mentees use swipe cards for lunch donated to the Office of Faculty Development by the vice president of student affairs and the director of dining. These receptions are ways to elicit the support of other allies on campus for the mentoring program.

Modeling and Supporting through Faculty Development

Mentors facilitate learning by modeling strategies and problem solving; they assist by offering options, gradually decreasing assistance as mentees internalize the process and construct their own knowledge and understanding. These processes are reflected in the mentor's role as facilitator, adviser, and coach. Providing emotional support and encouragement is essential. Formal learning and mentoring cannot operate in isolation; the quality of teaching increases through the mentoring of others.

Professional development workshops and training can be provided through the Office of Faculty Development and Centers for Teaching and Learning. Mentors can help faculty members soar into areas of teaching and scholarly research while providing service. Professors are able to become a part of a community of learners and scholars who can find support and encouragement to improve the academy and develop innovative teaching strategies that will impact the students we serve.

Keeping in mind that faculty members have various talents, it is important, as Boyer (1990) asserts, to support and promote the scholarship of discovery, the scholarship of application, the scholarship of integration, and the scholarship of teaching in order to enhance the academic learning community. Modeling through a mentoring program is crucial as we move into a new century that is bringing profound changes—a time in which deeper dialogue is needed, a listening ear is warranted, and mentoring is necessary. Members of the professoriate experience periods of stability and periods of change. But for faculty, such ebbs and flows are profoundly influenced and complicated by imposed barriers. The mentor can provide a listening ear and psychosocial support during the time of transition.

The psychosocial function of mentoring is a form of relational learning, the value of which is increasingly being recognized in a less hierarchical team environment; therefore, we encouraged a dual mentoring program and embrace the growing-your-own model.

Growing-Our-Own Model

During the 2006 new faculty orientation mentoring panel discussion, growing our own became the overarching theme. Throughout the semester, faculty development workshops often included new faculty members who were mentored by someone in the program. The college or department should not assume that all faculty members can naturally teach. Many in higher learning are attempting to teach full time and complete their terminal degrees simultaneously. Deeper dialogue is needed about faculty members who are caught between competing obligations (Boyer 1990). Discussions of such topics as documentation for promotion and tenure, grantsmanship, publishing, teaching enhancement, professional visibility, networking with colleagues, overcoming academic barriers, and navigating successfully in the academy are vital. There are indeed advantages to same-likeness mentoring and gender-sameness mentoring, but the FMCC program stressed the importance of being culturally sensitive and ensuring that a mentor had the passion to serve while attempting to understand the needs of the mentee and therefore embraced cross-race mentoring. According to Stanley and Lincoln:

Cross-race mentoring provides a unique opportunity for mentors and protégées to be agents of change in helping to create a more inclusive academic community. Such mentoring is an opportunity for majority faculty to coach faculty of color who aspire to senior administrative positions or have talents and expertise that would serve the college or university community well. Many individuals in higher education advocated "growing your own" as a strategy for diversifying the faculty ranks: this strategy also works for the administrative ranks. (2005, 49)

The FMCC expanded its program to meet the needs of faculty members and administrators across campus. Administrators or annually contracted personnel who were working on terminal degrees later requested mentors through the Office of Faculty Development. Keeping within the goals proposed by Provost Blair Lord, the FMCC is committed to becoming "a showcase for teaching and learning at a regional comprehensive university with an emphasis on relationship-driven education. We are committed to building relationships with new and existing faculty."

Conclusion

"Mentoring is a part of the institutional citizenship responsibilities of every senior faculty member, not a form of overload" (Stanley and Lincoln 2005, 48). What a profound statement! Not only are mentoring programs important for retention, but they also lead to more productive faculty. The program provides a development and acculturation experience for new faculty members, assisting them in making the transition to full-time academic work and a career. It provides renewal for existing faculty.

Following are some important aspects of successful mentoring.

- Mentoring must ensure supportive measures and creative environments, especially during times of uncertainty.
- Higher education mentoring must be concerned about the development of all stages of faculty (early-career, mid-career, and veteran faculty).
- Training must be required or strongly recommended for both the mentors and mentees in order for the program to be successful.
- The whole person's developmental needs should be mentored; therefore, we promote the wholesome professor while providing teaching, research, and service.
- Matching outside of departments but within the same college or school is encouraged to ensure confidentiality and a level of trustworthiness.
- Mentoring must be done with passion and an understanding of the differences between the partners.
- Junior faculty serve as mentors to those working on terminal degrees.
- Mid-career and veteran faculty mentors can be renewed through formalized mentoring programs.
- Mentoring is not hierarchical but instead a dual process, and roles and responsibilities should be explained.
- Mentors and mentees must have or develop key competencies.
- Assessment of the program (summative or formative) should be included.

References

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