

## **FACULTY MENTORING: SHAPING A PROGRAM**

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### **ABSTRACT**

A well developed mentoring program should not be just considered another faculty activity but rather a significant program that can define a preeminent academic institution. Charged with determining whether the needs of both new faculty and the institution were being addressed in a manner that would optimize the productivity, acclimation, and professional enhancement of those faculty who would eventually be the foundation of the institution's future, a Faculty Learning Community (FLC) at Metro State College of Denver conducted a year long study and an extensive survey in order to provide the administration with findings, suggestions, and recommendations for shaping a faculty mentoring program for the future.

### **INTRODUCTION**

"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"

"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.

"I don't much care where---" said Alice.

"Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.

"---So long as I get *somewhere*," Alice added as an explanation.

"Oh you're sure to do that," said the Cat, "if you only walk long enough."

*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland Lewis Carroll*

### **Background**

Whether just entering academic teaching or an experienced instructor newly hired by an institution of higher learning, a new faculty member faces a daunting environment. The road to success poses varied obstacles to tenure, promotion,

and retention. As the preamble to the past TV hit "Cheers" so aptly states, "Making your way in the world today takes everything you got". Helping the new faculty member travel the right road in achieving the desired goals stated above is largely the optimum intent of a well developed mentoring program.

Within the past year the Center for Faculty Development at a state college assumed the task of critically reviewing the college's existing early career faculty development program. The charge was to determine whether the needs of both new faculty and the college were being addressed in a manner that would optimize the productivity, acclimation, and professional enhancement of those faculty who would eventually be the foundation of the college's future in transitioning from an urban college to a preeminent university.

Through the formation of a Faculty Learning Community (FLC) consisting of a cross section of both tenured and non-tenured faculty committed to a year long schedule of meetings, the FLC researched published materials regarding mentoring, reviewed, discussed, and assimilated findings, and developed an extensive survey that was administered to the entire faculty. It was obvious from the initial meeting of the FLC participants that perspectives as to the meaning, intent, and administration of a mentoring program were varied due to individual past experiences in either the non-academic or academic workplace. It was acknowledged that, according to Boice (2002), "the first few years in the careers of professors, beginning at the time they interview for their initial position

in academe, are an enormously critical period. Then, applicants and new hires must need useful advice but are least likely to receive it. In the midst of often conflicting and confusing advice, the "newbie" may be tempted to ignore all of it".

Johnson (2006) suggests that the difference in rank and tenure among faculty members involved in a mentoring relationship can mount barriers for the "safe" or natural exchange of information between mentor and mentee.

The FLC further acknowledged that guidebooks such as *Advice for New Faculty Members* can offer sage advice on topics such as "proven ways of easing the surprisingly hard work of teaching, principles for writing productively, and guidelines for socialization ". However, for faculty, finding the time to digest such lengthy tomes invariably takes a back seat to more urgent tasks when faced with limited days for required course preparation. Mentoring becomes even more valuable during challenging times because it offers many benefits for negligible costs (Hodgkin,2010). The task undertaken by the FLC to study the existing mentorship program turned out to be a formidable one and far more involved than expected. Through the years significant time and money had been expended in developing and implementing the mentoring program in being at the college, good intentions do not necessarily result in meaningful or successful outcomes. As Zachary (2000) states, "the difference between a highly successful program and one that succeeds for a limited period of time lies in sustainability. Mentoring programs enjoy sustainability over time when mentoring is embedded in an organizational

culture that values continuous learning". The FLC recognized early on that developing such a program had as its goal the seamless integration of the new faculty member toward productive teaching, career progress, and as a contributing department member. Weimer (2002) also proffers that faculty development has taught some important

lessons, one of the clearest being that efforts to improve instruction cannot be based on premises of remediation and deficiency.

The results of the survey provided significant insights into faculty perspectives on mentoring beyond the FLC's expectations with implications applicable to any educational institution interested in optimizing the benefits of a mentoring program. This paper presents the cogent aspects of the faculty survey along with the accompanying descriptive statistical data. It is reasonable to assume that the faculty at MSCD is representative of most college faculties with regard to faculty demographics, availability of various academic disciplines, and organizational structure. Conclusions may be of value to any institution seeking to review or re-evaluate an existing mentoring program.

### **The Data**

Synopsizing the attached survey results, the first item of interest is that the voluntary response to the survey administered via email to the entire full time faculty resulted in a 52% response (175 participants) as indicated in Slide #1. This percentage signifies that faculty were interested in the topic and felt their responses could make a difference in analyzing the mentoring program. Other results deemed significant are highlighted as follows:

- mentors paid more than cursory attention to this commitment to their mentees with frequent meetings. (Slide 2) The amount of actual time spent with the mentee could have been, but was not, explored.
- 44.1% of mentees and 47.2 % of mentors will continue relationships after completion of the year long mentoring program. This bodes well not only for the development of faculty solidarity but the long term benefits at collaboration with experienced faculty. (Slide 3).
- The conduct and administration of past mentoring programs was such that both mentors and mentees indicated less than optimum desired outcome. This could be attributed to the selection and orientation of mentors. (Slide 5).
- Overall perception of the current program was that it is viable in meeting the intended purpose but less than exemplary. (Slide 6).
- The preparation of chosen mentors was acceptable but seems to reflect disparity between what should be done vs what could be mandated by administration. (Slide 7).
- Mentees, being on the receiving end of the program's benefits, perceive that preparation of mentors, while acceptable, could be enhanced through mentor development activities. (Slide 8)
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- Mentors were in strong agreement across all questions regarding their training that the need exists for mentor training or at least re-exposure to dossier preparation, existing academic policies, teaching skills desired, and interpersonal skills. (Slide 9)
- The key to selection of mentors should focus on knowledge of institution resources and environment as well as interpersonal as opposed to length of experience and academic rank. (Slide 10)

- The view that chosen mentors should be paired with mentees with whom they share similar professional development goals may be desirable but poses a problem of knowing a mentee's goals at the time of the pairings without some form of consultation between prospective mentors and mentees. (Slide 11)
- Both mentors and mentees lean slightly toward a one year formal mentoring program but there is support for one longer than a year. (Slide 12)
- Starting the mentor program before the first semester contract would primarily accommodate the training of selected mentors before pairing with mentees but would involve a compensation issue outside normal terms of faculty contracts. For mentees, any mentoring information could be accomplished during new faculty orientation and compensated accordingly. (Slide 13)
- Interestingly, mentors were more concerned with recognition in their dossiers than other incentives to volunteer to make up for the time devoted

to mentees vs involvement in other dossier documented activities i.e. service to the college. Mentees, on the other hand, viewed recognition in the dossier as an important addition for their mentors. (Slide 14).

- Even though mentees may be required to engage in the mentoring program, they also recognize the value of "fodder" for their dossier, (Slide 15)
- While the underlying reasons for wanting to be involved as a mentor undoubtedly vary, the response from those taking the survey support the need for and benefits to all of a well developed mentor program. (Slide 16)
- In addition to the responses to the 22 questions posed in the basic faculty survey, comments were solicited from all respondents resulting in 28 single spaced typed pages of suggestions, observations, opinions both positive and negative, and general thoughts about both the existing mentoring program and mentoring programs in general.
- Selected quotes from the question "If you had one message to send to the Provost" are shown in Slides 17 & 18. There were 86 responses to this inquiry clearly demonstrating the multitude of thoughts given to the question.

## **Conclusions**

- Mentoring is important for any college.
- Current program has higher ratings on learning objectives than previous programs.
- Mentoring is perceived by faculty as good, not excellent.
- First-year faculty should have development opportunities outside the mentoring program.
- First-year faculty development could start before first semester.
- Mentoring program could last longer than one year.

- Mentor/mentee pairings should be by professional development and teaching goals.
- Mentors should be chosen for their knowledge of Metro State resources and interpersonal skills.
- Mentors should have development opportunities as mentors.
- Incentives should be related to recognition in the dossier.
- Current involvement projects a strong interest in future involvement.

## **Recommendations for the Future of Early Career Faculty Development at Metro State**

The following recommendations were derived from the Survey of All Full-time Faculty on Mentoring administered in the Spring of 2011.

- 1. The mentoring program should be intentional not accidental.**
- 2. The program should be longer than one year.**
- 3. Early career faculty should be given opportunities for development before the start of the first year.**
  - a. Workshops should be offered in the week before the first contract date.
  - b. First-year faculty should receive an honorarium for these days: \$100 per day.
  - c. Workshops should focus on education on resources at Metro State, developmental activities as teachers, and study of the nature of mentor/mentee relationships.
- 4. First Year: Nuts and Bolts**
  - a. First-year Guide:faculty members who will act as guides
    - i. First-year faculty should be given access to necessary information on resources.
    - ii. The First-year Guide will meet regularly to assure that issues related to resources are quickly and expertly addressed.
    - iii. First-year Guides will receive training in Metro State resources.
    - iv. First-year Guides will receive training in goal setting for first-year faculty.
  - b. Programs in the Schools
    - i. First-year faculty should be provided guidance in setting appropriate goals in all areas of development.
    - ii. First-year faculty will be given information to aid understanding of the RTP process.

## **5. Second Year: Professional and Personal Growth**

- a. Mentoring
  - i. The goal of the first year program should be to pair faculty with appropriate mentors.
  - ii. Mentors
    - 1. Mentors should be chosen from those volunteering for the program.
    - 2. Mentors should be selected for their personal attributes.
      - a. Knowledge of Metro State resources
      - b. Interpersonal skills
    - 3. Mentors will be given training in interpersonal and mentoring skills.
    - 4. Mentors and Mentees will be paired by their professional development goals.
    - 5. Mentors should receive small honoraria to offset the cost of lunch and dinner meetings: \$200 per year.
- b. Teaching and Advising
  - i. Developmental activities in the area of teaching and advising should be focused on the second year and beyond.
  - ii. Activities should be of sufficient variety and quantity that all early-career faculty members are able to participate.

## **6. Third Year: Refining Developmental Activities and the Tenure Process**

- a. Mentors and Mentees will have an opportunity for adjustment of the mentor/mentee relationship.
- b. Mentors and Mentees will have opportunities to engage in activities designed to enhance the interpersonal relationships.