

Building a Mentoring Program at a Regional Campus: Best Practices and Ideas

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Considering the higher education landscape today, anyone landing a full-time faculty position at a college or university has already been vetted in myriad ways, showing amazing credentials; however, certain marginalized populations and other less integrated individuals may have a hard time navigating their new setting. With knowledge, mentoring, and connection, these new hires can better understand and become an integral part of their new professional home. A formalized mentoring program helps ensure that all new faculty will be able to find and utilize mentoring toward their own success in academe. This paper will move through ten steps for building a program, focusing on the need for knowledge, relationships, leadership, and institutional support. These ideas are offered not as a prescription, but as an opportunity to learn from another institution's experience, borrowing and adapting as needed. The proposed Ten Steps are: See What You Have, See What You Need, Garner Support, Develop the Program, Grow the Program, Be Flexible, Get Ready for the Culture Shift, Spread the Culture, Collect Data, and Avoid Dangers.

1. See What You Have: We know that mentoring is positive, even if we do not always know how to define it. Vicente Lechuga (2014) notes that there is “. . .no single comprehensive definition of mentoring” (p. 910), though it is still often seen as the typical dyad of senior faculty paired with junior faculty. We now know that those dyads don't always work, and that often “faculty needs for professional guidance and interpersonal connection could still be high even with mentoring dyads” (Colón-Emeric, Bowlby, & Svetkey, 2012, p. 633). For good mentoring, whether dyadic in format or not, we need “respect, proximity, comprehensive feedback, and mentor experience” as well as “expertise, honesty, accessibility, approachability, and supportiveness” (Efsthaliou et al., 2018, p. 2). This is a tall order; it is therefore important to *See What You Have* already in mentoring at your institution before creating a new program. It will be likely that dyads have formed, formally or informally, and that some senior colleagues are already excellent mentors who share many of the qualities listed above. It may be just as likely that mentees (people who would like to be mentored or who are being formally mentored) are not getting their needs met in some of the common areas junior faculty have questions about: “Career development, research, and promotion. . .followed by. . .institutional resources and administration/service” (Voytko et al., 2018, p. 1045).

2. See What You Need: It is one thing for individuals to see what an institution needs from their perspectives; it is another thing for the institution (effectively, the administration), to see that they need to make changes: “Those institutions that acknowledge their limits are the ones, perhaps, who have the necessary self-confidence to engage intentionally and thoughtfully to establish effective mentoring programs” (Fraga, 2014, p. 259). It is widely known that academia is changing, and all faculty, but particularly junior faculty, face new challenges: “The three primary forces of change that directly affect faculty members' abilities to carry out their teaching, research, and service include a changing professoriate, a changing student body; and

the changing nature of teaching, learning, and scholarship” (Yun, Baldi, & Sorcinelli, 2016, p. 442). Specifically, tenure-stream faculty have more duties, with less people to complete them, as their students are becoming more diverse (Yun et al., 2016, p. 442). A one-size-fits-all dyadic mentoring system may no longer be enough.

The Tuscarawas campus had both formal dyads and an informal peer and near peer group of newer faculty who worked together, from before or just after the tenure decision, to help each other create better documents for RTP. However, it became exceedingly clear that some people were falling through the cracks of this mentoring circuit. All too often, we assume that people who do not ask for help do not need it. Often at my campus, the people not asking for help were outside of the predominantly white, middle class, American-born status of the majority of faculty. It was apparent to junior (or recent junior) faculty at my campus that “the traditional dyadic mentorship is strained when the availability of senior faculty is limited, or when junior faculty members are unable to find a compatible mentor” (Colón-Emeric et al., 2012, p. 631). Additionally, because women and underrepresented faculty have additional mentoring needs, “new mentorship models to complement the traditional senior-junior dyad are needed” (Colón-Emeric et al., 2012, p. 631).

3. Garner Support: Fortunately for our campus, Dean Bielski believes in holistic mentoring programs and immediately saw that what we had could be improved. This was fortuitous as “a mentoring-rich environment will depend on administrative support” (Riofrio, 2014, p. 223). We had a moment in which the administration and faculty leadership were able to come together on the issue of mentoring, just as our university was involved in creating new faculty handbooks. Practice, culture, and policy are all necessary ingredients in creating any institutional change, and different situations call for different approaches to program creation. A leader is needed, one who can envision the new program and communicate effectively those needs as well as have a vision for what the program should entail: “Any faculty mentoring program must have a single, visible locus,” or director (Kohn, 2014, p. 5). Additionally, finding handbook language, or in this case, creating handbook language, that would enable the creation of a new program also is key. It is impossible to overstate how important administrative “buy in” is for starting, implementing, and growing a robust mentoring program. One of the immediate pieces of support needed was that the new Mentor Coordinators needed administrative load for their work. The naming of the positions, the formalizing of the roles, the negotiation for load hours: these were the key moments to program creation at Tuscarawas.

4. Develop the Program: With support gathered and leadership in place, it was time to define the program. Utilizing the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity, an excellent mentoring organization of which Kent State University is a member, mentees and mentors learned together (Nuñez et al., 2015, p. 92). Additionally, reaching out to Associate Provost Mandy Munro-Stasiuk and the Center for Teaching and Learning helped shape our program. For instance, we moved away from the “guru” mentoring model. In inviting all senior faculty to participate in mentoring, but ultimately allowing senior faculty to choose if they wanted to be involved, I was able to utilize a team of mentors, many of whom had excellent ideas and mentoring practices already. Together we built “a cross-departmental networking model” (Golden et al., 2017, p. 494). Utilizing the NCFDD Mentoring Map, the NTT Coordinator and I

received enthusiasm and permissions from people on our campus who were willing and able to fill certain types of roles for our junior faculty, and we formalized their roles by including them in a mentoring handbook unique to our campus.

5. Grow the Program: During the second year, I started to see that with as many needs as were being met, still other needs were not being reached. With expanded load, I was able to gradually add to our program. Do not try to institute everything all at once; instead see what is needed most acutely, and then see where it makes sense to expand. Both mentees and mentors/coordinators can get burnt out if too many activities are added all at once. Currently, our campus mentoring program offers: New Faculty Orientation; New Faculty Cohort Meetings; Tenure Track Cohort Meetings; Non Tenure Track Cohort Meetings; Writing Group; Teaching Circle; Part-Time Appreciation and (Voluntary) Mentoring; Annual Mentoring Retreat; File Guidance, Models, and Proofing; Flashfolio Workshops; Mid-Career Counseling; Peer Review of Teaching; Individual Post-Review Meetings; and Archived Google Docs spaces for groups and common forms/models/information. This list might not be appropriate for every unit. In order to facilitate these activities, find and utilize in-house experts for support, such as the NTT Coordinator, other senior faculty, the in-house PR department, faculty and staff throughout the system, the Dean's office, and mentees themselves to provide programming, offer review and expertise, create materials, help with food and event planning, and more. It is a group effort, but does need an overarching facilitator.

6. Be Flexible: One of the most exciting things about running the Mentoring Program is the fact that the needs of the faculty body change frequently, so I never have the option of resting on my past successes and getting bored. I create surveys at the beginning of the academic year to help me determine faculty needs, which in turn help me determine programming to provide. And then there are the needs that crop up unexpectedly. I might think my calendar is clear for an afternoon, only to find out that a junior faculty mentor really needs to discuss an issue. I have been told by mentees that sometimes those types of discussions end up being the most useful part of the mentoring program.

7. Get Ready for the Culture Shift: Mentoring programs are not a panacea for all of the ills that can be found on a campus, but I believe that any time faculty can be shown that relational models can work better than the "individualistic" models so common to universities, everyone can eventually benefit. The goal should be "an understanding of the institution as a community of intertwined people" (Plout, 2014, p. 41). "Collaborative achievement," a goal of this model, can take many shapes. I have witnessed the start of several collaborative research projects--some between junior faculty members in the same cohort, learning for the first time that the work they are doing overlaps productively, and some interdisciplinary matches between junior and senior faculty. Collaboration can also be seen in a new camaraderie around the RTP table. Instead of the growled question, "Who was her mentor?", we now brainstorm what messages the junior faculty needs to receive officially and unofficially to protect them on their journey forward. Together, particularly through mentoring retreat programming and as needed, we discuss strategies and realities of dealing with various types of racism and microaggressions at our campus, another important role for mentoring (Bajaj, 2014, p. 241). Safe space networks nurtured in mentoring relationships grow out and expand, and support is becoming a larger norm

on our campus. Between new attitudes, mentee success, and closer professional and social relationships, the work of mentoring speaks for itself, and the *culture shifts* and spreads.

8. Spread the Culture: I recently secured a position as a CTL faculty fellow, and I hope to facilitate mutual mentoring groups to help people in mid-career on each regional campus. Another part of my fellowship is to map the great mentoring that is happening around the regional campus system. It is key to note that these additional duties are being done with additional support from parties outside my campus.

9. Collect Data: Unlike the way I started the program on my own campus, for my pilot program as a faculty fellow, I realize that I need to collect data regarding pre- and post-program perceptions of involved faculty. Word of mouth and visible success has been helpful thus far, but I have been working in an environment in which the administration is already supportive of mentoring activities. Following up with faculty, short and long term, to show results, will not only help any facilitator to tweak programming, but it can also help provide the argument for continuing and expanding support as needed (Yun et al., 2016). *Data-proven* results, and *data-driven* practice, will only increase the chances that more faculty in the system will receive the types of mentoring they need.

10. Avoiding Dangers: Mentoring is a huge responsibility, and creating and facilitating a mentoring program is amplified responsibility. Ethically, we have no choice but to helpfully and equitably mentor our faculty toward success. However, in doing the ethical act, other ethical issues can crop up that were never intended by the program or actors within it. Effective mentoring is relational and authentic; therefore, both mentors and mentees can experience vulnerabilities as they share their stories. For a junior faculty member, sharing the story of another rejection, or a failed data set, or challenges in the classroom, are of course more painful, and could, if the space is not truly safe, work to harm them. Confidentiality and care with information are a must, but sometimes the information a mentor receives is powerful, and remaining silent or sharing it can have important implications. It goes without saying that mentors could abuse their power, and that personal relationships, particularly romantic ones, should *never* be entered into between the mentor and mentee (Leon, 1993). But what happens when, as shown in a recent *New York Times* column by Maya Salam (2019), it becomes clear that certain mentors, often men, are reluctant to take on mentoring positions for (women or other marginalized) faculty whom they feel could harm their reputations? There is also the problem of frustration when mentoring the people who most need help but seem to not be following advice or seeking help.

In general, I would suggest it is a must for the mentor coordinator to understand the campus culture and rules (formal and informal) guiding it, as well as having a clear understanding of what constitutes a problem that necessitates sharing resources with the mentee, or actually having to seek additional help with and for the person and the problem. Typically, there are not clear answers here, and these are precisely the types of problems that will cause the most grief and work. With open and honest relationships with both mentees and mentors, as well as a working knowledge of procedures and resources, these *dangers* can usually be mitigated.

Conclusion: Mentoring matters--for junior faculty, for women, for FOC, for the entire campus culture. Those of us who have made it to the other side of tenure, those of us who find success in the academy, need to spend our time and energy on those who have not made it yet, and we need leaders and administrations that support us in those efforts.

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