

Studies of mentoring for new faculty reveal principles for its maximization, including a more directive and collective format for mentors.

Lessons Learned About Mentoring

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In a sense, we know a lot about mentoring. It is akin to parenting. It is as old as apprenticeship, coaching, and teaching. Yet, we are only beginning to learn the specifics of how best to mentor new faculty. Recent reviews of the literature of mentoring show an emphasis on other kinds of pairings, primarily in graduate schools or in business settings (Lavery, Boice, Thompson, and Turner, 1989). What may be most obvious about mentoring for new faculty is its unfamiliarity as a subject of inquiry (Boice, 1990; Sands, Parson, and Duane, 1991).

What hinders knowledge about mentoring? Part of the problem may be that mentoring often occurs in a gradual, unsystematic fashion, making it hard to study. And part of the enigma may owe to concerns about its possible status as a mere fad in faculty development (Weimer, 1990). We have been, until now, ambivalent about mentoring. Consider that heretofore the only proven benefits of social networks in professorial careers have accrued to scholarly productivity, not to teaching (Creswell, 1985).

Despite these obstacles, though mentoring is becoming a more popular part of plans and programs for new faculty. As we work harder to attract and retain the best people to professorial careers, we can no longer afford to ignore potential supports that can make a traditionally forbidding career seem more survivable (Boice, 1992; Bowen and Schuster, 1986; Schuster, 1990).

This chapter provides an overview of recent research on mentoring for new faculty and makes two related points. First, recent studies of mentor-mentee pairs suggest practical guidelines for maximizing the mentoring experience. Second, close examination of traditional mentoring pairs, even those operating in exemplary fashion, suggests a shortcoming of traditional

mentoring formats. Usual pairs of mentors and new faculty may work in too passive a fashion to help many new faculty, especially minorities, thrive in professorial careers. Thus, we face a frustration in getting to know mentoring as a tool for supporting new faculty: Just as we begin to understand its mechanisms, we may need to change them.

A Study of Traditional Mentoring Pairs

Elsewhere, in laborious detail, I described a multiyear project on mentoring at a large comprehensive university (Boice, 1990). Briefly, that federally funded project had two stages. In the first, my colleague Jimmie L. Turner and I surveyed the spontaneous occurrence of mentoring on campus during 1985-1986. Among the forty to sixty new faculty hired each year on tenure-track positions, only a handful participated in mentoring of any significant sort. But, those who had it clearly fared better than did the majority without it.

Given the usual complaints of these and similar new faculty about social isolation and intellectual understimulation, the situation seemed ripe for a systematic program for mentoring. Indeed, new faculty routinely gave high ratings in response to questions about their desire for mentoring.

The second stage of the project consisted of establishing twenty-five mentoring pairs for sustained study for at least an academic year of regular weekly meetings and other activities. Roughly one-half were what we termed *traditional mentoring pairs*: mentors and mentees essentially picked each other, mentors were older than mentees, and pairs were often from within the same departments. The procedure for forming the other pairs was dictated by practicalities. Many new faculty in the study were hired into departments without obvious or willing mentors among their more senior colleagues. So, some new hires were paired with mentors from other departments (who, like more traditional mentors, were selected for participation on the basis of demonstrated excellence and balance as teachers and researchers).

A variety of measures, including self-ratings by pair members and my own direct observations of pairs in action, indicated that all but a few of these pairs were highly successful. As a rule, mentoring was associated with more rapid socialization to campus and with improved student ratings of teaching compared to nonmentored peers. As a rule, both mentors and mentees listed a wealth of benefits for having participated in what initially seemed a time-consuming project. Overall, intensive study of the twenty-five mentoring pairs suggested five general outcomes that may have value to other campuses:

Arbitrarily Paired Mentors and Mentees Worked as Well as Traditional Pairs. Initially, arbitrarily paired mentors and mentees were highly skeptical. "How," each routinely asked, "am I supposed to get close to

someone like him [her]? I probably would have picked someone different." Soon, though, arbitrarily matched pairs minimized this problem. They discovered that the kinds of coping skills essential to survival were the same for all new faculty regardless of department. Pairs mixed across genders and ethnicities fared as well as unmixed pairs.

One feature seemed to make these arbitrary pairs slightly more successful in final ratings. Traditional pairs, who picked each other, often had prior histories of friendships. When one of them assumed the role of mentor, strife ensued. Mentees in these pairs resented the sudden change of status from supposed equals to unequals, especially when advice was tantamount to pressure to get at delayed tasks. These previously friendly pairs, incidentally, provided the only confirmations of a fear that bothered all mentors initially—the fear of being perceived as presumptuous in claiming the role of mentor.

The point of this finding is so simple that it can easily be missed. One of the seemingly most daunting tasks of setting up mentoring projects, one where the literature on mentoring provides little concrete help, is forming effective pairs of mentors and mentees. This study suggests that the process of meeting regularly in supportive fashion is more important than the personal characteristics of the pair members. That is, almost any new faculty can benefit from mentoring, regardless of the similarity or dissimilarity of the qualified colleague sharing his or her professorial experience and support.

Mentors from Same and Different Departments Worked at Least as Well. Here too, pairs began with doubts, whether paired voluntarily or arbitrarily. "How," each wondered, "can someone from a different department, or even school, begin to understand the special needs of my discipline or the special politics of my department?" I wondered too.

But this problem was soon mastered. Pairs, often with advice from other pairs, learned to send mentors to discuss departmental expectations for their mentees with the departmental chairpeople and retention-tenure committees. And, just as quickly, these pairs found that the kinds of coping skills most essential to thriving on a new campus were not specific to disciplines. The essence of good mentoring, according to almost all pairs, was socioemotional support.

In the final analysis, two characteristics of these cross-departmental mentor-mentee pairs seemed to contribute to their slightly greater success compared to more traditional mentoring pairs. The first was their mutual effort to learn about the cultures of each other's departments. The other was a readier openness of mentees with mentors from different departments. A common concern of the mentees with mentors from their own departments was that self-disclosures of failings might be held against them in retention-tenure decisions. Mentees with close colleagues as mentors acted conservatively and defensively at times.

Frequent Nudges to Meet Regularly Helped Ensure Pair Bonds. Because I was intent on studying the mentoring experience in progress, I did something that I might not otherwise have done. I had pairs keep checklists, journals of what happened during weekly mentoring meetings, and ratings of each other's involvement, helpfulness, and other presumed qualities of effective mentoring. Then, to ensure that data were being collected, I contacted pairs weekly or biweekly in person or by telephone to collect their notes and ratings and make my own.

As a result, of this simple action of making regular contacts, more was accomplished than the collection of fascinating information about the progress of mentoring pairs. Initially, pair members complained that the contacts were a nuisance. Eventually, though, the pairs came to value them. My contacts came to be seen as chances to reflect on a valued experience. Moreover, everyone noted, my contacts had acted as prods to keep pairs meeting when mentees and mentors had felt too busy to meet. Without my reminders that they should meet at least weekly for brief exchanges, they said, they would surely have stopped meeting. This prodding, more than anything else, helped ensure the bonds and habits of meeting regularly that contributed to the success of their pairs.

Left to Themselves, Most Mentoring Pairs Displayed Disappointingly Narrow Styles. Even where mentors had considerable seasoning at mentoring, they typically worked with mentees on a limited range of topics. Some mentors focused almost exclusively on preparing retention-tenure materials, others on coaching for writing productivity. Not until they were in monthly meetings where all mentoring pairs shared experiences did most pairs expand their horizons. Then, once freed from whatever invisible bounds had been in effect, pairs began trying creative activities (such as visits to the special collections room of the library, the faculty computer laboratory, and the weight room in the gymnasium). Perhaps because participants were accustomed to professorial mentoring that occurs in offices with students, mentors and mentees had not thought of alternatives in location or content. Once this broadening of perspectives began, pair members reported more enjoyment of mentoring and of their partners.

Mentors Assumed the Role of Interventionist with Reluctance. Despite the bonding and positive results, mentors resisted my attempts to move them beyond relatively passive roles of listening and giving occasional advice. If, for example, mentees were failing as teachers, mentors would wait for them to ask for help. And, when help was requested, it usually came in terms of vague admonitions to reduce the level of difficulty of course materials or to induce more active student involvement in classes. While such advice helped reassure mentees, it rarely translated into obviously improved teaching.

When I asked mentors about their reasons for not doing more, their answers were uniform and interesting: For one thing, they typically began,

they did not want to impose themselves on mentees; faculty, even novices, should be autonomous in their classrooms. For another, they were not sure that teaching could be taught except by experience; they themselves had learned without help beyond occasional bits of advice. And, to complete the list, they noted that if mentoring required more than socioemotional support, they might decline to do it. They suspected that they had no time or inclination to do more.

Only when I structured the task of coaching mentees at teaching did mentors get more involved. They agreed, once involved, that brief visits to mentees' classes and subsequent feedback on a brief checklist could be managed in a constructive fashion. And they found that the practice of bringing their mentees to their own classes, wherein a brief, specific strategy for teaching was modeled for the mentees' benefit, was both helpful and reasonable. Much like the initial narrowness in perspective of mentoring pairs described above, the lack of proactiveness owed more to uncertainty about how to proceed than to conscious resistance.

General Lesson. Taken together, these five guidelines suggest a general principle for maximizing the usefulness of mentoring programs: Mentoring pairs may need considerable mentoring, including prods, directives, and chances to show off successes. But as I brought those guidelines to another mentoring project at my new campus, I began to notice a dark side to that general lesson. As we usually see it practiced, mentoring for new faculty is surprisingly ineffective. Without some kind of program such as the one just described, pairs tend to stop meeting (no matter how well intentioned), to work in narrow fashion, and even to let mentees fail for lack of intervention.

But that is not all. Once my presence as a recruiter and prodder of pair members was gone from the project, the mentees most likely to become uninvolved were minorities. Traditional mentoring is passive in terms of self-initiative for new faculty in general, and for the new recruits that we most need to nurture and retain in particular. To counter this inertia, I have begun to experiment with nontraditional mentoring for minority new faculty. While the results are only preliminary, they suggest a way of improving on traditional mentor-mentee pairings for new faculty.

Nontraditional Mentoring

The logic in looking for alternative approaches to mentoring new faculty goes beyond the mixed results just reviewed. Clearly, mentoring based on the model of a dissertation adviser and graduate student is too constraining for new hires. In finishing our dissertations, it may have made sense to model our efforts after an individual's approach to research. Heaven knows that even for such a limited purpose, doctoral mentoring has a strikingly poor track record; my own interviews with new faculty commonly reveal

bitterness and mistreatment connected to doctoral advisers. Moreover, some observers of academe estimate that one-half of the graduate students who complete their coursework and qualifying exams never finish their dissertations (D. Sternberg, 1981).

When new colleagues and come to campus, the paradigm of aligning each of them with a single individual, with the single goal of carrying out a specific research program, is even less appropriate. New faculty need to bond with groups, on and off campus, with departments and campuses, with administrators, and with students. They must, to state the matter simply, please more than one person.

Recently, I undertook a study of new faculty who found quick success as teachers and as productive researchers and scholars (Boice, 1991). Three characteristics of these "quick starters" are relevant here: First, they constitute a small minority, perhaps of no more than 10 to 15 percent of new faculty at large campuses. Second, they are, so far, almost exclusively white and male. And, third, they are unique in seeking out social supports and advice from a variety of colleagues, especially those in the position to make decisions about their retention and tenure. While quick starters do not necessarily ingratiate themselves with influential colleagues, they do get constant feedback about whether their activities are sufficient in quantity and quality.

In my own studies of new faculty who appear likely to fail in professorial careers, the opposite pattern emerged. These are people, like the marginal and minority faculty studied elsewhere (Exum, Menges, Watkins, and Berglund, 1984), who not only are highly distressed over their social isolation but also show confusion about what is expected of them. Too often, they learn about norms and expectations only in retention or tenure reports, long after corrections would help.

What slower starters needed, I imagined, was something similar to what had been used more than a decade ago in studies of reengaging middle-aged, disillusioned faculty. They too needed clear directives, incentives, and social supports. The key element in that earlier work was a form of contracting that I came to call *cataloguing*.

Cataloguing. To ensure its widespread adoption among new faculty who suppose themselves too busy for most additional activities, the technique of cataloguing has to be brief but effective. In essence, new faculty are asked to compile and continually revise catalogues of succinct, readable descriptions of past activities, current activities, and planned activities. Because these three- to seven-page catalogues are easiest to conceptualize in relation to writing projects, I encourage new faculty to begin in that domain. Thus, each manuscript already published, in press, or in progress is described in a paragraph. And, in like fashion, planned manuscripts are described with details about their messages and significance, about their concordance with the individual's research and scholarly program in general, and about their intended outlets for publication.

Similar sets of descriptions make up catalogues for other vital activities such as teaching, collegial networking, and service. Although modest amounts of coaching and modeling are helpful in setting up catalogues, new faculty, in my experience, master this task rather effortlessly (Boice, 1992).

As described so far, cataloguing is anything but unusual. We already know of kindred devices such as portfolios that help gain untenured faculty credit for accomplishments beyond publication lists. And we can, those of us who know ourselves and our colleagues all too well, easily envision cataloguing as something that starts with enthusiasm and fades when new hires become immersed in their busy work weeks. What makes cataloguing work is its linkage to a special kind of mentoring for new faculty: group mentoring.

Committees as Mentors. Again, the task of the mentors is kept brief but effective. I ask the departments modeling this group mentoring to assign as mentors the same individuals who will make retention-tenure decisions for a new hire down the road. I also ask that the committee mentoring and the cataloguing be initiated as early as possible. Indeed, the first occasion where the group of mentors gives feedback about how much is enough and whether plans and topics are on track is when the potential mentee comes to campus as a job candidate.

Thus, the candidate, who submits a brief catalogue for teaching and for writing preliminary to his or her visit, gets the first round of feedback about what is expected early in the process of being a new faculty member. Even then, the occasion is set to accomplish three other facets of the mentoring that are essential in the long run. First, every attempt is made to avoid surprises (on both sides) about what is required and expected. Second, opportunities for soliciting and offering support and advice are made apparent (for example, how to plan and carry out a reasonable set of goals). Here, more than in traditional mentoring, opportunities for help are almost unavoidable. Third, the interaction gives faculty prospects a sense of a campus prepared to provide supports.

In my observations so far of eight minority faculty who are already engaged in cataloguing and group mentoring, these initial and subsequent meetings have a predictable set of characteristics:

1. New faculty and mentors alike claim immediate benefits of analyzing past, ongoing, and planned accomplishments. The task is especially illuminating for activities not ordinarily specified in written fashion such as teaching (where learning goals and designs for improving may otherwise have been vague or absent) and social networking (where little attention is typically paid to arranging and carrying out beneficial contacts for research and teaching).

2. New faculty express public relief at knowing what is expected and at being able to negotiate compromises in expectations. They also report far less private worrying about the fairness of the evaluation procedure

leading to retention or tenure decisions than do new minority faculty not in the program.

3. Mentoring committees and mentees report surprise at how little time the catalogue feedback sessions take. In general, after the initial meetings, monthly group meetings (always with the mentee in attendance) take about thirty minutes. Other interactions, usually between mentees and individual mentors, typically consist of delivery of revised or annotated catalogues, clarification of the nature of plans and expectations, and advice about how goals can be met. It is, in my experience, common for these mentors and mentees to misunderstand each other at the outset. Eventually, the communication of expectations, plans, and supports becomes more efficient.

4. Mentoring committees and their mentees say that the two best aspects of this project are (1) the unprecedented feelings of collegiality, of belonging, and of caring and (2) the eventual painlessness of the evaluations. Over time, mentoring groups suppose, the expectations and progress toward goals become so clear that the mentees will know the retention-tenure decision in advance.

5. The mentoring committees conclude that two factors make the difference in nurturing their minority mentees: One, already mentioned, is the clarification of expectations and of what are in fact reasonable accomplishments for the new colleagues under constant scrutiny. The other is that group members, once they become invested in their mentees, stimulate each other to provide active supports for them. Examples recorded so far include brief ventures in coteaching and in collaborative writing with mentees.

Despite these promising beginnings, questions remain. What, for instance, will keep cataloguing groups on a regular schedule of meetings? The answer in part may be that the mentoring committees expect to carry their commitments for at least as long as decisions remain to be made. While they might not otherwise meet and evaluate in ongoing fashion, these committees report intentions to continue functioning, at least biannually, until they complete their goals. Another part of the answer is that cataloguing groups seem to enjoy themselves. A final part of the answer may be that high-level administrators will give more authorization and funding to a project that focuses on supporting new minority faculty than to most faculty development programs.

Another question that arises when I discuss cataloguing groups with others on my own campus and elsewhere is why I limit the process to new minority faculty. My answer is that I began the project with the new faculty most in need of support and most likely to end up isolated and unhappy on campus. Next, I add an optimistic note. I expect that departments with cataloguing groups, when they acknowledge their successes, will help me institute cataloguing for all of their new faculty.

Finally, fellow practitioners often ask me to ground my ideas in more familiar approaches to faculty development. As a result, I have found a way to embed cataloguing in a simple composite theory formed from already successful approaches to student and faculty development. The abbreviated name of the theory is IRSS: Involvement, Regimen, Solving the right problem, and Social networking.

IRSS Theory and Cataloguing Groups. The kinds of things that new faculty must master first for success in academic careers are of the most basic sort, so elementary that we ordinarily overlook them. The first of the four IRSS factors is the simplest and the most firmly established.

Involvement. The notion comes from student development and Astin's (1985) theory of involvement. Briefly, he found that students who immerse themselves in campus life, in activities and social networks, and who develop a sense of belonging fare better and stay longer. The same rule undoubtedly applies to new faculty. Cataloguing helps ensure that newcomers get involved—in supportive and communicative networks with influential faculty, in campus activities, and in developing a sense of trust in the campus.

Regimen. Cataloguing, put simply, is a matter of staying on schedule and of staying with the task of mentoring. This suspiciously behavioral notion of productivity by way of brief, daily sessions has roots in my work with new faculty who procrastinate (Boice, 1989).

Solving the Right Problem. This notion comes from composition teachers and from Flower's (1990) studies showing that students who fail as writers typically do so because they try to solve the wrong problems. She concludes that they can learn to write when they solve useful problems such as writing for the appropriate audience.

Here again, the rule applies to new faculty. Many of them try to solve problems such as finding big blocks of uninterrupted time for writing and lecture preparation. Instead, the evidence (Boice, 1989) is that they do better when they solve the problem of time management by making tasks such as writing fit into the brief openings of already busy days. Cataloguing groups encourage accurate task representations by constantly keeping their mentees on the right tasks. With new minority faculty, for example, this assistance often takes the form of discouraging their overinvolvement in committees.

This third factor in the IRSS theory, like the other three factors, also has roots in recent insights about why students fail. Poor students do not know how to talk (or how not to talk) in class, how to apportion their time for studying, or how to study for tests (Sternberg, Okagaki, and Jackson, 1990). R. Sternberg's (1988) theoretical interpretation of these failures is that schools traditionally tend to ignore the teaching of tacit knowledge. While tacit knowledge is typically untaught, it is essential to thriving in academe.

Tacit knowledge is also critical to new faculty. They, like students, need to learn how to manage themselves, others, and tasks in order to thrive in academe. This need to learn subtle things may account for the enduring popularity of mentoring. Cataloguing provides the added measure of coaching from several mentors, all of whom are committed to regular interactions with mentees.

Social Networking. In a sense, this final IRSS theory component is preempted by what we have already covered here. Clearly, new faculty who find strong social networks have better chances of survival and success. But the theory behind this notion goes further. It says that those faculty who fare best strike a balance between teaching, scholarship, and collegial outreach. Thus, social networking, to be effective, occupies as much time as moderate investments in teaching preparation and in research and scholarship (Creswell, 1985).

What has balance got to do with cataloguing? In fact, the connection is tenuous so far. In my experience, the hardest thing to impart to new faculty, or to get cataloguing groups to induce in an effective way, is balance. Yet, it is this single component of adjusting to life as a new faculty member that the quick starters cite as pivotal in their successes (Boice, 1992). I continue to struggle with this dilemma, just one in the never-ending series of challenges that help keep faculty development in the realm of fun.

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