There are many synonyms for the word "mentor": coach, guide, role model, peer advisor, and sponsor, among others. The plethora of terms would suggest that we know something about this role, but most of the research on mentoring has been conducted in business and industry rather than in education. In fact, junior and senior faculty and administrators alike are often uncertain about how to foster effective mentoring relationships. This is especially true when faculty of color are recruited to predominantly white colleges and universities.

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Recent attacks on affirmative action have created a nationwide institutional paralysis when it comes to recruiting and retaining faculty of color. In comparison to majority faculty, the numbers of faculty of color in higher education remain disproportionately low. Mentoring is an important strategy for retaining these faculty members. There is nothing more isolating and alienating than to be the first or only person of one’s race and/or ethnicity to be hired in a department, and a mentoring relationship is one way to escape from that isolation. But while it is especially important that faculty of color be mentored effectively, majority administrators and senior faculty are likely to be perplexed by the task, because they may have no previous experience with minority colleagues to draw upon.

Consequently, some authors have observed, majority faculty are reluctant to mentor new faculty of color; few overtures toward faculty of color are made; and minority scholars feel keenly the absence of warm, constructive mentoring relationships. It is almost always assumed that mentoring is more beneficial when mentor and protégé are of the same gender and race or ethnicity, are in the same discipline, and share similar professional interests.

But while there are advantages to like-on-like mentoring, as D.J. Levinson et al. (see box on p. 50) note, “it is the character of the relationship and the functions it serves” that makes a difference between successful mentoring and merely assuming an assignment. R.S. Cañarella defines mentoring as an “intense caring relationship in which persons with more experience work with less experienced persons to promote both professional and personal development.”

The successful mentoring relationship, in our experience, is characterized by trust, honesty, a willingness to learn about self and others, and the ability to share power and privilege. Mentors also must learn how to recognize their protégés’ strengths and weaknesses, nurture their autonomy, treat them as individuals, capitalize on their skills, and create opportunities for challenge and growth.

Guided by insights drawn from the research, and more importantly from our experiences and from observing others, we describe here our relationship as mentor/protégé and share the lessons we have learned about how to establish and maintain meaningful cross-race mentoring relationships.

**Our Mentor/Protégé Journey**

**Christine’s Narrative:** I am a black woman who grew up in Jamaica, the West Indies, and emigrated to the United States in 1980. All my mentors in administration and the professoriate, except two, have been white women. I met Yvonna, my faculty mentor at Texas A&M University, in fall 1999, when I was recruited to join the faculty in the department of educational administration in the college of education and human development. All I knew about Yvonna before I met her was that she is regarded as “the queen of qualitative research,” although she certainly would not characterize herself that way. In the first two years of our acquaintance, she was named distinguished professor and given the Ruth Harrington Chair in Educational Leadership, and I learned that she was a former department head.

Needless to say, these characteristics were quite intimidating to me, a younger junior faculty member and a woman of color. After all, how does one measure up to a woman of her stature? When I left Ohio State for Texas A&M, one colleague remarked, “You are going to be in the same department and the same research program area with Yvonna Lincoln.”

I’m not exactly sure how our mentoring relationship began, but being the extrovert that I am, I do recall seeking her out on several occasions when I had questions about the departmental culture, the unwritten rules about promotion and tenure, how to be a good citizen while maintaining a scholarly agenda, and diversity issues in the department and the college. I found her approachable, with plenty of southern charm—she’ll greet you in the hallway or by the mailbox with, “Hi honey! How are you doing? Did you bring your lunch?”

I learned a lot about her, the department, the college, and the university during our occasional lunches. We had honest and open conversations about diversity and social justice in higher education. While we often had different opinions, I discovered that she is a strong ally for diversity. She is a white woman who gets it. This may be in part because for many years, she was the only woman in the department.

When I point out disparaging behaviors and attitudes that are racist, sexist, or xenophobic, for example, she has never once said, “You are being too sensitive” or “This has nothing to do with race at all.” She listens keenly. She asks questions.
She reflects. She tries to understand my perspective. She is not dismissive. She is also honest and open. Sometimes I receive feedback that I do not agree with, but I know that it is from a voice of experience and a place of caring.

I was the only black faculty member in my department until recently. I’m reminded of this fact every day—in faculty meetings, in class, when I was asked a question that assumes that I speak on behalf of all black people or Jamaicans, and when I remain silent during battles about diversity issues that I choose not to engage in that day. Needless to say, trust is paramount to me. I felt that I could trust as well as learn from Yvonna. Since I was one of “the only’s” and untenured at the time, she became my voice at faculty meetings. I was ever mindful of the fact that as an untenured faculty member, my comments or gestures could be misunderstood, particularly when I spoke about issues concerning diversity and social justice. But when I did, Yvonna did not hesitate to support me.

Her support was crucial when I was preparing for promotion and tenure, a process which a colleague of mine likens to “academic hazing.” I felt like I was under a microscope the entire year. Waiting for the decisions at every level of the process is enough to put anyone on Prozac. While I was preparing my dossier, Yvonna and I had several faculty meetings over a cup of coffee. During these meetings she explained not only the process but how I should prepare my dossier. She carefully reviewed my vitae as well, and gave me feedback on my written statements regarding teaching, research, and service. She took the time to read my research carefully and to solicit external reviewers who would, she felt, provide a fair assessment of my scholarship.

Yvonna has been my advocate. She was instrumental in writing a letter supporting my nomination and later successful application for the College of Education’s “Outstanding New Faculty Award.” I was promoted and tenured to associate professor in 2003 and later promoted to assistant dean of faculties. When the dean of faculties and associate provost asked her, in my presence, what she thought of the decision to promote me to assistant dean, Yvonna told her emphatically that she needed someone with my skills and experience in the faculty development for that position. I felt empowered by her confidence and trust in me. Last year, she recommended me to the editor of the book Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research to write a chapter on professional development. I’m not sure I would have had the invitation if she hadn’t known about and valued my work in faculty development.

The mentoring relationship is reciprocal. I rely on her for advice, and I am humbled when she asks the same of me. I have come to value and expect Yvonna’s, “Here is what you need to do...” When I look at her, I’m challenged and motivated to be a productive scholar.

Yvonna’s Narrative: In some ways, I know how Christine has felt. This is my third appointment as a tenured or tenure-track faculty member in roughly 30 years. In two of the places where I worked, for some years I was the only woman—or the first and only woman—in the department. In my first department, I was told to ask the secretary for my mail. When I observed that all the other faculty had mailboxes and I didn’t, the department secretary told me that since the department head had vowed that I “would be gone in a year,” there was no need to redo the alphabetic label of mailboxes to fit me in. He had not wanted to hire a female, but the affirmative action officer at the institution had insisted that he diversify the department. So I became the only assistant professor who had to ask the department secretary for my mail. And picking it up after returning from a conference on the weekend was impossible; it remained locked in her desk until she returned.

Shortly after moving to another institution, I asked for the computer that the dean had promised me at the interview. The dean asked whether or not I “had that computer in writing.” I went back to my appointment letter, and sure enough, I did not. It was then that I noticed that no woman in our department had a computer on her desk, although every male professor did, whether he used it or not.

So while I can never understand the “hidden injuries” of race, I understand full well about the hidden injuries of gender. Double that, triple that, and I begin to see the nature and extent of the trouble that faces a faculty member who is a woman of color.

When Christine first arrived in our department, I discovered a rare and marvelous combination: dignity combined with a rollicking wit and humor. I immediately knew we were going to be friends. She paid me the compliment of asking that I read her papers and played out ideas for future writing projects with me. I was delighted to read her proposed pieces, because she writes clearly and directly.

Furthermore, she obeys an old dictum that one should write not only from research, but also from experience. Consequently, whenever she takes on a new task, she thinks about what she learned and whether or not it might be valuable for someone else faced with a similar task. If so, she writes about it.

Christine was thoughtful about the dynamics at play in the department and the university, and I was happy to share with her my own insights. In an institution that was formerly an all-male, largely military academy and that has transformed itself in the past 30 to 40 years into a co-ed land-grant, space-grant, and sea-grant institution, clearly there were conflicting forces at work.

Sorting them out with someone else turned out to be less a mentoring experience than one that was simply fun and intellectually intriguing. Christine was always open to conversations about the power implications of race, ethnicity, and gender in

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Mentoring... is a part of the institutional citizenship responsibilities of every senior faculty member, not a form of "overload."

Although these kinds of research are highly useful in the goal of increasing diversity in higher education, they are not always rewarded in the academy. New faculty members are often told to refrain from engaging in these non-mainstream forms of research until they have achieved tenure.

Such advice, while possibly well meaning, serves the simulationist agenda. To demand that a marginalized group conform to conventional research agendas set to create the impression that non-mainstream research is of no value, that diversity is respected only insofar as it conforms to majority interests, and that faculty of color are to some degree incapable of laying out research agendas of their own. Mentors can use their familiarity with and understanding of such research to influence decisions during faculty recruitment, performance assessments, promotion and tenure reviews, and department and college benchmarking.

3) Cross-race mentoring may yield an "assignment," but it is a relationship. Faculty members are sometimes given the task of mentoring members of their departments. Successful mentoring relationships are more than fulfilling an assignment but are built on mutual respect and action. Like any relationship that is not our comfort zone, there are periods of adjustment and growth during which individuals are learning about and from one another while valuing each other's differences. There is a higher probability of success, though, when there is a reciprocal level of trust, honesty, commitment to human development, and openness to providing and receiving constructive feedback.

Faculty of color are sensitive to being singled out and to assumptions being made about them based on their race or ethnic background. A cross-race mentoring relationship is built on the deficit model—you are a minority mentor because you are a minority; minorities come to academia with scholarly deficits—will an unwelcoming climate for faculty of color and ultimately unsuccessful mentoring relationship.

4) Cross-race mentoring requires work on both sides. It is a deep reflection on the meaning of the assumption of white seniority and "voice"; and the mental and college mores, traditions, and values. Peggy McIntosh, associate director of the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, describes privilege as resulting in invisible systems conferring dominance on your group. She goes on to say that "privilege is a favored state, whether or conferred by birth or luck. Some conditions work to one's advantage in certain groups. Such privilege simply confers a sense of being of one's race or gender."

For example, most majority white faculty can speak in a public setting without putting their race on trial, or they can take a job with an affirmative-action employer and not w
that their colleagues will think they got the job because of their race. Some white faculty do not think that racism affects them because they do not see whiteness as a racial identity or they have learned not to recognize their own privilege. But it is important for mentors and protégés in cross-race mentoring relationships to acknowledge that privilege.

Race and gender are not the only sources of advantage in academia. There are others related to age or seniority, ethnicity, physical ability, sexual orientation, nationality, and religion. Departments and colleges on a university campus have cultures, mores, and traditions of their own regarding who gets listened to at faculty meetings and social gatherings, as well as who is assigned which courses and committees, who mentors whom, who is nominated for awards, who is promoted, who advises students, and the like. It is important to be aware of these systems of privilege.

5) Cross-race mentoring requires assuming some responsibility for the mentored individual. For instance, when it is time for promotion and tenure, the mentor might need to volunteer for the promotion and tenure committee. Since the mentor may be the individual who best understands—and has read the largest portion of—the protégé’s research and understands who might make the best external reviewers, the mentor is clearly better able than others to “represent” the dossier to the department, the college, and the university community. The same is true for the third-year review process, which is now often mandated to provide junior scholars with feedback on their progress toward promotion and tenure.

6) Cross-race mentoring is a multifaceted activity, addressing needs expressed by the individual mentored but also those that the individual may not be aware of. This can lead to conflict when constructive feedback is not considered supportive by the protégé. Mentors and protégés come to the relationship with certain goals and expectations. During the course of the relationship, new needs may arise, and they may involve conflict. Conflict exists even if only one person acknowledges the struggle. It can occur when faculty of color receive critical responses to their research, teaching, or service activities. But if managed well, conflict can lead to growth of understanding between mentor and protégé.

For example, a protégé might feel on track with respect to his or her scholarly agenda but receive feedback from the mentor that suggests otherwise. While this feedback might be hard to accept, if there is trust and respect in the relationship, the protégé should come to realize that such honest feedback is important for professional development.

This trust can be nurtured if feedback for improvement occurs at several agreed-upon intervals throughout the year. It can take the form of reviewing manuscripts for publication, observing classroom teaching, reviewing progress toward promotion and/or tenure, collaborating on grant proposals, buffering the call to serve on college and university-wide diversity committees, and helping the new faculty member carve out a research agenda.

7) Cross-race mentoring may often mean expressing views that the scholar of color feels strongly about but may be afraid to raise in public meetings. Many senior white administrators and faculty do not understand the fear felt by junior faculty who may want to speak up about certain issues but fail to do so because they suspect that such forthrightness might be used against them in personnel decisions.

For faculty of color who are present in small numbers or who are the only one of their racial and/or ethnic group in a department or college, this fear is sometimes paralyzing. Mentors can assure protégés that they should speak up because they will be supported, as well as educate other faculty that this fear is a pervasive problem. Furthermore, mentors can be strong allies for diversity and social justice when they publicly denounce any behaviors that have a paralyzing effect.

8) Cross-race mentoring involves sharing opportunities for professional development and promotion, as well as pointing out landmines in the academic landscape. The academy can be a very alien place for any new faculty member, but it is even more so when one looks around and sees few people like oneself represented in a variety of academic ranks and positions. With few role models, faculty of color often cannot determine how and where to seek opportunities for advancement or whom to trust for advice.

Cross-race mentoring provides a unique opportunity for mentors and protégés 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 advocate “growing your own” as a strategy for diversifying the faculty ranks; this strategy also works for the administrative ranks.
9) Cross-race mentoring is not academic cloning. It is the giving of self, expertise, and experience to help others achieve their goals. Many faculty want to see “more people like us” in the academy, whether the similarity is in how we see the world around us, the type of research we pursue, how we came to be academics, what it took for us to be successful, or what we view as normative and good.

But scholars of color do not wish to be white scholars. Rather, they desire to be themselves and to be valued for who they are and how they can enlarge the academy’s vision by virtue of their different voices, research themes, and perspectives. It is the goals of the individual scholar that are important; it is the role of the mentor to assist in achieving those goals.

Faculty of color often experience what W.A. Smith calls “racial battle fatigue” (see Resources) resulting from experiences related to individual, cultural, and institutional oppression. In a cross-race mentoring relationship, these experiences have to be taken into account when working to guide someone through the academic ranks.

10) Finally, cross-race mentoring requires the majority faculty member to become sensitive to issues that might have seemed unimportant in the past. Faculty of color may serve the mentor, as well as the larger faculty group, as “tuning forks.” That is, issues that seemed less than critical to a majority faculty member make take on new significance when seen through the eyes of faculty of color. Discussions regarding new hires, conversations about emerging lines of research, the framing of announcements for open positions—all may be freighted in ways previously not considered.

Majority mentors can learn much about the experiences of faculty of color if they routinely debrief their protégés about recent discussions. Faculty of color who trust their mentors will tell them what was good about a discussion and what they found disadvantaging. Such debriefing sessions serve to educate mentors in subtleties of which they might be unaware. Learning on both sides is possible, and indeed necessary, if the mentoring is to be effective. Many white mentors do not possess the requisite knowledge, understanding or skills to mentor without some learning curve. Asking the protégé for help is one meaningful way to enter that curve.

Cross-race mentoring for diversity and faculty development is challenging for mentor and protégé alike. Individuals bring to the mentoring process a complex set of experiences, mental models, social and cultural identities, expertise, goals, expectations, values, and beliefs, all of which make for potential areas of conflict. But if managed well, these differences can lead to rich learning. Higher education cannot diversify the faculty ranks without paying close attention to those who are sitting on the margins of our institutions. We need deeper dialogues in order to learn, grow, and change as we extend a warm welcoming hand to individuals who aspire to join the professorial ranks.

Suggested Readings

- Cafarella, R.S., Psychosocial Development of Women: Linkages of Teaching and Leadership in Adult Education. Information Series No. 350, Columbus, OH: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Center on Education and Training for Employment, The Ohio State University. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 354 386).
- Smith, W.A., A Long Way to Go: Conversations About Race by African American Faculty and Graduate Students in Higher Education, a paper presented at the 28th annual conference of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE), Portland, Oregon, 2003.
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A game based on pivotal moments of the past is gaining popularity as an effective technique for breaking through the common problem of classroom silence. Students develop skills, confidence, and poise as they discover a new enthusiasm for debate and meaningful conversation.

by Mark C. Carnes

12/The “People’s University”
Our (New) Public Libraries as Sites for Lifelong Learning
Taking a page out of the new popularity of American commercial bookstores that welcome people as much as resources, two public libraries on opposite sides of the country offer universities and colleges a model for how to design services that meet the ongoing literacy needs of patrons at all stages of life.

by Kathleen Blake Yancey

20/21st Century Learning and Information Literacy
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by Patricia Senn Breivik

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by Daniel Bernstein, Michael Steven Marx, and Harvey Bender

44/Cross-Race Faculty Mentoring
While it is often assumed that mentoring is most effective when the faculty members are of the same race or gender, a cross-race mentor and protégé share the valuable lessons they learned about how to establish and maintain a warm, constructive cross-race mentoring relationship.

by Christine A. Stanley and Yvonna S. Lincoln

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by Margaret A. Miller

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