

Faculty Mentoring in the Community College Setting

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LEARNING ABSTRACTS

by Katina Gothard

Even though a single definition of mentoring does not exist in literature, we all intuitively know what it is. As educators, we engage in the act of mentoring, at least informally, every day, whether with peers or students. So the question is: Do the benefits outweigh the cost of the development and implementation of a formal mentoring program?

Informal programs have little to no formal structure, no guarantee of alignment with institutional goals, no development or implementation of an evaluation system for the program, and little or no guidance given to the mentors or mentees regarding activities to complete or goals to achieve (Murray, 2001; Murray, 2006). In stark contrast, the development of a formal mentoring program is based on the needs of the organization, is aligned with institutional goals, has evaluation embedded throughout for continuous quality improvement, and is well coordinated (Murray, 2001; Murray, 2006). Such a program enhances the performance of the college and its people by

- increasing the recruitment of new faculty and retention of existing faculty;
- improving the effectiveness of the overall faculty development program by embedding activities into the mentoring program that focus on the transfer of learning from concurrently running faculty performance improvement interventions;
- improving communication between faculty members and the various academic disciplines through the mentor-mentee relationships that are developed;
- aiding faculty supervisors with the faculty performance appraisal process by providing opportunities for formative evaluation of the new faculty members and the ability to document the growth of the faculty members throughout the course of an academic year;
- supporting the tenure track application process by including activities in the program that assist mentees in the development of their tenure application packages; and
- helping new faculty members to more quickly acclimate to the college culture.

Additionally, mentees may experience increased self-confidence and job satisfaction, better understand the importance of and how to build professional relationships, and learn how to better use the supports in place within the organization by being provided the information and resources necessary to perform all required job duties. Mentors may experience a sense of personal satisfaction due to the opportunity to share their experiences (Allan, 2007; Ehrich, Hansford, and Tennent, 2004; Gothard, 2009; Kram, 1988).

Rationale for the Program

During interviews conducted in January and February 2008, newer faculty members shared that they were experiencing high levels of on-the-job stress and wanted more support in learning the college's structure, processes, and policies. When asked what concerns they had regarding new faculty performance, the campus provosts, academic deans, and department chairpersons expressed the desire that more support be provided to help the faculty (a) prepare for the first day of class, (b) learn about college procedures and processes, and (c) develop professional relationships with other faculty and staff members across the institution. Additionally, due to program growth and faculty retirements, 20 to 25 new full-time faculty members were hired each of the last two years. Therefore, the college needed a performance intervention in place to help incoming faculty quickly acclimate to the institutional culture and to minimize any negative impact that faculty inexperience and turnover had on institutional processes and services (Gothard, 2009).

Development and Implementation

To address these issues and alleviate the stress felt by new faculty members during their first term and up through attainment of tenure, a new faculty mentoring program was proposed. A needs assessment using Thomas Gilbert's (2007) BEM performance model was conducted to further investigate the performance issues experienced by the new faculty members. During the needs assessment, performance issues were identified and categorized using the performance model, causes for each were uncovered, and appropriate interventions were identified. The needs assessment verified that a formal new faculty mentoring program would best address the performance gaps, and the New Faculty Mentoring Program was then designed based on a review of the literature and current programs at colleges and universities in the United States. To evaluate the effectiveness of the program, program outcomes were developed at the institutional, process, and performer levels. The first implementation of the program began during the fall 2008 academic term (Gothard, 2009).

A faculty mentoring guidebook was developed and a copy provided to each mentor and new faculty member to help facilitate the mentorships. Included in the guidebook were descriptions of the program's purpose, mentor responsibilities, and mentoring guidelines. Also included were a mentor-mentee agreement form and a weekly activity checklist. The guidebooks were provided at the mentoring orientation held during the new faculty members' first week of employment.

Evaluation Strategies

The CIPP Model, first proposed by Daniel Stufflebeam (1983) in the 1960s, includes evaluation across four phases of any program: (a) Context, to determine the extent to which the needs of stakeholders were correctly identified and met; (b) Input, to evaluate the needs assessment and program design phases; (c) Process, to evaluate the implementation phase of a program; and (d) Product, to judge the overall quality and success of a program. The focus on all phases, from program conception through program implementation and impact, is why the CIPP Model was ultimately selected as the evaluation framework for the New Faculty Mentoring Program (Gothard, 2009). (See <http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/pubs/CIPP-ModelOregon10-03.pdf> for a CIPP checklist that may be used as a guide through the evaluation process.)

Data was collected from the program's design team members, mentors, and mentees by online questionnaires and follow-up interviews. Extant data was collected from internal progress and evaluation reports, strategic planning documents, design team meeting minutes, and internal emails between the program administrator and stakeholder groups in order to triangulate findings.

Effectiveness of the Program

The goals of evaluating the program were to identify ways to improve program quality and to identify ways in which participation in the program may have enhanced or impeded faculty performance.

Context Evaluation. Institutional, faculty supervisor, and new faculty needs were identified by interviewing campus provosts, academic deans, and department chairpersons and by reviewing the evaluations of other new faculty development experiences. These needs guided the development of outcomes at the institutional, process, and performer levels for the mentoring program.

Area for improvement: The program outcomes should be reviewed annually to ensure stakeholder needs are adequately addressed.

Input Evaluation. The design team based the program design on the findings of a thorough review of both the literature and current mentoring programs at various colleges and universities. A

performance model was used to guide each phase of the needs assessment, including performance, gap, and cause analyses. Confirmation that the program design met the needs of the stakeholders was obtained from the chief learning officer (CLO) and campus provosts before moving into the development phase.

Area for improvement: The needs assessment should be conducted annually to identify any changes to the performance gaps, and new faculty should participate in the needs assessment to confirm their needs are correctly identified and addressed by the design of the program. Additionally, incentives are needed to increase mentor participation in the mentoring program orientation and support meetings, both identified in mentoring research as core components of successful programs (Gothard, 2009).

Process Evaluation. To determine the extent to which the program was implemented as intended, communication and formative evaluation were assessed. The program administrator regularly emailed mentors, new faculty, and campus provosts and the CLO with information relevant to each group. Design team members were copied in all communications to enable them to track implementation and provide direction to the administrator where needed. Additionally, the administrator facilitated monthly support meetings for the new faculty and a midterm support meeting for the mentors. Feedback was solicited from all involved in every email and at every meeting. Midterm and end-of-term online questionnaires, customized for mentors and new faculty members, were also used to collect feedback. Issues were addressed as quickly as possible.

Area for improvement: Program management and evaluation plans should be developed and include timelines and task descriptions to aid the program administrator with tasks such as matching mentors and new faculty, scheduling meetings, communicating with stakeholders, and assessing the program. Such plans will minimize any negative impact to the program as the administrator and design team personnel change, and will ensure evaluation results are available for continuous quality improvement (Gothard, 2009).

Product Evaluation. New faculty members and their mentors experienced positive benefits from outset of the program. New faculty members reported receiving help in the development of performance goals and associated action plans for achieving said goals, and identified relationship-building with one another and their mentors. Mentors reported feelings of personal satisfaction and learning new instructional techniques from their mentees. The one negative impact of participation in the program reported by both mentors and mentees was that involvement in the mentoring program interfered with the time needed to complete other work activities.

Area for improvement: Mentors and new faculty members recommended several improvements for the faculty mentoring guidebook, including (a) more material to help with the development and implementation of faculty members' professional goals; (b) a quick fact sheet for each campus that includes contact information for various departments, locations of copier machines, and numbers to call for technical help with classroom equipment; and (c) more suggested mentor/new faculty activities. Additionally, to better plan for costs, sustainability, and accountability for the program, the following were recommended: (a) securing a budget for the program; (b) converting the program design team to a two-year rotating steering committee; and (c) incorporating the program into the faculty hiring process at the college (Gothard, 2009).

Lessons Learned

Sufficient time is needed to make adjustments to a mentoring program to better meet the needs of stakeholders, integrate the program with other faculty development experiences, and conduct the evaluation (Murray, 2001; Stromei, 2001). Therefore, while mentoring can have an immediate impact on the mentors and mentees, institutional impact may not be seen for approximately three years (Murray, 2001; Stromei, 2001). In our case, no data was available at the time of this article to determine the impact of the program for the provosts or the institution. The findings

summarized here were based on data collected after the first term of program implementation. Measures for process and institutional level program outcomes, such as improving the annual performance review process and increasing faculty retention, are currently under development and will be evaluated over the next three years.

The positive impact of a mentoring program is directly related to the investment in the front-end work: literature review, needs assessment, design, and development. Scheduling ample time for these phases will help ensure that (a) the correct faculty performance issues are identified and analyzed; (b) the core components needed for a successful mentoring program are identified and accounted for in the program design; and (c) the most appropriate activities are developed for inclusion in the mentoring program. While information on program evaluation is currently limited, a plethora of resources are available to guide you through the process of program development. We found Murray (2001) especially helpful. Also, standardized tools are available that measure the psychosocial effects, such as increased personal and job satisfaction, on participants. See Stromei (2001) for a description of the tool she developed.

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