

Cultivating New Leaders: Revitalizing a Library Faculty Mentor Program

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Samantha Godbey, Education Librarian, University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Erin Rinto, Undergraduate Learning Librarian, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Abstract

Beginning in the spring of 2013, members of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Library Faculty Professional Development Committee undertook the project of evaluating and improving a faculty mentor program, motivated by the recent hiring of a large number of new faculty librarians. The mentor program would be redesigned to better meet the needs of this large group. In this discussion session, the facilitators used the process they underwent in planning, implementing, and evaluating a redesigned mentor program as a framework for discussion among attendees. Emphasis was placed on the potential of a mentor program to nurture different kinds of leaders. Session participants discussed opportunities and goals for a mentoring program within their own institutions and identified potential challenges they might face. Through this discussion session, participants identified specific strategies for use in a formal or informal mentoring program in their own libraries.

Discussion

Introduction

Relationship-building with a mentor is a common strategy for cultivating strengths and optimizing leadership opportunities for new university faculty. At the University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV) Libraries, new faculty hires are offered a mentor within the Libraries. The library mentor program is coordinated by a faculty committee, the UNLV Library Faculty Professional Development Committee, of which the presenters are co-chairs. In previous years, the internal mentor program had fallen out of use, but an influx of new librarians in 2012 and 2013 motivated the committee to discuss ways to revitalize the program. In 2012, there were two new faculty librarians; in 2013, there were ten. These new hires came to the Libraries with varying levels of experience, with people at different stages of their careers and lives. The committee was challenged to develop a program that could accommodate a large number of mentees while also supporting a wide range of needs and interests. Discussions about potential changes began within the committee in spring of 2013, program materials were updated based on findings from the academic literature, and the first new cohort of mentors and mentees was established in December 2013. The committee decided to keep the existing format of voluntary participation and one-to-one mentor-mentee pairs. The current group consists of nine pairs.

Description

In this session, the presenters used the process they underwent in planning, implementing, and evaluating the UNLV mentor program as a framework for discussion. The two presenters are the co-chairs of the mentor program as well as participants in the program. Both are new-career librarians who began working at the UNLV Libraries in 2012 and were able to share their perspectives as mentees. When appropriate, relevant examples from the academic

literature were provided to participants in the discussion session, but the emphasis of the session was on giving attendees the opportunity to discuss how a mentor program might best be implemented or revised at their own institutions.

For each section of the discussion, the session facilitators shared their own experience at the UNLV Libraries then provided discussion prompts for participants. Participants discussed in small groups and recorded main discussion points on large sticky notes, which were posted on the meeting room walls. All groups re-joined for a large group discussion of main points on each topic before proceeding.

To frame the entire discussion session in the context of leadership, the discussion began with an examination of sample profiles of participants in a mentor program. Profiles included librarians at different stages in their careers, from professional backgrounds other than library science, and from different locations around the country. Session participants were given the prompt: *With those around you, discuss the needs a mentor program could/should address. What needs do these individuals have? How could a mentor program meet these needs?* These profiles were used as a reminder that when developing or adjusting a mentor program, it is easy to focus on logistics, but we must remember that the focus of the mentor program must always be the individuals who are being supported.

The discussion session then proceeded to discussing the planning stage of implementing a mentor program. The presenters shared details of their experience planning the changes to the UNLV program. Sessions participants were then given the prompt: *At your library, what are the main considerations when planning a mentor program? Possible considerations: What is the purpose of the program? Who should be involved?*

Next, the discussion turned to discussion of program implementation. The presenters shared examples from the literature and details of their own experience implementing the latest version of the UNLV program. Sessions participants were then given the prompt: *At your library, what are the main considerations when implementing a mentor program? Possible considerations: What model of mentorship will you use? Is there an approval process? How structured will the program be?*

The discussion concluded with an exploration of the possibilities for evaluating a mentor program. Sessions participants were given the prompt: *At your library, what are the main considerations when evaluating a mentor program? Possible considerations: What will you evaluate? When will you evaluate? What will you do with the results?*

Key Points

Planning

At UNLV, the planning stage of this process was influenced by the presence of an existing mentor program with program documents that had initially been approved by the library faculty. Planning at UNLV began with an examination of the existing program documents and the revision of the questionnaire used to match mentors and mentees (Appendix 1). The previous version of the questionnaire emphasized the tenure review process, with mentoring topics aligned with job performance, scholarship, and service. The committee decided to expand the questionnaire to include the transition to living in Las Vegas, as this is a particular challenge for many of the library's new hires, regardless of career stage. The committee also discussed who should be included in the program as mentees (only faculty? only *new* faculty?) and as mentors (only tenured faculty? administrators?). Additionally, the committee discussed how structured or flexible to make the program, regarding scheduled activities and meetings.

The discussion session participants cited the following as considerations in planning a mentor program at their own institutions:

- How long to mentor someone - one year, through tenure, etc.
- Need to decide what model of mentoring to follow - group, one-on-one, etc.
- Wanting to enable people to be successful
- Importance of managing expectations; start small
- Establishing a time frame for the planning process
- Organizational climate
- Mentor training
- Defining what makes a successful faculty librarian
- Defining expectations for mentors and mentees
- Deciding which levels of people within the organization will be included - anyone, new librarians, middle management, etc.
- How best to match mentors to mentees
- Potential shortage of mentors
- Goal of enhancing career satisfaction for participants

Implementation

Next, the presenters outlined the implementation of the mentoring program at UNLV. The UNLV program is a voluntary, one-on-one mentorship program, though the literature gives several alternate models of mentoring, including group mentoring, peer mentoring, and multiple mentors for each mentee (Appendix 2). As discussed previously, the committee that coordinates the library mentor program chose to maintain the existing structure of the mentor program, revising the questionnaires for participants to encompass topics beyond tenure. In order to not make too many substantial changes at once, the committee also decided to continue with the current practice of including faculty librarians only. Rather than making the program more structured, the committee would keep it flexible and provide a list of suggested activities for participants (Appendix 3).

Because the mentoring program at UNLV is coordinated by a faculty committee, the first step was to bring the revised documents to the Library Faculty for approval by vote before the new questionnaires could be used. This “red tape” was one aspect the committee had not anticipated when they first started the revision process in the spring of 2013; the committee had originally planned to match pairs before the start of the fall semester. Instead, the revised documents were approved in October 2013, and the committee was able to begin recruiting participants and matching pairs at that point.

Aside from the need for official approval of the revised documents, a second challenge the committee faced was difficulty in recruiting mentors. Late in the fall of 2013, the committee chairs distributed questionnaires to both mentees and mentors which asked what areas of job, scholarship, service, professional development, or transition to Las Vegas faculty wanted mentorship in, or, for mentors, to select areas in which they were willing to mentor someone (Appendix 1). Although all of the recent hires submitted mentee forms, it was more challenging to solicit enough faculty to serve as mentors: some tenured librarians were uncomfortable with being an official “mentor” and the responsibilities they felt it entailed, while others felt unsure they were qualified to be a mentor. The program coordinators had greater success when mentees requested a specific person as a mentor in their questionnaires. Coordinators were then able to tell a potential mentor that they had been named as a desired mentor, thereby alleviating some of

the deterrents to participation. In addition, coordinators approached the library's associate dean for a list of faculty members who might be strong mentors. These faculty members were approached individually regarding participation. Between these two sources of mentors, the committee was able to match all mentor program participants with an appropriate senior faculty member.

During the discussion session, participants identified the following as considerations for implementing a mentor program at their own institutions:

- What models they felt would be most effective - peer-to-peer mentoring, group mentoring, a many-to-one model combined with a one-to-one model
- Importance of knowing which model is best for your institution
- How to recruit and retain mentors - e.g., offer credit for being a mentor, either as professional development funds or as an activity that can be claimed on tenure and promotion documents
- How to handle pairs that are not working out
- Whether to make the program required or voluntary - importance of letting people opt out
- Considering inclusion of non-faculty library staff, or faculty members outside of the library, if appropriate

Evaluation

Lastly, the presenters explained their approach to evaluation of the UNLV mentor program. Due to the delayed implementation of the revised program, the first cohort of mentees had only been in place for approximately five months at the time of this discussion session. The presenters shared tentative plans at UNLV to conduct an initial evaluation of the program in June, at the midpoint of the first year of the revised program. The evaluation will consist of a survey as well as a focus group discussion among mentees. The presenters clarified that for their group, the intention was to evaluate the program itself rather than the mentor program participants.

During the subsequent discussion, discussion session participants explored the following potential considerations and options for evaluating a mentor program at their own institutions:

- The importance of connecting evaluation to program goals
- The difficulty of evaluating and/or establishing program goals when a program is already in progress
- The importance of evaluation in articulating the value of the mentor program to the library or institution
- Deciding on what method of evaluation to use - surveys, focus groups, one-on-one interviews
- Who will conduct evaluation - committee, library dean/director, etc.
- Who will be present - e.g., whether to separate mentors and mentees for authentic feedback

Appendix 1: Mentee Questionnaire

Questionnaire for Faculty Mentoring Program (Mentees)

Please fill out the form below indicating your interests in ranked order so that we can match you up with an appropriate person as a mentor.

Name: _____

1. Which division/department are you in? _____

2. Would you prefer a mentor in your division/department?

yes

no

no preference

3. Please rank the categories you want guidance on (1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc.). Also, please check off the subcategories in which you have a particular interest in and would like to address with your mentor.

___ Scholarship

Presentations

Submitting proposals

Research methods

Writing

Generating ideas

Grant writing

Other (please specify) _____

___ Professional Development

Leadership Skills

Presentation Skills

Technology Skills

Networking Skills

Grant Writing

Other Skills (please specify) _____

___ Service

- Committee assignments (local, regional, and national)
- Editorial board
- Professional association involvement
- Campus involvement (Faculty Senate, campus organizations and committees)
- Other (please specify) _____

___ Mid-Tenure/Tenure Process and Documentation – writing and reviewing

___ Access to campus and professional networks

- Introduction to chairs of various campus or professional associations committees.
- Identify and be introduced to faculty with similar research interests within UNLV and other institutions.

___ Adjusting to Las Vegas

- Restaurants
- Local attractions
- Outdoor activities
- Other _____

___ Other (please specify):

4. List your research interests:

5. If you have a particular person in mind, please provide his/her name: _____

Appendix 2: From the Literature--Examples of Mentor Program Models

Bosch, E. K., Ramachandran, H., Luévano, S., & Wakiji, E. (2010). The Resource Team Model: An Innovative Mentoring Program for Academic Librarians. *New Review of Academic Librarianship*, 16(1), 57-74.

This article discusses the Resource Team Model for a mentoring program at California State University Long Beach. Three mentors with varying areas of expertise all work with one tenure track faculty member for 6 months. This acclimates the new librarian to all areas of the organization and introduces them to multiple tenured faculty members. The idea behind this model is that it is a shorter time commitment and the mentors can divide the work between them; it also gives the new faculty member a team of support and maximizes their chances of being successful, all while securing the investment of their hire.

Farmer, D., Stockham, M., & Trussell, A. (2009). Revitalizing a Mentoring Program for Academic Librarians. *College & Research Libraries*, 70(1), 8-24.

This article describes the restructuring of a previously existing mentoring program at Kansas State University Libraries; emphasis was not only promotion and tenure but all areas of professional development. The program started with volunteer mentors that were matched with one or two untenured faculty, and in subsequent years fluctuated between pairs and group mentoring depending on the number of new hires. It also discusses a program evaluation survey and results.

Kuyper-Rushing, L. (2001). Formal Mentoring Program in a University Library: Components of a Successful Experiment. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 27(6), 440-46.

This article discusses the mentoring program at Louisiana State University Libraries, which was required for all tenure-track librarians and included a series of mandatory meetings throughout the year. One interesting component of this program is the use of a period of peer-to-peer mentoring for the first few months of employment so that new faculty have someone to answer their questions and help them get to know tenured faculty and select a mentor. The article also discusses the challenges with introducing a new mentoring program to the library faculty and the kinds of questions and concerns that might arise.

Level, A. V. & Mach, M. (2005) Peer Mentoring: One Institution's Approach to Mentoring Academic Librarians. *Library Management*, 26(6/7), 301 - 310.

This article describes a peer-mentoring model used at Colorado State. A growing number of tenure-track faculty and a limited number of tenured mentors had led to a model where one mentor was responsible for too many mentees. The revised program came from a monthly meeting of the tenure-track faculty where they worked together to come up with topics for discussion, such as requirements for tenure, the IRB process, national service opportunities, ideas for collaborating, etc. The group brought in tenured faculty to speak on these topics and share their expertise with the group and eliminate an "us-vs-them" mentality. After one year of monthly meetings, the group decided that quarterly meetings would be sufficient.

Van Avery, A. R. (1992). Facing Personal Evaluation: A Mentoring Program Supports Professional Staff Undergoing Tenure Review. *Reference Librarian* 17(38), 121-31.

This article describes two models for mentoring at the University Library of the State University of New York at Albany: a paired faculty program, which aimed at supporting new, more rigorous promotion and tenure standards, and a group mentoring program for library professional staff.

Appendix 3: Suggested Activities

Suggested Activities for UNLV Library Faculty Mentor/Mentee Pairs:

- Review Mentee questionnaire together to identify priorities for meetings
- Go to lunch
- Go for a walk
- Orient to campus as needed
- Orient to town, including location of businesses, shopping, schools, clubs/organizations, parks, recreation, etc.
- Provide introduction/overview of Library and University governance and committees
- Discuss local/regional meetings/conferences/workshops that might be of interest
- Discuss community/social activities/events that may be of interest
- Assistance or guidance with joining a committee/roundtable/ section
- Discuss how to identify venues for publication/presentation
- Assistance with portfolio/vita - share vitae with each other
- Assistance with research, writing and publishing (e.g. team up on a research project together if appropriate)
- Assistance with presentations (e.g., review draft proposals, rehearse presentation, share examples of work with one another)
- Assistance in selection of additional courses, degree-work, etc.
- Read and discuss articles on mentoring

Adapted from Farmer, Stockham & Trussell (2009) and
<http://selaonline.org/membership/mentoring.htm>

Suggested Articles for Further Reading:

- Level, A. V. & Mach, M. (2005). Peer mentoring: One institution's approach to mentoring academic librarians. *Library Management*, 26(6/7), 301 – 310.
- Bosch, E. K., Ramachandran, H., Luévano, S., & Wakiji, E. (2010). The resource team model: An innovative mentoring program for academic librarians. *New Review of Academic Librarianship*, 16(1), 57-74. doi:10.1080/13614530903584305
- Farmer, D., Stockham, M., & Trussell, A. (2009). Revitalizing a Mentoring Program for Academic Librarians. *College & Research Libraries*, 70(1), 8-24.
- Golian-Lui, L. M. (2003). Fostering Librarian Leadership through Mentoring. *Adult Learning*, 14(1): 26.
- Luyper-Rushing, L. (2001). Formal mentoring program in a university library: Components of a successful experiment. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 27(6), 440-46.