TITLE: Evaluating a First Year Faculty-to-Faculty Mentoring Program

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**Abstract**

Studies indicate that the characteristics of good mentoring programs share four essential qualities: 1) a clear purpose with goals and strategies; 2) that protégés and mentors are prepared for their roles; 3) that regular meetings are encouraged to nurture interaction and; 4) that there is a method for evaluating the effectiveness of the program. This paper examines the efficacy of a first year, clinical faculty-to-faculty mentoring program at the University of Southern California in the Marshall School of Business, Center for Management Communication where recent department hires, adjunct faculty and select senior faculty participated. The purpose of this report is to share what was learned over the past year and to critically review the impact and effectiveness this program has had among senior clinical faculty and adjunct faculty to move to the second year iteration. Furthermore, the discussion addresses fundamental issues concerning program growth, developmental relationships, faculty development and how to foster continued program interest and long-term relationships. The article proposes a methodology or evaluation model for mentoring program development generated from after-meeting questionnaires and comments gathered during meetings with specific analysis on three, meeting models aimed at steadily improving relationships to advance the channels of communication. Recommendations are offered to those in early stages of faculty mentoring programs; for those looking for new thoughts to move their program to new levels; and for those establishing a faculty-to-faculty mentoring program. The relevant information for this paper comes from open literature on the topic of mentoring, case studies and meeting discussions.

USC’s Marshall School of Business launched its mentoring program in 2009 and as a result, received university recognition with a Mellon Award because the program clearly promoted a mentoring culture on many levels. When the 2011 fall semester included a clinical faculty mentoring program that would enable new clinical faculty to successfully transition into Marshall, it became clear that Marshall’s Committee on Mentoring was in need of two separate faculty committees—the Committee on Tenure Faculty and the Committee on Clinical Faculty—to oversee tenure and clinical program needs. Each program is complicated by issues and goal complexities of faculty working in their respective programs.

In connecting the many mentoring programs that now exist in the academic landscape, it is evident that wide spread mentoring programs show a growing mentoring culture. Research indicates that available information is multi-disciplined and suggests a burgeoning mentoring community that continues to grow—resources are more widely accessible and timely; they invite pedagogical discussions that encourage diverse teacher development class models going beyond teacher-to-teaching coaching practices, teacher to student interaction, student to student coaching, Internet mentoring and project mentoring. Yearly conferences are testament to the many professionals who want to share their experiences in an extensive 21st century mentoring community and the amount of registrants who apply to workshops and sessions. Educator and educational consultant, Barbara Gottesman (2009) comments,

The idea that teaching in universities can be improved is gaining widespread acceptance among professors and instructors. The tradition that teachers in higher education provide instruction in their disciplines without being concerned about teaching techniques is rapidly becoming passé. The argument that professors cannot teach effectively because they have taken no education methods courses is specious. University professors and instructors today are seeking other ways to improve teaching in order to increase student learning. [Mentoring] is a process by which university professors and instructors can improve their teaching techniques by observing, giving feedback, and coaching each other. (3-4)

University mentoring programs have split into two tracks: Tenure faculty who are focused on research and grant writing in the pursuit of tenure promotion so they get the kind of mentoring needed in their pursuit. And clinical faculty who concentrate on encouraging protégés to develop best teaching practices. In either case, both the mentor and protégé benefit in measureable ways.

This paper explains how the clinical faculty mentoring program evolved at the Center for Management Communication in the Marshall School of Business at the University of Southern California, moves to describe the program’s first year outcomes and ends by discussing future goals.

**Purposeful Goals and Strategies**

The Center for Management Communication (CMC) established a faculty-to-faculty Peer Observation Program (POP) in 2009 with two primary goals. A 2009 email to faculty outlined the process and outcomes:

1. To align teaching objectives with teaching outcomes in the classroom and provide an enriching learning experience for students. The program seeks to ask faculty if each instructor is applying the most effective teaching methods and materials to service those goals.
2. To ensure that class content and professionalism enriches and fits within the context of the overall mission of Marshall and USC.
3. **Process**: Prior to class visits, partners should discuss the general subject matter, teaching objectives, activity plans, lessons, etc. for the scheduled observed lecture. Partners should also discuss previous strategies, potential concerns, and any other issues the faculty member want to address, or have determined in their initial communication. (Philadelphia, M., Little, S., Hubbard, R.S., Owens, J.)

**Outcomes**: Faculty identified that time constraints and scheduling difficulties were the biggest impediments in committing to the POP program where 2-3 faculty were assigned to a peer. Teaching schedules, committee work, personal commitments, class preparation and student meetings impacted success in the program’s goals. Although a written process and timeline for achieving visits and evaluations were available, only a few faculty partners managed to complete evaluations, meet with colleagues and help push the program forward. Thus, by the spring of 2010, the POP program was languishing. However, the program did set the stage for another iteration.

In 2011 the issue of mentoring once again came to the forefront through a September 7, 2011 email from Dr. John Matsusaka, Vice Dean for Faculty and Academic Affairs that not only provided a list of assigned mentor-mentee pairings for the 2011-2012 academic year but included the important announcement of the expansion of the mentoring program to include clinical faculty with the appointment of a chair to head Marshall’s Committee on Clinical Faculty. The goal clearly addressed the point that clinical faculty ought to be included in a mentoring program to help new professors transition into Marshall. The Marshall School of Business Faculty Manual (2011) provides guidance for achieving best mentoring practices and states what a mentoring program ought to accomplish in the long run, “to expand our intellectual community, promote relationships between senior and junior faculty members that help junior faculty members develop as scholars and progress towards promotion, and expand the role of senior faculty in the critical process of faulty development.” And, this missive opened up the complexities of establishing a clinical faculty mentoring program.

**Mentor and Protégé Preparation**

The early Peer Observation Program served as a foundation for designing a structured mentoring program for new full-time faculty hires and adjunct faculty who would benefit from alliances with seasoned educators in the department. Those who were teaching new classes were paired with seasoned instructors who would share their experiences and guide them to a level of comfort and competence in teaching new courses and at a new location. A program coordinator was appointed to develop the program and the program launched with a pre-fall 2012 semester informal lunch meeting to introduce adjunct faculty to librarians, faculty coordinators who headed core courses and department office coordinators who were instrumental in explaining specific services and computer programs essential to teaching performance. For the most part, most mentors had met their protégés during early summer to begin the process of reaching out. The meeting mood was engaging, welcoming and cut the anxiety that many new faculty were experiencing before their teaching assignments were to begin. The point was to begin in a positive manner by introducing protégés to key staff people so they might begin to negotiate the university in a manner to avoid isolation. Each was encouraged to ask questions so conversations might easily evolve. While the initial meeting was limited to two hours, clearly it could have been extended to a half day. This first meeting was important for setting the groundwork in building a mentoring community: Adjunct faculty witnessed the easy-going attitudes of those who would be essential to showing how to carry out non-academic duties. This was a first mentoring step.

**Meetings that Encourage and Nurture Interaction**

The first full faculty meeting of the semester allowed for the opportunity to introduce new adjunct faculty to full-time department faculty. Many adjunct faculty members commented that they felt welcomed and included in the department. Since almost all adjunct faculty members were assigned teaching duties in the upper-division business writing program there was a strong connection between the protégés.

During the first semester, two brown bag mentoring meetings were scheduled and both mentors and protégés were encouraged to attend. Each attendee was supplied with an agenda handout that clearly stated the meeting’s purpose and defined the work to be accomplished with stated outcomes. The first meeting stated that CMC’s mentoring program is a four-component evolving model:

▪ New faculty are assigned to a qualified mentor

▪ Protégé/mentor pairs are required to have regular developmental meetings

▪ Protégés and mentors must observe the other’s classes

▪ Protégés and mentees participate in group dialogue

The meeting served to link the pre-semester meeting with what had ensued between that time and the first brown bag meeting. Sharing meals together functioned as a way to cement the community spirit that is always being encouraged. The meeting involved group work that centered on mentor and protégé discussion so each group had an opportunity to speak to all members working in the program. Room arrangement was carefully planned so mentors and protégés faced one another. This was advantageous for later discussion.

During the breakout discussion session, both groups were encouraged to discuss Zellers, Howard, and Barcis’ statement (2008) that, “the best mentors they studied served as sponsors or coaches to guide, protect, teach, challenge, open doors, and provide feedback.” This statement clearly allowed both groups to interpret how it applied to them and what the statement meant. Protégés were clearly affected by the idea that mentors were in a position to protect them and mentors began to see the profound relationship that mentoring encouraged.

Towards the conclusion of the first meeting, program development suggestions were encouraged. Thoughts like spending time together while grading, program coordinator visits between each mentor/mentee pair and role-specific mentoring—when a mentor helps a protégé with a project—proposal writing and writing teaching statements became topics of interest. The coordinator provided these thoughts with the purpose of encouraging socialization in the program. Socialization has always been at the forefront of the program and is highly prized.

**First semester meeting**. The first 2012 fall semester meeting provided a model for ensuing meetings and emphasized mentoring goals couched in Martin and Robinson’s article (2011), “Why you should get on board the mentor ship.” Emphasis in the article places value on the fact that mentoring programs have important outcomes on both mentors and protégés; however, many other readings affected the design and implementation of meetings. Additional readings are listed in the reference page of this document. It’s important to add that much research accompanies every mentoring meeting and that all attending faculty leave with an article to read.

**Second semester meeting**. The second 2012 fall semester meeting summarized what was accomplished during the first meeting and moved to impress the connection that group dialog has. Thus the goal of the second meeting was to continue to cultivate the communication process and the benefits occurring between a community of mentors and mentees participating in the department’s mentoring program. Once again, there was time for separate mentor/protégé discussion and a sharing of the results:

▪ What characteristics or commonalities do you share?

▪ How would you assess your personal benefit of conversations?

▪ What areas of coaching have you provided to your protégé/conversely, what types of areas of coaching has your mentor provide?

Many protégés felt that they wanted a special grading writing norming session. This is actually doable since almost 100% of protégés are upper division writing instructors and could be enlarged since the writing program coordinator conducts a norming session for adjuncts. They also indicated that they want more assignment samples and better focuses instructions on how to use BlackBoard. The second meeting of the semester ended with an analysis on how the program might move forward. And thus, the first semester of a faculty-to-faculty mentoring program ended on a high note with much to consider on how to move to the second semester in the program.

**Third semester meeting**. The first and only 2013 spring meeting into the second semester mentoring program concentrated on the following theme,

*“Where do we go from here?” The meeting began with lingering comments or questions like: “We’ve enjoyed clear purpose in the meetings. However, we need more commitment in following up with written feedback. How prepared are participants when meeting? Do regular meetings encourage and nurture interaction. Are they regular enough? Do program participants need more as a group or alone? How can the members encourage more community development?*

This time rather than asking mentors and mentees to engage in separate group conversations, the groups participated in a dialog concerning three specific topics with the following thought at the heart of the discussion:

*We are organized to learn about effective mentoring from each other. What is effective mentoring? Thus, because each member brings a unique experience and fresh perspective. Let’s hear from each of you because we are focused on appreciating commonalities and diversity.*

Please respond to the following questions:

▪ Do you need more guidance in evaluating the effectiveness of the program?

▪ What single or joint successes were most prominent?

▪ How can we improve?

Once again, conversation was invigorating and open since all participated. The manner of conversation was direct and each participant agreed that meetings have been beneficial to building a successful and self-confident entry into department teaching and that there has been a profound sense of protection that allows for building their teaching careers so they might try new teaching techniques.

**Program Evaluation**

By the end of the mentoring program’s first semester, it was clear that protégés were satisfied with the manner in which meeting discussions were conducted and all indicated that meetings were not a waste of time. Pre-meeting agendas were appreciated because handouts gave clarity to the purpose of meetings and activities. There was a sense that protégés were given the freedom to be outspoken during the breakout discussions since they were in a protégé centered community and the reporting that ensued allowed one person to speak for the group. So, while mentees felt they could speak freely with their mentors, the truth was that the relationship protégés enjoyed with mentors provided a comfortable and safe environment. However, it was the protégé-to-protégé relationship truly encouraged a sense of protection. This revelation also brought up the point that the relationship between mentors and mentees was still building. Many mentors were surprised to learn that they didn’t seem to be protecting their protégés and so they set about to construct more openness in relationship building. But the real question remains, can a mentor-protégé relationship be truly open? This remains to be seen as we move to the second year in the faculty-to-faculty mentoring program.

**Evolving program**. What’s on the agenda for developing our Center for Management Communication faculty-to-faculty mentoring program? Clearly, there is much to do and after the first year, questions abound. How can a mentoring program keep its members engaged in the program so they look forward to each meeting? How can a mentoring program move beyond the concept that participation is just another service requirement? How does a program stay energized? Mentees have indicated that they’d like to see a central location for accessing a bank of assignments. Both mentors and protégés are open to spending time working in each other’s offices while grading for the purpose of spontaneous conversations and observations. This was a suggestion that was rejected at the start of the program but now, many feel this might be important. We’ll be implementing a “best teaching practices” e-location where department faculty can submit taped lectures on topics that allow colleagues to see how certain topics can be best taught.

The mentoring program ought to move to include all department faculty members which brings up the important point of keeping the program interesting and alive so it doesn’t flounder. How can colleagues who admit to burnout be mentored back to the time when they were excited about teaching? What about seasoned colleagues who are floundering but not ready to retire? How do we “fix” this issue and can it be “fixed” in a reasonable amount of time. Why make it difficult for clinical faculty to take a sabbatical leave for reenergizing themselves and finding new excitement in their careers? Should mentors be trained? How?

Finally, we need to establish an evaluation process that goes beyond end-of-the-semester mentor/protégé comments. How can an evaluation tool dig into the fact that mentors and protégés experience a journey from one internalized state to another and is there evaluative tools to do so? Can it be articulated? Are there commonalities that express the same meaning? What evaluative metrics can be established and how can they be interpreted? A second year mentoring program is just around the corner and will continue with a program that rife with complex questions, complex processes and questions that need answers.

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