

MENTORING PROGRAMS IN U.S. ACADEMIC LIBRARIES – A LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this review is to pull together selected research reports that examine how academic librarians approach mentoring and how they perceive the role and function of mentoring programs for academic librarians in the United States. The focus of the review is to identify the scope and types of mentoring programs that exist within U.S. academic libraries.

INTRODUCTION: MENTORING VERSUS APPRENTICESHIP

Mentoring relationships can play a vital role in professional development. Researchers who study these relationship as aspects of learning grapple with the meaning of mentorship. The sense of the word can be traced as far back as the classic period of Odysseus. In the modern period attempts have been made to elaborate the concept in order to give it greater theoretical and empirical purchase. In her 1985 book, for example, Kram notes a distinction between mentoring for career advancement (instrumental support) and mentoring for personal growth (emotional support).^{1 (p22-46)} While this definition captures the modern sense of mentoring, the underlying concept is still rooted in a fundamental view of what constitutes human socialization. No society (or institution) can exist without older and more experienced members passing on acquired wisdom to new members. In most traditional societies this was done informally in father/son and mother/daughter relationships, with the addition of apprenticeship relations with non-family members. With the advent of the modern industrialized state, learning acquired a more hierarchical and formal nature (e.g., the modern classroom). The apprenticeship model gradually receded in importance except within academia where it continues in the relationship between professors and graduate students.

The importance of studying mentoring in academic libraries, therefore, lies in the peculiar intersection in this environment of the older, academic apprenticeship pattern and the modern bureaucratic mode of interaction.

In recent years researchers who study mentoring relationships, especially in the work place, depend on the theoretical framework established in Kathy Kram's 1985 *Mentoring at Work*.¹ This shows how mentoring as a focus for research has been transformed into a relatively new area of inquiry. Among studies of work place mentoring that followed the publication of Kram's book, Crosby has usefully shown how most utilized quantitative methodologies to analyze people in corporate settings.² (p8) Our initial investigation indicates that there is a paucity of quantitative research that explores mentoring in academia and especially within academic libraries. Moreover, many academic librarians who report on the institutional development of mentoring programs utilize largely descriptive and qualitative methods.

The purpose of this review, therefore, is to pull together selected research reports that examine how academic librarians approach mentoring and how they perceive the role and function of mentoring programs for academic librarians in the United States. The focus of this review is to identify the scope and types of mentoring programs that exist within these libraries.

LIMITATIONS OF THE REVIEW

A rich and extensive corpus of research on mentoring exists in the fields of organizational behavior, developmental relationships, management and human resources, and higher education. Although a complete inventory of this literature is beyond the scope of this review, it is clear that the library and information profession can benefit from a close examination of selected mentoring programs in other fields. A considerable amount of research on mentoring programs also exists on school librarianship, the unique role that librarians play in mentoring students to become better learners in a library environment, mentoring for the purposes of recruitment (especially of non-MLIS students who wish to enter the academic library profession), mentoring for the purpose of developing leadership for administrative roles and, finally, mentoring of women and minority groups. However, unless such studies cast light on the development of mentoring programs for academic libraries, they have been excluded from this review.

GENERAL LITERATURE

Golian and Galbraith's 1996 essay provides a comprehensive review of issues related to effective mentoring for the library profession in general. In addition to its extensive treatment of mentoring issues in the library profession, the authors make an important contribution by synthesizing the diverse and often elusive definitions

of mentoring in different fields. After examining mentoring as it is defined in higher education, in management/organizational behavior, in psychology, and library science fields, the authors conclude that no operational definition of mentoring currently exists within library science.^{3 (p99)} One definition used in the higher education field defines mentoring as a form of professional socialization ...a definition, we believe, that should be more carefully examined and then applied in studies of academic librarians' mentoring programs.

Culpepper also presents an extensive literature review of mentoring in the library profession focusing on the role of mentoring in the career advancement of academic librarians.⁴ However, the research that the author identifies in this review belongs within the general area of how mentoring processes can be initiated and implemented, who can be mentees, what mentoring means for ethnic minorities and women, and who can be a mentor. Although the author asserts that research on the mentoring of academic librarians reveals that professional librarians in mentoring relationships seek career guidance for a variety of reasons, this appears to be anecdotal, containing self-assessments by the participants rather than validation based on objective analysis.

Faye Crosby's literature review examines mentoring questions in the context of developmental relations in the multicultural milieu of the 1990s. As one of the significant milestones of mentoring research, Crosby refers to the 1978 work of Levinson and his colleagues, "Seasons of Man's Life," in which the authors explore the importance of mentors in the career development of white middle-class men.^{2 (p3)} However, Crosby suggests that systematic academic inquiry of mentoring relationships in more diverse workplaces only began with the publication of Kathy Kram's articles and, notably, her book, *Mentoring at Work*, which legitimized the study of the entire field of mentoring relationships.^{2 (p7)} In her review, Crosby also presents a useful "meta-list" of research on mentoring in order to identify how researchers from 1988 to 1996 operationalized the definition of mentoring.^{2 (p12)} Her conclusion was that most of the operational definitions used in these studies conflated the instrumental (career advancement) and emotional (psychosocial) aspects of developmental relationships.^{2 (p11)} This finding comports with Delong's notion that mentoring isn't just about promotion but is much more about developing one's potential as a professional and as a human being.⁵

In one of the more recent works on mentoring in academic libraries, Murphy encourages academic librarians to re-conceptualize mentoring practices as they have evolved from a traditional, hierarchical and, some even claim, exploitative dyadic pairing of junior/senior librarians to a peer mentoring model.⁶ Such a transition can contribute to a learning culture that supports change in a dynamic library environment. The author cites studies that explore the transformation of mentoring in new work environments where the role and expertise of the senior mentor blurs with that of junior colleagues whose expertise may lie in different areas. This new environment encourages multiple developmental relationships. The study, on the whole, is a descriptive one that contains examples of mentoring pro-

grams that were established in selected U.S. academic libraries. Two examples that were cited are the three-level mentoring program at the University of Delaware Libraries and the Colorado State University Libraries' peer mentoring groups.

In a brief article, Struthers presents the results from a survey of 165 female professors who had been mentored at some point during their academic careers.⁷ The survey was designed to determine whether having a male or a female faculty mentor affected the rate of career advancement. The study found that it was the organizational rank of the mentor (e.g., full professor versus assistant professor) rather than the mentor's gender that had the most significant effect on advancing career goals. The author repudiates the common perception that male mentors are better equipped to use power to enhance career objectives while female mentors are better at augmenting psychosocial support.

In separate research, Maack and Passet surveyed over 150 women faculty of all ages in the Library and Information Science (LIS) field, using face-to-face interviews, focus groups and telephone interviews. The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which academic women have access either to role models or mentors. One of the major conclusions was that women faculty in the LIS field value long distance mentoring relationships, usually with an individual at the university where the respondent earned her highest degree. They saw a need for more support on the local level.^{8 (p148)}

ACADEMIC ACCULTURATION AND MENTORING PROGRAMS

One of the key issues in developing mentoring programs in academic libraries is facilitating the acculturation process that is required for academic librarians to achieve promotion and tenure. The preparation of teaching faculty to join the academic community requires lengthy graduate school training, whereas many consider library school education as inadequate or even irrelevant to successful academic citizenship.^{9 (p383), 10 (p468)}

It appears that academic librarians who are engaged in developing mentoring programs tend to overlook the critical importance of how academic librarians are acculturated into the larger faculty culture. For example, the 1999 Association of Research Libraries (ARL) survey of mentoring programs in its member libraries found that only a little over half of the survey respondents (57%) stated that learning more about campus culture was a stated goal of the mentoring program.^{11 (p5)}

There are two articles that explore the critical importance of socialization issues for academic librarians. Incorporation of ideas expressed in these two articles may benefit those who contemplate the design of academic library mentoring programs. First, Mitchell and Morton have published an excellent article that captures critical aspects of academic librarians' socialization by comparing and contrasting the process for librarians versus that for the professorate.⁹ The authors emphasize the critical role that senior librarians play in mentoring junior librarians. Second,

Jean Major interviewed 18 mature (i.e. experienced) librarians who were selected from publicly supported university libraries; her findings suggest that academic librarians achieve collegiality more often through their service on campus governance bodies rather than through common research activities. Her findings also suggest the importance of early mentoring on how to be a faculty member.¹⁰

In contrast, we find that to date the majority of research on mentoring for academic librarians largely addresses either the procedural concerns involved with planning and instituting mentoring programs or the immediate needs of developing research competence and uncovering publishing opportunities for new tenure track librarians. A more comprehensive goal of the mentoring programs should consider how to assimilate new academic librarians within the larger campus faculty culture.

MENTORING IN U.S. ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

Traditional formal mentoring

In 1999 there was sufficient interest in mentoring programs in U.S. academic libraries that the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) issued its SPEC Kit 239 on mentoring programs in ARL libraries. This survey showed that only 26% (21 libraries out of 122 ARL libraries that were surveyed) reported having mentoring programs for professional librarians.^{11 (p4)}

Two of the more widely cited studies on academic library mentoring programs are the case studies of the University of Delaware's three-tiered mentoring program¹² and the Louisiana State University Libraries (LSU) formal mentoring program.¹³ These two studies represent different approaches and processes in the design and development of sustainable mentoring programs in academic libraries. Earlier, Jesudason reported on the "New Colleague (Mentoring) Program" that was implemented in 1993 at the University of Wisconsin Madison General Library. In this program the "New Colleague Program Committee" pairs a senior volunteer librarian with a new junior colleague.¹⁴

Another comprehensive report is a case study of the mentoring program at the University of Kansas Libraries that was largely modeled after LSU's formal mentoring program. In this study, the authors examine a mentoring program that initially began as a way to help train tenure track librarians but evolved into all-inclusive mentoring for all staff.¹⁵ In another recent case study Farmer and her colleagues report on the revitalization of a twenty-year old formal mentoring program at the Kansas State University libraries that evolved from mandatory participation to more flexible voluntary involvement. Using a Professional Development Committee as the main mechanism for fostering a new approach, this mentoring program changed its focus from "attaining tenure" to the development of individuals in all aspects of their professional and personal lives. These authors also made a

significant contribution by compiling an extensive bibliography on mentoring issues that are relevant for academic libraries.¹⁶

Crump and her colleagues report on the University of Florida mentoring program that was instituted in 2004.¹⁷ This program focuses on the mentoring of tenure track librarians up to the midterm review (a third year review) as part of junior faculty mentoring. The mentoring program starts the first year of employment and lasts through the completion of the midterm review at the end of the third year when a promotion and tenure committee evaluates whether the candidate has made satisfactory progress toward tenure and promotion. Additionally, the authors examined the websites of the libraries of the Association of American Universities institutions with specific attention to midterm reviews and mentoring. Additionally, they conducted an informal survey via various electronic discussion lists regarding a third-year review prior to tenure and mentoring programs that support the review process. The results are included in an appendix to their article. Their survey partially updates the 1999 Association of Research Libraries SPEC Kit survey on mentoring in academic libraries with an emphasis on midterm reviews prior to a tenure decision.

Lee describes the critical role that the Research Committee plays at the Mississippi State University Library that, in addition to serving as an information clearing house for matters that relate to research, provides individual mentoring beginning with a web page that highlights the publications of library faculty.¹⁸ The Committee also organized programs that will enhance research skills for both tenured and non-tenured faculty members.

Slattery and Walker report on a formal mentoring program established at a medium size academic library. The program focused on “organization and campus culture [that] help[s] acculturate the new librarian to things academic beyond the immediate aspects of librarianship.”^{19 (p2)} The value of this study lies in its effort to acculturate new academic librarians to a larger faculty/campus culture beyond the library environment.

In many of these case studies librarians debated whether the immediate supervisor or the department head of the protégé should also serve as a mentor. The studies recommended that, in general, immediate supervisors or department heads should not serve as mentors under the assumption that non-supervisors would create a less threatening learning environment. Unfortunately, we were not able to locate any research that actually tested the validity of assumptions, such as this one, that are frequently held by the designers of academic library mentoring programs.

Peer mentoring

Against the background of long established traditional dyadic (senior/junior pairing) mentoring relationships, the emerging concept of peer mentoring has increasingly gained acceptance as a viable alternative, or supplement, to the traditional formal dyadic mentoring model. Peer mentoring is especially encouraged and

popular in academia where each faculty member or librarian has his/her own subject or disciplinary expertise. Some researchers suggest that peer mentoring also encourages learning by mentors, as well as by protégés, thereby promoting an overall organizational learning culture. As a consequence, some argue that peer mentoring can serve as a useful tool for understanding and advancing learning within organizations and helping to promote transformational leadership.²⁰ Peer mentoring groups are normally self-organized, composed of untenured faculty members who address issues that concern collaborative research agendas and the sharing and exchange of information, both professional and personal.

Angelique and her colleagues present a model of classic peer-mentoring among non-tenured faculty.²¹ The authors characterize the traditional mentoring relationship as one that involves a one-to-one, unidirectional, asymmetrical relationship in which a junior and less experienced individual is paired with an experienced person for the purpose of receiving guidance and support. Researchers contrast this traditional relationship, where the existing values of an organization are reinforced, with peer mentoring which has emerged as more appropriate in academic environments. One example of the newer model is the New Scholars Network, a support group among non-tenured faculty members at the Pennsylvania State University, Harrisburg campus. The authors report that the members of the Network place great emphasis on professional development. Examples are the development of collaborative interdisciplinary research agendas, assistance and editorial advice on grant proposals, and the sharing/exchange of information on conferences, teaching, syllabi development, and community connections.^{21 (p203)} This is a useful study, especially for those interested in forming a peer mentoring group.

Keyse and her colleagues report on the mentoring of untenured librarians at the Oakland University Library.²² This model is not a totally self-organized peer mentoring group since the formation of the Untenured Librarian's Club was "spear-headed" by an administrator who participates in their informal monthly meetings. The value of this report is a short checklist of how to be a successful leader of an informal mentorship program. Senior librarians, who have not had a chance to attend workshops or be trained in becoming an effective mentor, will benefit from this short list of the attributes of a successful informal mentor. The list was developed from the perspective of untenured librarians and can be supplemented by the experience of informal mentors themselves.

At Colorado State University Libraries, Level and Mach report a mentoring program where the peer support group supplements the formal mentoring program.²³ Nicknamed The Junior Club, this peer support group was created by tenure track librarians for the benefit of other tenure track faculty. The members of the Club created an e-mail list that serves as a main communication tool and a forum for sharing research project information and information about upcoming conferences, etc. The e-mail list is supplemented with a web page on professional resources that can be accessed by all library faculties.

The case studies reported in this section suggest that academic librarians develop mentoring programs not only to advance individual career objectives but also to encourage “a culture of engagement” and “a culture of mentoring,” and to create a learning organization. For example, Mavrinac argues in her essay that peer mentoring can serve as a values-based learning process that promotes the democratic nature of a learning culture.^{20 (p392)}

While peer mentoring is encouraged as a way to establish an initial mentoring relationship within peer groups, especially among junior librarians, the findings from Major’s study indicate that library directors can play an important role in encouraging librarians to participate in campus governance.^{10 (p468)} Doing so can enhance the visibility of librarians and increase the relevance of mentoring as a tool for integrating librarians into the general life of the institution.

E-MENTORING

Despite the advances in telecommunication technology and the ubiquitous presence of the Internet, researchers note that “electronic mentoring is a ‘relatively new and under-researched field’.”^{24 (p372)} Also called cyber mentoring, virtual mentoring, and online mentoring, Hamilton and Scandura suggest that e-mentoring “refers to the process of using electronic means as the primary channel of communication between mentors and protégés.”^{25 (p388)} Hilbun and Akin define e-mentoring as the “merger of [traditional] mentoring with electronic communications to develop and sustain mentoring relationships.”^{26 (p1)} With the advent of globalization and online teaching, the greatest advantage of e-mentoring is its ability to overcome geographical barriers. In their extensively researched article, Hamilton and Scandura explore the concept of e-mentoring and the role that e-mentoring plays in extending the traditional mentoring relationship (referred to in this article as t-mentoring).²⁵

Hilbun and Akin view electronic mentoring as a natural offshoot of the impact of electronic communication technology on teaching and learning.²⁶ They also suggest that because librarians work within an electronic environment, e-mentoring seems ideally suited for transferring knowledge and experience throughout the library field, either within the same library system or across systems. E-mentoring is particularly useful in large library systems that allow partnering relationships to span branches, departments, or even towns. Finally, the authors identify helpful elements that will lead to successful e-mentoring. These include the structure of mentoring programs, mentoring objectives, administrative support, technical support, communication tools, training and support for the participants, and finally, assessment. While the case studies reported in this article assessed a school media environment, the article presents the basic issues necessary for a successful e-mentoring program in any library environment, including academic libraries.

Headlam-Wells and her colleagues reported on the design and management of an e-mentoring system that included the design of an automated matching system. This scheme was developed in the UK in order to help develop women's career potential. One of the useful findings of this study was that the most widely adopted approach was a blended one, "where e-mail and telephone contact were included."^{24 (p383)}

For academic librarians the earliest experiment in electronic mentoring was conducted in the early 1990s by the Association of College and Research Libraries' Research Committee in order to encourage research by academic librarians. Echavarría and her colleagues reported on this experiment whose aim was to extend the traditional boundaries of mentoring activities to a network environment that would utilize an electronic list as a communication tool.²⁷ The participants, who were geographically dispersed, were organized into six broad subject groups according to their research interests. Among these, only the subject group that was engaged in research on understanding the user led to a satisfactory mentoring relationship. Participants cited poor matches between mentors and protégés, and the lack of face-to-face contacts as some of the reasons for a less than satisfactory mentoring experience. This approach fits within Hamilton and Scandura's description of a technology and team mentoring model.^{25 (p 398)}

One of the results of successful traditional and peer mentoring programs in academic libraries has been the creation of web sites that contain information, including institutional documents, related to mentoring programs. Often the main purpose of such websites is to share professional resource information that can be accessed by all library faculty members. Many academic libraries also post the procedural documents related to their mentoring programs on their websites. In her descriptions of successful mentoring programs within the academy, Osif, by mining just such websites, presents a snapshot of successful mentoring programs in eight academic libraries.²⁸ Although, as noted earlier, electronic lists and websites were constructed for the purposes of mentoring in many academic libraries, it appears that e-mentoring has not, to date, been the dominant force driving mentoring in academic libraries. Indeed, as was the case reported by Farmer,¹⁶ academic librarians appear to invest their time and effort in revitalizing the traditional model of mentoring relationships.

CONCLUSION

This brief review of literature covering research on mentoring programs in U.S. academic libraries suggests that much of this work fits within the case study genre. Unlike research on mentoring programs in management and other fields, there are no large-scale quantitative studies designed to test the effectiveness of mentoring programs either of librarians in general or of academic librarians in particular. Many case studies that report on mentoring programs in academic libraries contain

a section on assessment at the end of the pilot project – but these tend to be anecdotal and self-referential in nature.

The basic ingredient of mentoring involves a transfer of knowledge through sharing experiences, whether the mentoring adheres to the traditional junior/senior dyadic format or to the more recent approach of peer mentoring. However, little, if any research on academic library mentoring addresses the importance of the newly emerging field of knowledge management (KM). If the stated goal of peer mentoring, for example, is to share information and exchange ideas among equals, KM concepts such as “Communities of Practice” can be incorporated into the development of an effective mentoring program. Doing this would result in a hybrid model of formal/informal/peer mentoring or group mentoring. While discussing KM tools and techniques for libraries, Nelson suggests that mentoring is simply a people-centered KM technique.^{29 (p135)} Rejecting the traditional idea of mentoring as a lifelong commitment, Nelson cites Steve Trautman’s notion that the knowledge of the mentor can be segmented such that information can be acquired in bundles that allow the apprentice to assimilate new information better and faster on a task-specific basis.^{29 (p136)} This approach to mentoring expands the idea of learning restricted to specific assignments and makes it potentially inclusive of librarians at all levels.

Although there is cross fertilization among academic library mentoring programs regarding issues of importance to librarians, one weakness noted in this review is the lack of additional cross fertilization from other fields and disciplines. Mentoring in academic libraries in general needs to address larger issues of acculturation in the context of the wider university faculty culture. Such an approach can encourage tenure track librarians to integrate with the research and teaching faculty, thus filling in a lacunae that many have seen as a shortcoming in the training of academic librarians at library schools. A commitment to scholarship and instruction is one of the quintessential requirements for membership in a faculty. It appears that the majority of academic library mentoring programs have a limited focus on professional competence rather than nurturing librarians to appreciate and participate in the broader culture of scholarship and research. Acquiring such an appreciation would clearly have an impact, passively or pro-actively, on the careers of librarians in their post-tenure period.

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