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Assessment News

Findings from the Faculty Development Survey on the Mentor Program

By Dr. Linda Beane Katner
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The Office of Faculty Development, as noted in its mission statement, exists to serve faculty needs[1]. In an attempt to meet those needs, the St. Norbert College Mentor Program was established in 1986 by Dr. Ken Zahorski and became a model program for many institutions nationwide. Successful mentor programs can have an extremely positive effect on new faculty colleagues. As we know from the latest research, the most salient mentoring outcomes for junior faculty include[2]:

- stronger commitment to a career in academe
- greater sense of ownership and commitment to their institution
- higher rates of retention
- more effective teaching and service to the institution
- better adjustment to the department, the institution, and the job
- enhanced scholarly productivity (grants and publications)
- higher rates of job and career satisfaction
- higher rates of achieving tenure

In the years since the Mentor Program was established, demands on mentors and new faculty members have increased as the College has evolved. In order to best serve our new faculty colleagues, the Mentor Program should respond to the current demands of the College.

With this in mind, the Survey of the Mentor Program was developed to measure faculty members' level of satisfaction with the program in order to gauge what we are doing well, and what areas might need attention. This article will critically analyze the data and make some preliminary recommendations on ways to strengthen the Mentor Program.

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[1]"The Program is designed to be flexible and dynamic enough to meet the changing needs of the Faculty in relation to the institution as a whole." *Faculty Handbook of St. Norbert College,* IV-27 and IV-28.

[2.] W. Brad Johnson, *On Being a Mentor: A Guide for Higher Education Faculty* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erilbaum Associates, Publishers, 2007) 141.

Mentoring Matters: Evidence & Experience

By Dr. Stephen Correia
Associate Professor of Education

Editor's Note: Assessment News has regularly invited commentary from the SNC Community. As a colleague who has served two separate three-year terms on the Faculty Development Committee, investigated the range of mentor programs in place at other colleges, and reviewed literature on mentoring, Dr. Correia offers his commentary on what the Mentor Survey data suggest for St. Norbert College.

Like cars, cold medicines and clothing, effective faculty mentoring programs come in many shapes, sizes and styles. When the need arises, and choices must be made, the challenge is to determine which option to select based upon specific needs and wants. A choice well made will yield a myriad of positive outcomes.

The value of a well-planned faculty mentoring program in higher education institutions is evident. Research documenting the benefits to faculty, both junior and senior, has placed a well-conceived and executed mentoring program well within the confines of best practice in higher education. Scholarly literature documenting the value of such programs extends beyond the work of W. Brad Johnson's *On Being a Mentor* that was presented at the Office of Faculty Development Winter conference. Johnson's work does support the value, and challenge, of developing such a program to meet the needs of any higher education faculty.

All evidence indicates that it is time for the St. Norbert College mentoring program to evolve. For all faculty levels, from the large number of recent tenure-track faculty hires to already tenured and senior faculty, a pronounced need for an expanded mentoring program is evident to position faculty to meet present and future professional expectations.

This short essay will raise a number of issues that seem to need to be addressed prior to the adoption of an enhanced and expanded faculty mentoring program at St. Norbert College.

The positive outcomes derived over the last two decades to St. Norbert College faculty from the current Mentoring Program at the College are apparent. Among the benefits derived from this program are:

Assessment Conference Possibilities

Higher Learning Commission, Leading for the Common Good, April 20-24, 2007, Hyatt Regency Chicago, IL

AIR 47th Annual Conference, Choice/Chance: Driving Change in Higher Education, June 2-6, 2007, Kansas City, Missouri.

AAC&U's 7th Annual Greater Expectations Institute, Campus Leadership for Student Engagement, Inclusion, and Achievement, June 20-24, 2007, Burlington, Vermont.

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The Survey was administered in October 2006, and the full survey data can be found on the Office of Institutional Effectiveness website:https://www.snc.edu/oie/archive/login/ mentor_survey_frequencies.pdf

Demographics

Sixty-two faculty members responded to the survey (55 full-time, 3 adjunct, 1 emeritus, 3 did not identify status). Results were cross-tabbed to further profile respondents:

- Divisional Affiliation: 33.9% HFA; 38.7% SS; 24.2% NS; 1.6% other (vs. the 42% HFA, 36% SS 21% NS, and 1% other that comprises total voting faculty)

- Gender: 54.1% Male; 45.9% Female (vs. 65% men and 35% women who comprise total voting faculty)

- Number of Years Taught at SNC: 24.2% less than 4; 27.4% 4-10; 21% 11-20; 24.2% 21+; 3.2% did not specify

- Current job rank: 4.8% adjunct professor; 1.6% visiting professor; 4.8% instructor; 35.5% assistant professor; 37.1% associate professor; 9.7% professor; 1.6% professor emeritus; 4.8% did not specify

Participation and Best Practices

Overall, 26.2% of survey respondents said that they were not assigned a mentor when they first arrived at SNC. While surprising, this percentage may be explained by the number of adjuncts responding as well as professors who arrived at the College before the start of the Mentor Program in 1986.

Best practices research is divided on whether or not the mentor should be from the same discipline, although 81.8% of respondents strongly agree or agree that this should be the practice at St. Norbert College. An overwhelming majority of respondents (82.2%) reported having one or more informal mentors, indicating that considerable mentoring is occurring outside the official Mentor Program. Notably, a minority of faculty members are actually mentoring new colleagues, with only 37.1% of respondents reporting that they had been a mentor. The data also suggest that this small group of mentors are asked to be mentors repeatedly with 40% of those responding reporting that they had been a mentor three or more times.

Mentors generally report that they are satisfied with the job that they are doing with their mentees. 73.9% reported that their mentees were very receptive to their feedback, and 90.9% indicated that their feedback had a positive impact on their mentees. 90.5% of mentors felt that they were a good match with their mentees, and 86.9% of mentors rated themselves as very good or good as a mentor. In short, mentors believe they are performing their roles well or very well.

Program Satisfaction

While 52.1% of respondents think that the Mentor Program is working excellently or very well, a surprising 47.8% think that the program is working fairly (39.1%) or poorly (8.7%). The data offer some insight into this apparent disconnect between mentor perceptions of how they are doing and their general level of satisfaction with the program. Mentees express less satisfac-

tion with the program than mentors with 36.4% of respondents reporting that their experience as mentees was fair (15.9%) or poor (20.5%). Furthermore, the quality of these mentor-mentee relationships varies greatly. Whereas 72.8% of mentees report that their relationship with their mentor during the first year was friendly (61.4%) or collegial (11.4%), 27.4% of mentees characterize that relationship as remote, which is disconcerting. Some of these relationships improve slightly over time with 21.4% of mentors characterizing the relationship as remote now. It is clear from the data that mentees have a less satisfactory experience with the Mentor Program than mentors.

Satisfaction with specific mentor functions also varies. The number in parentheses indicates the percentage of mentees who were satisfied with their mentor's performance of various mentor functions.

- encouragement to attend meetings (78.6%)

- introductions to colleagues (76.8%)

- feedback on advising (72.1%)

- feedback regarding collegial expectations (70.5%)

- inclusion in social activities (69.7%)

- feedback about scholarship (69.7%)

- guidance about campus politics (67.4%)

- feedback about teaching (65.1%)

- orientation to College policies and the Faculty Handbook (64.3%)

- counsel on year-end evaluations, tenure and promotion applications (62.8%)

- guidance on balancing work and personal responsibilities (61.9%)

- guidance on how to best manage professional workload (59.5%)

The first five functions could be considered to be more straight-forward, less complex tasks. This might explain why mentees are generally satisfied with how their mentors performed these functions. As the functions become more complex and/or less well defined mentee satisfaction declines.

Correspondingly, mentors were asked to report how much attention they gave to the same functions. Again, the number in parentheses indicates what percentage reported giving some or a great deal of attention to:

- feedback regarding collegial expectations (95.6%)

- introductions to colleagues (91.3%)

- feedback about teaching (91.3%)

- guidance about campus politics (91.3%)

- feedback on advising (86.9%)

- encouragement to attend meetings (82.6%)

- feedback about scholarship (78.2%)

- orientation to College policies and the Faculty Handbook (77.3%)

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- counsel on year-end evaluations, tenure and promotion applications (73.9%)
- inclusion in social activities (72.7%)
- guidance on how to best manage professional workload (69.5%)
- guidance on balancing work and personal responsibilities (68.2%)

Mentors generally report giving quite a bit of attention to the majority of functions, although the degree of attention does not necessarily translate into satisfaction on the part of mentees. Considering the importance we give to teaching at St. Norbert College, having 91.3% of mentors report giving a great deal or some attention to this is not surprising. What is surprising, however, is that only 65.1% of mentees are satisfied with the feedback they receive. Furthermore, it is apparent that mentors are not clear about what is expected of them and express unhappiness about that in the comments.

Sample Variations

When we cross-tab the results, some variations by rank, division, gender, and length of service emerge. In general, when discussing mentee satisfaction with specific mentor functions:

- Assistant professors are the least satisfied
- Faculty in Natural Science are less satisfied than those in other divisions
- Female faculty are markedly less satisfied than male faculty
- Faculty who have been at the college 4-10 years and 21 plus years report less satisfaction than other faculty

This same pattern holds true when respondents characterize their relationship with their mentor in the first year and at present. A higher percentage of faculty members in the following categories describe the relationship as remote: assistant professors; Natural Science, female; and those who have been at the college 4-10 and 21+ years.

Furthermore, assistant professors and women are most likely to rate themselves as poor mentors. Assistant and associate professors are more likely than professors to regard the current Mentor Program as fair or poor. In sum, women faculty and natural science faculty are not getting as much out of the program as others. Assistant professors express less satisfaction, which is worrisome given that they are the primary focus of the Mentor Program.

Recommendations

Whereas the Mentor Program at St. Norbert College has many strengths, these findings along with the research done on best practices suggest that the Office of Faculty Development might consider the following (listed in no particular order):

- continue to match mentees with mentors in their own discipline unless a compelling reason exists otherwise
- more clearly lay out expectations for mentors, and continue to provide more training
- give new mentors a copy of Dr. W. Brad Johnson's book, *On Being a Mentor: A Guide for Higher Education Faculty*

- investigate and address special mentoring needs of women faculty
- engage the divisions in discussions about how new colleagues can be better served
- explore ways to extend the mentoring relationship beyond the first year
- devote more resources to the program, specifically in funding training for mentors and opportunities for mentor-mentee pairs to get together
- explore developing a questionnaire for new faculty about their preferences in a mentor, to better match mentors and mentees
- expand established faculty participation in the Mentor Program
- decide how being a mentor is recognized in tenure and promotion applications

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- Each newly hired faculty member has been provided a mentor with whom to interact. These interactions often have included ongoing conversations about teaching, collegiality, scholarship and advising.
- Newly hired faculty have a person to speak with confidentially to share concerns and ask questions.
- In certain cases, opportunities for joint efforts in scholarship have resulted from these mentor interactions.
- Newly hired faculty are encouraged to use the Resource Center and consult with the Director.

It is, however, equally evident from recent survey data that all faculty do not experience the current iteration of mentoring at the College equally. From the perspective of newly hired faculty, the program is occasionally uneven. Many newly hired faculty members have shared that they did not understand what this college-assigned relationship was expected to accomplish. That is, many junior faculty did not know the process by which they were to be mentored. Topics to be discussed, areas of mutual concern, and a framework for professional dialogue with their mentor was not mutually understood or embraced. Interestingly, experienced mentors often express the same concern. In short, in many cases where the mentoring process was not successful, neither the mentor nor the new faculty member knew how to mentor or what a mentor was to do.

It is, in part, this very unevenness of effective mentoring that an expanded and enhanced mentoring program would be designed to address. A framework for designing such a program needs to be crafted to guide the College's development of a mentoring program that would work within our culture. Such a framework would be based upon recommendations within the literature of faculty mentoring and survey data already gathered. In order to determine the goals of an enhanced mentoring program, the following questions would have to be answered:

- What length of time should the mentoring relationship be? Is one year long enough or should it be formally recognized and supported through the earning of tenure by the new faculty member?

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- What type of training should mentors have? With what skills and techniques should they be trained?

- How will mentors be formally recognized within the college tenure and promotion guidelines? Given that an increased expectation of time and expertise will be needed by mentors to have this program be successful, it seems evident that such a formal recognition of faculty effort be institutionally supported.

- How will this mentor program be assessed? How will data be collected, analyzed and shared to create an on-going process for improvement of the monitoring program?

- Who will be mentored? Will all recently hired faculty members, tenure-track and non-tenure track experience the same kind of mentoring?

- Will a component of an enhanced faculty-mentoring program be geared towards the unique needs of mid-level and senior faulty?

- How will existing college faculty be selected to participate as mentors?

Many types of mentoring programs exist in higher education. It is clear, however, that to be embraced by the College faculty, that not just any "off the shelf" program will be successful at St. Norbert College. Just as it is evident that such change needs to be brought to the college's mentoring program, it is also clear that the program must be crafted to meet the unique needs of the faculty.

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Higher Learning Commission Assessment Roundtable Training for Mentors
By: Dr. Eliot Elfner
Professor of Business Administration

Since it first elaborated an interest in improving student learning in 1989, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) of North Central Association (NCA) of Colleges and Schools has traditionally favored an approach which encouraged institutions to conduct their assessment of student learning in an independent and autonomous manner. This led to others providing conferences, workshops and consulting services for institutions trying to organize for their efforts to assess student learning. I was able to participate in these services through presentations and participation in AAHE, NCA-HLC and other conferences, and by affiliating with Institutional Effectiveness Associates presenting an annual three-day workshop on assessing student outcomes for 15 years, and two-day workshops on assessing General Education for the last five years, held here on the St. Norbert campus at the Bemis International Center. Now, the HLC has begun an assessment initiative including an Office of Assessment Support Initiatives and Services (OASIS), to include the Assessment of Student Learning Academy (formerly called the Institute), as well as to coordinate the Commission's various education and training programs and services for improving student learning. Based on my past experience I was invited to become an Assessment Academy Mentor. Thanks to the generous funding of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness I was able to participate in a training program held last October at the HLC training facilities in Lisle, IL.

In fact, the nature of this session was less that of training the participants than it was preparing the program for upcoming Assessment Academy Roundtables. Three Roundtables were scheduled, one in November of 2006, one in February of 2007 and one in June of 2007. The agenda of these Roundtables was the central focus of our discussions during this workshop. Approximately 22 potential mentors met in various sessions over the course of the two day workshop to plan for the upcoming workshops. We also scheduled mentors for each of the workshops. In addition to developing an agenda for these Roundtables we also reviewed the resources that would be suitable for participant institutions.

In order to participate in the Roundtables, institutions are required to prepare an extensive application proposing potential action projects for improving student learning at their institutions. These applications were read by the Commission staff and groups of 12-16 institutions were chosen to participate in each of the three scheduled Roundtables. Each chosen institution will send a team of 4 to 6 participants to these sessions. Sessions will be used to further develop and refine the action projects they intend to pursue during the four-years which the institutions will be active in the Roundtable process. Over the four years of this process, mentors and institutions will collaborate on the development and implementation of several assessment projects. This process is intended to provide institutions with the background, experience and guidance necessary to demonstrate they fully meet the improvement of student learning requirements of the accreditation process.

My initial involvement occurred at the February Roundtable. A group of ten mentors were teamed with several institutions from the 16 who participated then. I was teamed with another mentor from a small private institution and we facilitated the process for three of the participant institutions, all of which were small, religiously affiliated private colleges with enrollments ranging from 400 to 800 students. These teams were responsible for developing specific projects for improving student learning at their institutions. The three day workshop consisted of keynote sessions, team work sessions, and common sessions presenting information about improving student learning. I was teamed with other mentors to present sessions on the basics of assessing student learning. The HLC has now begun emphasizing the true purpose of this process – the improvement of student learning. The term "assessment" has been properly de-emphasized to make it clear that the HLC is really interested in improving student learning, and regrets the heavy emphasis of the past on the terms "Assessment." The institutions I helped facilitate through the workshop all embraced this approach, and worked very hard to take away valuable projects and information from this workshop. The HLC plans one more workshop for this year in June and has 15 or so institutions already accepted for that workshop. Plans for the following year are still in development and will be announced at the annual Commission Conference in April this year.

It will be rewarding to see the increased expertise and sophistication develop over the four-year Assessment of Student Learning Academy program. As with the workshops I have participated in in the past, I expect the participants from the institutions will become assessment champions at their home institutions as they become more comfortable with the assessment process. I will be happy to share my Assessment academy experiences with any and all SNC faculty and staff interested in continuing the development of their discipline assessment processes.