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## Creating a Culture of Mentoring @ Your Library

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# Creating a Culture of Mentoring @ Your Library

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## CREATING A CULTURE OF MENTORING @ YOUR LIBRARY

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### Why Create a “Culture of Mentoring” at Your Library?

The need to find and retain high quality leadership for libraries is one of the top seven issues for academic libraries. With a significant percentage of librarians planning to retire in the next decade, retaining professionals is imperative. Librarians must not only be retained, but mentored and developed for future leadership roles in the academic library community (Hisle, 2002).

Creating a “culture of mentoring” helps the organization, individuals in the organization, and those with whom they interact. This culture provides integrity (accountability) throughout the organization, and opportunities for learning, for feedback and for improvement of performance throughout the organization. Libraries are using mentoring to orient new librarians, to assist them through the promotion and tenure process, and to provide information to librarians interested in advancement.

### How You Can Help Prepare Your Library For a “Culture of Mentoring”

Developing a “culture of mentoring” at your library is a gradual process. You can create an atmosphere that welcomes learning and promotes a “culture of mentoring” not only to benefit individuals, but the library as an organization. For a “culture of mentoring” to persist, it is important that people be enthusiastic about participating and that there is acceptance across

the board in your library from top to bottom. A “culture of mentoring” should be visible in all directions up and down the hierarchical chain in the library or any organization from support staff to management.

Consider the size of your library. A formal mentoring program in a smaller library may be hard to accomplish due to limited faculty and staff members. However, smaller libraries can still have an informal “culture of mentoring” that provides encouragement for employees to become involved in professional development, whether it is participation in opportunities within the organization, e.g. in committee work and faculty organizations, or outside activity in professional associations.

### Potential Benefits of Starting a Formal Mentoring Program at Your Library

As mentioned earlier, in order to promote a “culture of mentoring”, it is important that people understand the benefits of mentoring for themselves and for their organization. For example, in academic libraries mentoring can provide guidance or advice for reappointment, tenure and promotion; enhance knowledge about the library and/or campus culture; and provide research direction and help with vita preparation.

### *Mentoring Culture in Academic Libraries: Benefits for Mentees and Mentors*

Faculty organizations, usually at larger universities, have orientations for new faculty

members and mentoring programs that are structured and related to college, departments and institutional goals. Academic librarians on tenure track will benefit from mentoring programs as they must meet specific tenure and promotion criteria.

Ideally, the library administration assigns each new faculty member a mentor, preferably from the senior faculty. Ideally, this professional mentoring relationship will last throughout the new librarian's career, but particularly during the first five years as he/she builds the faculty portfolio to submit for tenure and promotion.

Perhaps most valuable to the library and the college/university, are mentoring benefits shared across the organization by junior and senior faculty, as well as by administrators. Senior faculty members can build their portfolio by "counting" their responsibilities as mentors as service to their profession. Also, senior faculty members can learn from their mentees as they share knowledge and guide mentees through the tenure and promotion process. Mentoring can provide senior faculty members with a way of keeping up with new and emerging trends in the profession.

Junior faculty members engaged in building their portfolio can benefit from senior faculty members advice and guidance through the tenure and promotion process. New faculty can share their knowledge of technology and trends with senior faculty and likewise, senior faculty can show junior faculty how librarianship has been done in the past, providing background and rationale for why things developed the way they did in the library. Also, taking part in a mentoring relationship may increase junior faculty members networking opportunities; senior faculty members "friends" may become their friends.

For library administration and management, mentoring benefits include having proud, productive and connected faculty. Strong relationships are formed and faculty are "in it together" to produce and prepare outstanding library faculty for tenure and promotion. The torch is passed, and the library's legacy and institutional history is preserved and passed on as

senior faculty take an extended role in teaching new faculty the ins and outs of the operation, management of new faculty, and a variety of administrative responsibilities.

### *Other Organizational Benefits*

A successful formal mentoring program contributes to a healthy organizational climate and positively impacts the organizational culture. The program reflects an organization's commitment to, and investment in, their employees. Mentoring programs are low cost opportunities organized to meet the training and workforce development needs of less experienced employees.

Mentoring promotes a clear understanding of the professional responsibilities and expectations within a particular workplace. As the mentor coaches and guides the mentee, he or she stays focused on the skills, characteristics, and styles valued by the organization. Mentoring may also increase a new employee's satisfaction and reduce any sense of isolation. It is a valuable tool for recruitment and retention, an effective succession planning strategy and can be an effective tool for building diversity. Mentoring also contributes to the development of partnerships or allies that may later be useful to the organization.

### **Starting a Formal Mentoring Program at Your Library**

To start a formal mentoring program at your library, you need to have a clear purpose and direction, goals and a plan for assessment. For a program to be successful, mentoring should be operationally defined to reflect the needs of participants and institutional goals, and these goals must be linked to the choice of mentoring activities and to the assessment of mentoring outcomes (Wunsch, 1994).

Good communication and visible support from management/administration are necessary for a formal mentoring program to be effective. If the administration does not support the program, it is hard to get acceptance and participation from other employees. There must be communication from the administration so both mentors and

mentees will know they have continued support for the process.

Roles and responsibilities for the coordination of the program should be clearly identified. How is the program coordinated and by whom? Is there a coordinator or a committee? Who will select the participants for the program? How will mentors/mentees be matched and trained? Should participation be voluntary?

What are the responsibilities, characteristics, and expectation of the mentors/mentees? The role of mentor/mentee needs to be clearly understood by the individuals involved in the process. When is the pairing terminated or may successful mentoring relationships continue after the agreed upon time period elapses? These are questions which should be answered before starting a formal mentoring program.

As part of a formal mentoring program, a reward system needs to be in place and tied to goals, achievements and professional development. A reward could be publishing an article or getting promoted, or simply being recognized for completing the mentoring program. Education and training should be valued, encouraged and maintained to keep the mentoring program visible and active.

Anticipate obstacles; people leave, drop out, and goals are not accomplished for one reason or another. Some things are beyond the mentor's control, for example campus politics, a change in the organization (i.e. job positions), the mentor becoming a mentee's supervisor, etc. Therefore, it is important to develop plans for changes and adjustments before they are needed.

Finally, how will the program be assessed? Goals and objectives should be defined and measurable so that progress can be ascertained and the mentoring program can be re-adjusted as needed for future participants.

### **Ways to Create a “Culture of Mentoring” at Your Library**

If you have no formal mentoring program at your library, you are not alone. According to a survey by Wittkopf (1999), only 26% of the Association

of Research Libraries (ARL) reported having formal mentoring programs. If it is not feasible to establish a formal mentoring program at your library, it is important to know that there are other ways to promote a “culture of mentoring.” The library as an organization can provide support structures for informal mentoring. Some alternatives to full-fledged formal mentoring programs in academic libraries include library faculty organizations, library committees geared toward research, and welcome/orientation committees for new librarians.

### ***The Library Faculty Organization (LFO)***

A Library Faculty Organization (LFO) is a voluntary organization, a means of structured support that can improve the quality of life for academic librarians. A strong LFO will “offer daily support to its librarians, providing a forum for discussion, innovation, and camaraderie” (Spencer & McClure, 2008, 92).

For example, at the University of Alabama, the LFO identifies specific discussion topics that are of interest to academic librarians such as “tenure and promotion standards, travel funds, salary compression, the annual review process, and release time for scholarly pursuits” (Spencer & McClure, 2008, 92). The LFO also welcomes new faculty members, partners with other campus faculty groups, encourages communication with the library administration, and promotes continuing education and professional development (Spencer and McClure, 2008).

### ***The Research Committee***

The research committee is a vehicle of support that is especially helpful for the tenure-track librarian. For example, the research committee at Mississippi State University, “is charged with:

- Developing programs to enhance the research skills of the library faculty
- Sponsoring informal discussions of research ideas, strategies, methodologies, and opportunities
- Apprising faculty members of upcoming conferences and deadlines for paper

submissions

- Providing individual mentoring as needed, including editorial advice
- Recognizing faculty publications in appropriate ways
- Recommending to the dean improvements to support research (Lee, 2005, 711).

Topics discussed in workshops included: the editorial review process, a research resources overview, evaluating research articles, and choosing research topics and types of methodologies (Lee, 2005).

### *The Welcome, Orientation, and Mentoring (WOM) Committee*

Another way you can promote a “culture of mentoring” throughout the library is by creating a committee that welcomes, orients and mentors librarians new to the profession or new to your library. Committee activities can include developing orientation materials and organizing events such as meet and greet receptions.

For example, at the University of California-Santa Barbara, the WOM committee sponsors sessions that address the progression of librarian careers; dynamics of the mentoring relationship and the formal review process; and activity in professional organizations, research and publication, and grant writing. Other topics include time management, library cultures, integration of individual and organizational goals, and building support networks in the workplace (Martorana et al. 2004).

### *How Mentoring 2.0 Can Help You Create a “Culture of Mentoring”*

#### *Benefits of Mentoring 2.0*

Mentoring 2.0 is a trendy term for a very simple concept—taking the traditional mentoring relationship to an online format, using the many web tools available at your disposal. We can now use technology in place of or in conjunction with face-to-face time for all aspects of mentoring. With the use of web tools, mentoring relationships can overcome many of the geographic, time, and social limitations of in-person communication. Online tools can now

help in creating a mentoring program, finding a mentor, and providing a mentoring time and space.

### *Creating a Web Mentor Program*

Free blog services such as Wordpress or Blogger, can be used to create a simple website for a mentoring program featuring contact information, times and places for events, pictures of events, a manual, and anything else you can dream up to help your mentors and mentees. Mentoring programs can also use SurveyMonkey or other survey software to easily create an online application process. With an online process, mentoring programs can reach non-traditional participants, who would not be accessible otherwise. Example: USC CMCIS Alumni Society Mentoring Program Blog <http://cmcismentorprogram.wordpress.com/>

### *Finding a Mentor, Contacts & Introductions*

If you are not eligible for a structured mentoring program, you can find informal mentoring opportunities through social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn. You can find alumni of Library Science programs and search for colleagues in the same fields as you. Do not underestimate the friend-of-a-friend relationship either; you never know who works in your dream job and would be happy to chat. At Ning.com, you can search user-created social networks—there are several specific library networks for you to explore. Examples: Business Librarians on Ning <http://businesslibrarians.ning.com/> Texas School Librarians on Ning <http://txschoollibrarians.ning.com/>

### *Mentoring Time & Space*

Where social technology really shines is in its ability to create online spaces where mentoring can take place, freed of physical restraints. Web 2.0 tools can be used successfully in the mentoring process for both synchronous and asynchronous communication. From email to Second Life, there are many ways that mentoring can be accomplished from a distance; these solutions also work for busy people who must fit mentoring into a hectic work life. Email can be



used to send discussion-worthy articles and basic keeping-in-touch conversation. Instant messaging is a great way to have one-on-one real-time discussions that can be less formal than a telephone conversation.

Social networking sites also have built-in spaces for conversations that can be used for formal and informal mentoring. For instance, Facebook provides email, chat, message boards, group discussions, and other communication tools. iMantri is an “online exchange and a social network for mentors and mentees” with resources to help guide the goals of both sides of the relationship. Second Life is also a unique space that can be used to meet online in a pair or groups. In Second Life, you can create an avatar and “meet” to text chat or actually talk via microphones in online spaces. There are many common areas and several libraries have spaces set up within Second Life to feature their resources. Example: South Carolina State Library’s Second Life Library <http://slurl.com/secondlife/Cyprary%20City/44/36/24> (link works only in Second Life); University of South Carolina School of Library & Information Studies Second Life <http://students.libsci.sc.edu/secondlife/http://slurl.com/secondlife/Eduisland%204/34/175/25> (link works only in Second Life)

### **Difficulties**

While Mentoring 2.0 provides mentoring relationships with many avenues of communication, there are some difficulties which should be noted. Both mentors and mentees need to be aware that ideas and feelings may not be expressed clearly in an email, instant message, or Second Life chat as in-person. Also, there may be issues with maintaining access to technology and resolving technical difficulties. However, using some of these online social tools can result in productive conversations about the technology itself and provide learning opportunities on both sides of the mentoring relationship.

### **Benefits of Becoming Involved in a Career Mentoring Program**

Many professional library associations at the state, regional, and national level offer career mentoring programs. Becoming involved in a career mentoring program affiliated with a state, regional or national library association offers many benefits to the mentor and mentee. Some of the general benefits include learning library philosophies, policies and procedures, interacting with individuals from different library settings, and expanding one's professional network.

### **Benefits to the Mentee**

A career mentoring program affiliated with a national, regional or state organization can help expand a mentee's professional network. Participating in a professional organization's career mentoring program can also provide the mentee an outlet to discuss issues such as professional goals, staying up-to-date in the profession, learning organizational culture, planning for promotion/tenure, dealing with difficult situations at work and becoming a leader. Having a career mentor who is outside the mentee's library can give a different perspective from what the mentee may learn from those he/she works with on a daily basis.

### **Benefits to the Mentor**

Mentors can benefit both personally and professionally from becoming involved in a career mentoring program affiliated with a professional library association. Involvement in a career mentoring program can bring mentors a sense of personal fulfillment at being able to give back to the profession. Mentors help the association by training the future leaders. For example, the mentor may explain how a particular library association functions to the mentee who in turn, may bring new ideas to that professional association.

### **Southeastern Library Association (SELA) Mentoring Program**

One example of a career mentoring program is that developed by the *Southeastern Library Association* in 2007. The SELA Mentoring Program offers SELA members the opportunity to improve their professional library skills and to gain knowledge about a library organization by

working with a library professional. In this way, SELA is developing future leaders for the organization. The SELA Mentoring Program embraces the idea of having library professionals at all levels (library science students, library paraprofessionals, and professional librarians) participate in their mentoring program.

As part of the SELA Mentoring Program, a mentee is matched with a mentor who either has a similar background or is currently working in the area of librarianship in which the mentee is interested. The mentoring program does allow either the mentee or mentor to excuse himself or herself from working with each other for any personal reason. The goals for the mentee include obtaining, improving, and expanding library skills, discussing and investigating work related issues with an experienced library professional, and gaining knowledge of the SELA organization and how each part of the organization functions. Some of the main points of the SELA Mentoring Program are the one-on-one attention the mentee receives from the mentor, the communication and its frequency between the mentor and mentee (generally speaking, the mentor and mentee will not be working in the same work organization), and the variety of opportunities the mentee can experience.

An important aspect of the SELA Mentoring Program is the flexibility that the mentees have in fulfilling the requirements of the program. For example, as part of the SELA Mentoring Program, the mentee is required to attend either the SELA BiAnnual or Leadership Conference. If a mentee is unable to attend either conference, alternative projects will be developed for that person.

SELA's Mentoring Program requires that mentors and mentees work together as team members. Through their relationship, an agenda is created so the mentee receives the training needed to improve current library skills or to learn new library skills for future employment.

If you are interested in becoming a member of the SELA Mentoring Program, contact Hal Mendelsohn at: [hmendels@mail.ucf.edu](mailto:hmendels@mail.ucf.edu) or (407) 823-3604.

### *Other Career Mentoring Programs Affiliated with Professional Library Associations*

See the appendix at the end of this article for examples of other professional library associations' mentoring programs. This is not an all-inclusive list but it will give you some idea of career mentoring opportunities available at the national level.

### **Conclusion**

We all want to feel that we have the power to change things for the better. Creating a "culture of mentoring" in your library can provide a sense of empowerment and an opportunity to better both the organization and those who work there. Whether you are interested in starting a formal mentoring program at your library, supporting an informal program, or seeking a mentoring relationship or career mentoring program outside of your organization, it is important to start somewhere. It only takes one person to make a difference - be that one.



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## Websites

Attributes of Effective Mentoring Relationships: Partner's Perspective

<http://coachingandmentoring.com/mentsurvey.htm>

Coaching and Mentoring Network - Articles

<http://www.coachingnetwork.org.uk/ResourceCentre/Articles/Default.asp>

Mentoring

<http://www.sonic.net/~mfreeman/mentor/mentsupp.htm>

Mentoring Group.

<http://www.mentoringgroup.com/>

## Professional Library Associations - Mentoring Programs

### American Library Association (ALA)

*ALA New Member Roundtable (NMRT) Mentoring program*

<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/rts/nmrt/oversightgroups/comm/mentor/mentoringcommittee.cfm>

The Mentoring Committee of NMRT helps newcomers to librarianship navigate their way in the profession. Programs include a conference mentoring and a career mentoring program. Conference mentoring participants may choose to extend into the career mentoring program at their discretion.

*ALA Library Research Roundtable (LRRT) Mentoring Program*

<http://lrrtmentor.ci.fsu.edu/home.html>

This program promotes and supports the development of substantive and rigorous research in information and library studies. By providing a means for interaction and collaboration, the LRRT Mentoring Program brings together professionals with varying levels of expertise who share an interest in research.

*Library Administration and Management (LAMA) Mentoring Program*

[http://www.ala.org/lamatemplate.cfm?Section=lamacommunity&Template=/CFApps/Rosters/lama\\_com.cfm&committee=LAM-MENTORING](http://www.ala.org/lamatemplate.cfm?Section=lamacommunity&Template=/CFApps/Rosters/lama_com.cfm&committee=LAM-MENTORING)

This mentoring program is designed to facilitate and encourage the professional development of current and emerging library leaders.

*IIRT International Librarians' Conference Mentoring Program*

<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/rts/irrt/irrtcommittees/irrtorientation/orientation.cfm>

This mentoring program organizes the orientation for international visitors at annual conference and works closely with the ALA International Relations Office to develop a mentoring program for annual conference.

*Association of Research Libraries (ARL) Leadership & Career Development Program*

<http://www.arl.org/diversity/lcdp/>

The ARL Leadership & Career Development Program (LCDP) is an 18-month program to prepare mid-career librarians from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups to take on increasingly demanding leadership roles in ARL libraries.

**Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)**

ACRL has seventeen sections to help members individualize their ACRL experience. Listed below are some examples of mentoring programs that these sections offer.

*ACRL-IS Mentoring Program*

<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/about/sections/is/iscommittees/webpages/mentoring/ismentoring.cfm>

The Association of College and Research Libraries Instruction Section (ACRL-IS) Mentoring Program contributes to the professional development of academic librarians interested in information literacy instruction and improving their teaching skills by pairing librarians experienced in teaching with librarians new to instruction or to the Instruction Section.

*ACRL-LES Mentoring Program*

<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/about/sections/les/lesmentoringform.cfm>

The Literatures in English Section (LES) members are involved in the acquisition, organization, and use of information sources related to the study and teaching of literature written in English from around the world.

*ACRL-RBMS Mentoring Program*

[http://www.rbms.info/committees/membership\\_and\\_professional/mentoring\\_program/index.shtml](http://www.rbms.info/committees/membership_and_professional/mentoring_program/index.shtml)

The Rare Books and Manuscripts (RBMS) mentoring program, facilitates communication between RBMS members and supports their professional development as special collections librarians, curators, and archivists. It is open to all members of RBMS, old or new, who need help in becoming more involved with RBMS and in navigating the rare books and manuscripts profession.

*ACRL-STS Mentoring Program*

[http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/about/sections/sts/publications/ACRL-STS\\_Brochure.pdf](http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/about/sections/sts/publications/ACRL-STS_Brochure.pdf)

The ACRL-STS program mentors new science librarians.

*ACRL Dr. E. J. Josey Spectrum Scholar Mentor Program*

<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/proftools/mentorprogram.cfm>

The ACRL Dr. E. J. Josey Spectrum Scholar Mentor Program links participating library school students and newly graduated librarians, who are of American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander descent, with established academic librarians, who provide mentoring and coaching support; serve as a role model in academic

librarianship; and provide guidance in seeking a career path and opportunities for leadership in the profession.

*ACRL College Library Directors Mentor Program*

<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/about/sections/cls/collprodisc/collegelibrary.cfm>

The program is designed to enhance leadership capabilities of new college library directors and to help them meet the challenges involved in directing libraries in small colleges. This program meets this need by fostering a mentoring relationship with an experienced library director.

**American Association of Law Libraries (AALL)**

[http://www.aallnet.org/committee/menret\\_com.asp](http://www.aallnet.org/committee/menret_com.asp)

The Mentoring and Retention committee plans and implements programs designed to provide a network through which the newer members of AALL, and members contemplating job changes or desiring career guidance, can establish personal contact with experienced law librarians who can serve as resources for information and advise on the profession and the Association.

**Medical Library Association (MLA) Mentoring Program**

<http://www.mlanet.org/mentor/>

This MLA mentoring program helps students who are interested in exploring a career in health science librarianship and to those interested in changing their career to medical librarianship. New members are encouraged to attend the Annual Meeting and promote MLA committees.

**Special Libraries Association (SLA)**

<http://www.sla.org>

Many state chapters have mentoring programs. In addition see:

*Virtual “career coaching”*

<http://www.sla.org/content/jobs/advisor/index.cfm>

Virtual “career coaching” is available 24/7.

*Business and Finance Division Mentoring*

<http://units.sla.org/division/dbf/resources/index.html>

Individual divisions provide mentoring, such as the Business and Finance Division.

<http://units.sla.org/division/dbf/index.html>

The Public Library Association (PLA)

<http://www.ala.org/Template.cfm?Section=pressreleases&template=/contentmanagement/contentdisplay.cfm&ContentID=86286>

The Public Library Association (PLA) supports the American Library Association's (ALA) Spectrum Initiative. PLA funds Spectrum Scholars interested in pursuing public librarianship as a career.

**American Association of School Libraries (AASL)**

<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/aasleducation/recruitmentlib/learningabout/learningabout.cfm>

Individual districts have mentoring programs for their new employees. Reforma, the National Association to Provide Libraries and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking, provides a mentorship program providing services to Latinos.