Trekking to the Tenure Finish Line: Teacher Educators and the Power of Peer Mentoring at an HBCU

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Trekking to the Tenure Finish Line: Teacher Educators and the Power of Peer Mentoring at an HBCU

Obtaining tenure and promotion at an institution of higher learning can feel overwhelming for tenure track faculty. Often tenure track faculty are required to teach a full class load, provide service to the institution and community, and perform scholarly research for publication. The journey to tenure and promotion is long and challenging if done in isolation. Partnering with a colleague to gain support and guidance can relieve the stress and pressure while applying for and obtaining tenure and promotion within a strict timeline with many expectations. To meet the requirements to obtain tenure and promotion at a teaching Historically Black College and University (HBCU) in the mid-Atlantic, tenure track faculty must provide evidence that they have met or exceeded the specific requirements. Candidates must demonstrate exceptional teaching, scholarship, and service.

In addition to holding a doctorate or recognized terminal degree in the faculty member's field of specialization, the HBCU in the mid-Atlantic requires its junior faculty to demonstrate excellent teaching practices. The faculty member must minimally submit student, peer, chairperson, and dean evaluations to verify outstanding teaching practices over multiple academic years. To meet the university's scholarship requirement, the junior faculty member must provide evidence of scholarly contribution and growth in their practice area through peer-reviewed journal publications and other scholarly activities. Holding an office in a professional organization, presenting at regional or national conferences, and completing additional graduate work are examples of the types of activities the junior faculty member can complete to meet the scholarship requirement. Finally, the junior faculty member must demonstrate participation in university and community service. Junior faculty can participate in non-required workshops, write grants, advise a student organization, participate in university-wide projects, consult, or serve on a community council to meet the service requirement. The teaching, scholarship, and service activities mentioned are examples and not an exhaustive list of options the university allows.

Importance of Faculty Mentoring in Higher Education

Part of having a successful outcome in academia as a Black faculty member is having a network of mentors (Kelly & Fries-Britt, 2022). Not only should this network include intentional relationships but must begin from a genuine place with the time commitment to grow and evolve (Chaddock, 2017).

Eby, Rhodes, and Allen (2010) assert that there are four attributes of mentoring: (1) unique relationships, (2) learning partnership, (3) process, and (4) reciprocal, yet asymmetrical interactions. Mentoring is a particular type of interpersonal relationship that leads to the development and benefits all individuals involved. Furthermore, the etymological exploration of the word mentor includes intent, passion, sacrifice, dedication, and vulnerability (Author, 2016). Again, displaying that mentoring is mutually beneficial for all parties.

Although mentoring in academia comes with various challenges, one of which is identifying a mentor with whom a productive relationship can be established (Patton, 2009), creating and sustaining these relationships are beneficial to faculty. Some of the other challenges or barriers to mentoring for faculty of color include negative mentoring experiences, insufficient institutional support for formal mentoring, and lack of post-tenure mentorship among tenured faculty (Davis et al., 2021). In an ideal professional space, thriving learning communities are established where there is a team to support professional and personal growth. We, as two Black tenure track faculty members, liken our peer mentor relationship to that of a learning community. Learning communities not only build a sense of community among Black faculty (Jones, et al., 2020) but can also support progression in scholarship, decrease feelings of isolation and help to retain faculty of color (Loveless-Morris & Reid, 2018). While we live in a digital age and seek to maximize the benefits of technology, Black women faculty have found that it is possible to both cultivate community and create courageous spaces virtually (Robinson et al., 2022). In this, technology becomes more than an instructional tool for faculty, but a way to continuously build relationships, while not replacing the need for in-person communication (Robinson et al., 2022).

When referring to faculty of color mentoring relationships in higher education, particularly Black faculty, there are various components to consider. These considerations should be noted by faculty and leadership in institutions of higher learning for the benefit of faculty and students. Fries-Britt and Kelly (2005) share that connecting to one another, being vulnerable, establishing trust, and motivating one another to maintain momentum are all elements of a mentoring relationship when both people feel like outsiders in academia. While mentoring can be composed in a hierarchical sense, with a mentor who is more accomplished, experienced, and possibly more mature in age, while the mentee is less experienced and younger, Endo (2020) shares a multi-leveled mentoring-partnership model that centers equity. Equity-centered mentoring is about collaboration and partnership, while all involved are committed to dedicating their time and energy while accessing multi-leveled systems of support (Endo, 2020).

Research affirms the critical need for healthy mentoring relationships for faculty of color in higher education. While mentoring shows itself in various ways, it is necessary that there are components of collaboration, care, growth, and commitment.

Professional Background

K12 Experience
Mentor A

Since the age of eight, my sights have been set on being an educator. Thankfully, it was in that educational space that I truly felt seen, heard and understood by Mrs. Williams, a Black woman. In the predominantly white school and classroom, the culturally responsive educator Mrs. Williams, reminded me of my uniqueness and relevance, not only in school, but everywhere. This experience was the beginning of my educational pursuit to be that same source of inspiration for young Black and Brown students. Having taught in both suburban and urban elementary contexts, it has been an honor to teach other people's children. As an elementary school teacher, there were many opportunities to plan, instruct, and assess student learning. Teaching was such a joy. The fun, laughter, questioning, using interesting materials, and aligning instruction to students various learning needs was a sought-after challenge.

While many novice teachers have horror stories about their first year in the classroom, that was not my experience. Due to the school leadership, team collaboration, and parental support, my first year in the classroom was wonderful and left nothing to be desired. During this time, my overall focus was to build meaningful relationships with students and families, partnering in students' overall academic and social emotional success and growth.

While preparing third grade students for standardized tests, there was always a level of responsibility and frustration; responsibility because these are "my" students that need to be prepared and frustration because of the knowledge that these tests never truly capture the brilliance of most students, particularly students of color. As a team leader, data analysis continually led to next steps and discussions around instructional improvements. Constantly seeing students in the red, which indicates failure or not meeting expectations, became disheartening. The first-year joy once felt was fading and being overshadowed by the pressure to meet proficiency, which seemed impossible for some students. These tests did not measure the academic growth of many students who had improved one grade level, yet still struggled with third grade text. The repeated frustrations are what ultimately led me to pursue a doctoral degree. There was a desire to engage in

deeper understanding around curriculum, instruction, and what matters when teaching and learning with students of color.

Mentor B

While in grade school, I struggled as a student. Like many students in the 1980s who faced hardships outside the schoolhouse, I missed several days of school each year, which caused me to fall behind academically. As a result, the school staff placed me in what was called the Department of Exceptional Children, at that time. Being placed in the Department of Exceptional Children meant the school suspected a disability and decided I required special education services to be successful. Although I struggled academically due to chronic absenteeism, I still worked hard. I knew I wanted to make a difference in the life of children who experience similar hardships while in grade school. My desire to serve the community as an educator one day was a key factor that inspired me to work hard and to exit the Department of Exceptional Children by my fifth-grade year.

Most of my family members have chosen careers in law enforcement, working for the federal government, or education. I began my career in law enforcement while serving as a deputy sheriff in the state of Maryland. While watching the disparities, I quickly realized I wanted to support young Black and Brown people in a different setting. At this point, I decided to finish my undergraduate degree and pursue a career in education. I began my K12 experience as a substitute teacher. Working as a substitute teacher in a third-grade class, I instantly knew being an educator was my calling. Becoming a substitute teacher marked the beginning of a twenty-one-year career in K12 education, where I served in many roles, including teacher, assistant principal, principal, manager, and director.

As a teacher, I always wanted to go above and beyond for my students. I knew how to support the whole student to maximize their success because many of my students faced similar struggles as I did in grade school. My desire to help students on a larger scale inspired me to pursue formal education to become a school leader. Serving as a school principal was my most rewarding position throughout my career. While serving as principal, I coached and led teams of educators and school leaders to achieve a common goal of high academic achievement for all students. Through these experiences, I have learned several essential concepts which have molded my philosophy of education and educational leadership. Among them are developing a shared vision to achieve a goal, the importance and impact of having high expectations for all students, developing character, and getting all stakeholders to take responsibility for every student. In addition, my personal conviction and dedication empowered me to

ensure that every student receives access to the same educational opportunities regardless of their social and economic status and that my teachers have the necessary tools, training, support, and materials to maximize student success.

After twenty-one successful years of serving students and families in the K12 setting, the heavy pressure of high-stake assessments, last-minute deadlines, heavy demands, and a love for teaching and leadership development caused me to pursue a career in higher education. As an assistant professor of education, my experience in K12 serves as an instrumental tool in developing future teachers.

Higher Education Experience
Mentor A

My time as an assistant professor of elementary education has been at one institution. This Historically Black College and University (HBCU), set in an urban context, serves as a major place of learning for me as a teacher educator and scholar. For the past five years, I have had the pleasure of working with amazing students, many of whom are first-generation college graduates and non-traditional college students. Their perseverance, wisdom, and insights continuously help me to grow as a professor. Again, similarly to my time in an elementary setting, the overall goal is to build meaningful relationships, ensuring that preservice teachers learn in my courses, feel confident and are ultimately prepared to enter their own classrooms and thrive as educators. Over the past five years, many professional hats have been worn. The most prominent role has been that of instructor, but there have been opportunities for grant writing, directing grants, serving on departmental and university-wide committees, advising a student organization, conducting research, publishing scholarship, advising preservice teachers, assisting in preparation of capstone projects, and coordinating support for Praxis tests.

Working as an adjunct professor in both the HBCU and Predominantly White Institution (PWI) space, prior to becoming a full-time tenure track professor, lacked something invaluable for my professional development and enjoyment. Collaboration, teamwork, and the familial relationship held with colleagues was missing. The completion of previously mentioned tasks is impossible without the collaboration of colleagues that have a similar desire to see students reach their academic and professional goals. This collaboration extends across departments and disciplines as we progress towards the goal of consistent transdisciplinary scholarship. Mentoring has played a prominent role in my time as a faculty member. Having the opportunity to be both mentored and mentor others has been helpful while navigating sometimes unfamiliar professional terrain. By far, the most rewarding has been the moments of peer mentorship.

When junior faculty members have come together to support, guide, and inspire one another, that has been remarkable for my growth as a scholar.

Mentor B

While my tenure as an assistant professor of elementary education has been brief, it has been rewarding. Teaching, scholarship, and service are the fundamental building blocks of the institution. I have met some of the best and brightest students and faculty members in the past two semesters. The students and faculty made my transition into higher education smooth. Initially, I thought I would struggle because of my lack of experience in higher education. However, I quickly learned that my experience as a classroom teacher and school administrator allowed me to easily connect class content to practice. Building connections to the elementary and early childhood students' past and current experiences in the K12 setting has unlocked ambiguity for many students. My teaching philosophy is grounded in critical thinking. Critical thinking requires the students to synthesize past and present classroom content, and life experience to fully demonstrate the depth of their understanding of the classroom content. At the end of each class, we complete an optimistic closure. During optimistic closure, the students share glows and growth (strengths and weakness) of the class experience and concepts of future interest. I use the content obtained during the optimistic closure to inform future class instruction. While I was quickly able to master instructional delivery, I needed assistance with understanding student milestones, building courses in the learning platform, actions that must occur at specific points in the semester, and much more.

The institution provided many service opportunities. During my first two semesters, I volunteered to support many activities across the campus, needing to understand the level of demand teaching and scholarship holds. I built relationships with students and faculty members outside of my department through service. These relationships have built the foundation to make students feel comfortable sharing their struggles with the content, career interest, and school-life balance. Understanding the students' experiences and struggles has allowed me to develop an informal male mentoring program and develop meaningful partnerships with other universities and school districts to support their needs. Connecting students with partnering universities and local school districts will create a more substantial teacher pipeline.

Instruction and Scholarship

Instruction in Higher Education or Higher Education Instruction
Mentor A

With almost every interaction we have, Mentor B and I find a way to discuss our courses and instruction. We have a shared desire to increase what works and eliminate that which is a problem for students. We discuss how to better align course assignments to required certification assessments, creative ways to ensure students are engaged in course texts, and assure that while our courses remain challenging, we do not unintentionally overload students. Although required to have a peer observation completed each academic year, each of us have observed one another's classes multiple times. This helps us to understand how we instruct, what gaps may need to be filled in our courses, and additional ways to engage preservice teachers in learning. From Mentor B, I have learned to infuse an instructional framework in preservice teachers' lesson planning and instruction activities. From the onset, this was such an obvious connection for Mentor B to make with preservice teachers, while I had not considered the value in it. When these preservice teachers enter the profession, they will have familiarity with areas of evaluation and what it means to meet or exceed expectations in their own work as educators.

Based on our individual experiences and background knowledge, we have also engaged in co-teaching around lesson planning and its various components including identifying standards, composing a learning objective, and identifying formative assessments, while engaging in a gradual release model of instruction. Additional elements of the lesson plan have also been discussed during our co-teaching sessions. During this time, preservice teachers have the benefit of hearing from two professionals in the field with varied experiences. Mentor B can speak and then I can add a bit, and vice versa, based on our unique insights. These sessions are beneficial to both of us as professors and also to the preservice teachers.

Personally, my growth and understanding around teaching and learning can be credited to Mentor B and his ability to make meaningful connections between theory and practice. In connection to lesson planning, there are appointed times when we visit one another's classrooms to observe our preservice teachers during mock lessons. Mentor B teaches Math and Social Studies methods courses and I teach Reading and Language Arts methods courses. From these shared observations, we can mutually identify shared areas of strength and areas of growth for the preservice teachers. These observations also help to inform our instruction moving forward through the course of the semester. This level of openness and collaboration has been instrumental in preparing preservice teachers

for the classroom and strengthening our abilities as teacher educators. There is a deep appreciation towards Mentor B for his willingness to go above and beyond to ensure student success, while also supporting my advancement on the tenure track.

Mentor B

Although I have over two decades of experience in education, transitioning to higher education was exciting and overwhelming. In early August of my first year, I anxiously awaited the first day for the professors to return. I wondered about the support and expectations of the department and how I would learn the requirements promptly to ensure I provided my students with the best educational experience. During the first week of the academic year, I met the other professor of elementary education, Mentor A. I quickly realized I would have support and guidance as I transitioned into the new position. As we discussed our professional backgrounds and instructional interest, we realized that with our combined experience, we make a dynamic team. Considering my recent experience in K12 as a school and district administrator, I found a place in the department for my expertise.

Working collaboratively with colleagues positively impacts student outcomes. As Mentor A and I discuss course content, learning outcomes, and the student experience at the university, we utilize our planning time to discuss the needs of our students. We identify learning gaps, stress points and examine the level of rigor in our classes to ensure our preservice teachers receive the educational experience needed to educate today's learners. Mentor A has expanded my understanding of how the content aligns and connects across the education courses required to obtain a bachelor's degree at our institution by building a connection to the curriculum alignment practices we use in the K12 setting.

On numerous occasions, Mentor A and I have visited each other's classes to conduct peer observations, observe preservice teachers' practice lessons, and to co-teach. While watching Mentor A's teaching, I can observe how she engages with students and utilizes course resources and instructional approaches to forge critical thinking. Observing how Mentor A engages her students in critical thinking activities has expanded my toolkit and enhanced my ability to engage my students in meaningful thought-provoking activities in addition to class discussions. I appreciate Mentor A's willingness to partner, as the collaboration has eased my transition into higher education and improved my job satisfaction.

Scholarship in Higher Education
Mentor A

Grappling with the idea of what it means to be a scholar has been normal since my entry into higher education. This stems from my own struggles with imposter syndrome [Edwards, 2019; Hutchins, 2015] and being in this esteemed position as faculty. Meeting certain milestones annually to work towards tenure and carving out time to engage in meaningful research is challenging while focusing on the multiple tasks required to ensure student program completion. Frankly, scholarship often takes a backseat in my daily professional checklist. My immediate priority tends to be student-centered, so typically focused on advising, ensuring Praxis support is provided and improving instruction for student engagement and learning. As a result of this, my research and publishing goals are often pushed to the sidelines. Mentor B helps me to re-center those goals as a reminder that these are critical components of my professional life as a teacher educator. During his first semester at the university, Mentor B purchased name plates for himself and another colleague. When I made mention of it on his desk, Mentor B shared, "I did not get you one because you will soon be an associate professor, so I'll just wait until that happens." That statement, filled with support and ultimate confidence in my success in acquiring tenure and promotion, still makes me smile while simultaneously reigniting a desire in me to work harder towards accomplishing that goal soon.

Because of our shared interests and specific grade level experiences, Mentor B and I find it easy to collaborate. We meet and discuss expectations for tenure and promotion, noting what areas of completion still remain as we work towards the finish line. Since we work in a teaching and service-oriented institution, those two areas of the tenure checklist are easily completed. Research is the area where we need to be intentional about engagement and supporting one another. Through the sharing of calls for proposals and feedback on drafted publications, we provide the peer support that is needed for advancement. Additionally, we have presented at a local conference on the topic of being culturally responsive with teacher educators by connecting relevant current events in the world to classroom content. Even with this article, we are collaborating about our peer mentoring experiences. Although my time in higher education exceeds Mentor B's, the lessons learned from him are invaluable, impacting my professional growth immensely.

Mentor B

I regularly ask myself what activities qualify as scholarship in higher education. As a new faculty member, I often need help finding the time for scholarship activities. I naturally participate in many service activities across the campus and with the local school district. With over two decades of experience in

the K12 setting, going above and beyond for the benefit of students comes naturally and did not present a struggle during my higher education transition. With teaching and advising as a primary function in my faculty role, I structured my schedule to instruct and meet with my advisees regularly.

Mentor A has helped me to understand the importance of scholarship through the lens of preparing for tenure and promotion. Under Mentor A's tutelage, I am developing a clear understanding of the institution's academic expectations for tenure track faculty. Through regular collaboration, I have learned that scholarly publication and obtaining grants to conduct research are two critical factors in obtaining tenure and promotion. Mentor A has shared and discussed the tenure and promotion rubric/documentation to ensure I clearly understand the institutional process and the types of activities I must engage in to obtain tenure and promotion.

Considering the high importance of research and peer-reviewed publication, Mentor A and I have identified potential research topics that would enhance preservice teacher experiences while completing teacher preparation programs. Additionally, we have begun identifying potential funding to conduct our research. We naturally focus on different activities based on our experiences and interests. For example, Mentor A focuses on finding calls for proposals for conferences and scholarly journals; I focus on identifying potential partners and funding for our research. Moreover, while transitioning from K12 to higher education has been a journey, I have felt supported and valued by Mentor A and have grown personally and professionally because of her guidance.

Maintaining Healthy Work-Life balance

Personal Life
Mentor A

Even with his very busy professional schedule, Mentor B often takes trips, attends concerts, and plans family nights with his children. Just his willingness and commitment to make time for his family reminds me of the need to prioritize my husband and children. Even though there is always work to be done, time with my family is non-negotiable. Dance class, swim lessons, game night, and Netflix binges happen in the [Author Surname] home to maintain our closeness. Frankly, this time with family also allows me time away from work, so upon my return, there is a renewed enjoyment for the work. Beyond family time, Mentor B also reminds me to make time for myself. Yes, self-care is currently a trendy phrase, but it is necessary. As a Black woman, it is almost unheard of to put myself first, so engaging in "radical self-care" (Chambers & Sule', 2022, p. 130) that ensures I

remain healthy and whole is critical. While engaged in family life and work that is often all about serving others, the moments for self are needed to refresh and continue with the right spirit and attitude. Mentor B often takes me to various eating spots in the city. This not only allows me to learn about the surrounding communities, but there is time to get away from campus, the office, and just enjoy a meal. These outings spark conversations about our professional goals, personal triumphs, and how we can support one another through it all.

Mentor B

While working as a school leader, I believed that to ensure the school's success, I was required to be in the school daily, including during the summer. Believing I must be in school daily caused me not to take regular vacations and spend time with my family. For over a decade, I missed family events and milestones in my personal life to be present for my school community and staff members. While being present demonstrated my dedication to my school community, I did not consider the importance of being present for my family. In my later years as a school administrator, I learned that setting boundaries, spending time with family, and making time for self-care is monumental. Taking time to enjoy life made me a more robust administrator and more understanding of my school community's personal needs and boundaries. As an assistant professor, I make time for family and self-care while I do not claim to have mastered work-life balance. Mentor A and I intentionally discuss our plans for family and self-care and offer each other supportive reminders to balance our personal life and work requirements to ensure our wholeness. During these conversations, we also discuss our personal and professional goals and offer encouragement and accountability to ensure we both make time to achieve them.

Professional Commitments
Mentor A

Lessons learned while navigating tenure track include saying no, enforcing healthy boundaries, and embracing the most enjoyable aspects of my work. Saying no is necessary in order to focus on what is most pertinent and avoid burnout. Enforcing healthy boundaries works with both colleagues and students so we can respect one another's time and space. While embracing the most enjoyable components of being a teacher educator, there is a continuous opportunity to revel in work that is meaningful to me. Mentor B has helped me to embrace all of these areas as we work closely on program improvement and student experience in the elementary education program. In addition to these areas, Mentor B reminds me to dream big when it comes to my professional goals. There is nothing wrong with seeking a modest amount for grant work, but why not believe that the multi-million-dollar grant is possible? Instead of just one local

partnership, why not consider national partnerships? With his optimism and experience in education, Mentor B affirms that my commitment to the work should not be limited by small thinking. Chasing the big dream is a needed challenge and one that pushes me to continue advocating for students and what they need to have a phenomenal learning experience.

Mentor B

Managing my professional commitments is an area of growth. While I meet all of my commitments, meeting many commitments is challenging. As a new and junior faculty member, many committee leaders regularly attempt to recruit me to join committees and participate in many on and off-campus activities and projects. Through experience, I know that saturating my commitments can lead to burnout and decreased performance. Mentor A consistently reminds me to balance my commitments and that it is acceptable to say, "No, unfortunately, I cannot participate at this time. Let us reconnect next semester to see if things change." Partnering with Mentor A is also helpful as she helps me to identify when I am spread too thin and to determine which commitments to eliminate and maintain. Mentor A has helped me to see that I can be overzealous in obligating myself to teams and activities and the need to protect my time to ensure I maintain a high performance and work-life balance is critical.

Relationship with Students

Mentor A

The prominent reason for my dedication, sacrifice, and effort towards my work in higher education is for the students. With a student-centered teaching philosophy, all of the components of my professional responsibilities are centered around the preservice teachers enrolled in the educator preparation programs at my institution. Serving the students starts with relationship building. Mentor B and I often have students in our offices, just stopping by for a visit, seeking academic or personal advice, and verifying next steps for program completion. Over the course of just one semester, Black males interested in majoring in education have gravitated towards Mentor B. His open-door policy and sincerity appeal to the students. His openness reminds me to make time for the students, while maintaining healthy boundaries. Students are aware of my high expectations, high support approach to education. High expectations are set, but the support is embedded in my instruction, interactions, and responses to students. However, there is a need to maintain time and space for what is needed to attain my professional goals. As mentioned earlier, research is not always at the forefront of my task list, so it is critical that boundaries with students are maintained because it is easy to give students all of my time and energy.

Maintaining these boundaries is easy when you and students know one another. Most, if not all, of my students know about my professional responsibilities, family life, and interests. When students share with me, it is easy for me to share with them, and this makes me aware of the many situations students are experiencing. Working full-time, maintaining marital relationships, raising children, enduring financial hardships, overcoming physical ailments, and many other circumstances occur in the lives of students. Knowing this helps to provide them with the support that they need to have a successful and memorable college experience.

Mentor B and I work together to brainstorm ideas in support of students. Some of these ideas have been utilizing Mentor B's professional relationships with a partnering school district to find employment for students whose finances are a barrier to program completion. We have also worked to infuse Praxis instruction in our courses so preservice teachers are better prepared for the necessary certification exams. With informal mentoring naturally occurring through our relationships with students, Mentor B confirmed a partnership with another institution to move forward in mentoring efforts of both male and female students. One goal for the mentoring is to receive external funding and of course, Mentor B has pulled me into the effort to lead the female mentoring component. Again, another opportunity for us to further support students and provide them with needed information, guidance, and materials, while working together.

Mentor B
Supporting and educating students is the core function of faculty at our institution, making teaching and advising students the primary responsibility as a professor at my university. While all professors are required to have set office hours, Mentor A and I work to make ourselves available to our students due to the non-traditional status of most of our students. Building a healthy individual relationship with our students has allowed us to gain valuable information about the student experience in our program. Students feel comfortable sharing their needs and experiences because they feel our dedication and genuine concern for their wellbeing. Through regular meetings with my advisees, I found that many of my advisees and I have similar backgrounds, which helps the students realize they can overcome whatever adversity they face. Through regular collaboration, Mentor A and I find creative ways to modify our course requirements and instructional practices to meet our students' needs. We use the information gathered from students to determine partnerships, potential research topics and to determine what experiences and supports we should provide to strengthen student performance. For example, nationally, many preservice teachers struggle with

passing the Praxis exams to receive their teacher certification. To mitigate our preservice teachers' anxiety about passing the Praxis exams, we partnered with a statewide organization to offer Praxis tutoring to our preservice teachers earlier in our program. While being available to students, supporting their events, and mentoring are essential, Mentor A regularly reminds me to maintain boundaries by protecting time for my other duties and self-care. Admittingly, working in the K12 setting within a high-needs school district for over twenty years has made adequately protecting my time an area of growth. However, with Mentor A's support and mentoring, I am better equipped to balance my time.

Conclusion

The road to tenure can be long and arduous. Establishing and maintaining healthy peer-mentoring relationships is one of the proactive approaches to ensuring success in the tenure process. The benefits to working collaboratively with other junior faculty to ensure advancement in teaching, scholarship, and service are endless when peer-mentoring is consistently pursued. The opportunity to receive feedback, encouragement, and engage in honest conversations around professionalism are necessary and invaluable as a junior faculty member. Moreover, in an HBCU context, partnering with another faculty member who works in a context to support students of color, particularly Black students, is empowering and serves as a constant source of motivation. HBCUs that prioritize tenure and promotion for junior faculty members should implement mentoring opportunities and networks to support them in meeting this critical professional goal.

About the Authors

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