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Chapter 18- Case Study of the Statewide Faculty-to-Student Mentoring Program at Utah State University

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CASE STUDY OF THE STATEWIDE FACULTY-TO-STUDENT MENTORING PROGRAM AT UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to examine an undergraduate mentorship program through Utah State University (USU). The creation of the Faculty-to-Student Mentorship Program originated in an attempt to increase both retention and graduation rates throughout the statewide system. In the first year, a steering committee was formed, and the mentorship program was piloted on one statewide campus—Uintah Basin. During the next year, the program was expanded to all eight statewide campuses. The steering committee examined available literature regarding existing mentorship programs and identified three shortcomings: lack of theoretical framework, operational definition, and methodological rigor. This article discusses the program design for the mentorship program in addressing these shortcomings while providing a step-by-step approach to mentorship. This includes purpose, funding, recruitment, mentoring objectives, and description of measurement instruments. The article concludes with a discussion of lessons learned and recommendations for future mentoring programs.

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Mentoring Context and Program Development

Purpose

The purpose of this case study is to examine the faculty-to-student mentoring program of the statewide campus system at Utah State University (USU). In 2017, the Student Success Committee from the Uintah Basin campus developed a needs assessment to examine retention efforts targeting undeclared majors. Based on the results from students and faculty, the committee created the very first formal mentorship program at USU. In the first year, the mentorship program included 24 faculty members and 88 students solely on the Uintah Basin campus. The following academic year, the program was expanded to eight statewide campuses as part of the USU strategic enrollment management planning (SEMP) initiative. The expansion focused on the retention and graduation numbers throughout the statewide system. In Logan, fall-to-fall persistence rates were 78%, while only 54% in the statewide system for 2017. Regarding graduation rates, Logan was at 59%, and the statewide rate was 38% (Law, 2019).

In developing the mentorship program, the committee considered the best-practice approaches for faculty-to-student mentorship. As discussed by Law et al. (2020), the shortcomings of undergraduate mentoring programs include a lack of theoretical framework (Jacobi, 1991), operational definition (Gershenfeld, 2014), and methodological rigor (Jacobi, 1991; Law et al., 2020, Gershenfeld, 2014). The faculty-to-student-mentoring program aimed to build upon the existing mentorship literature while addressing these shortcomings in the programmatic design.
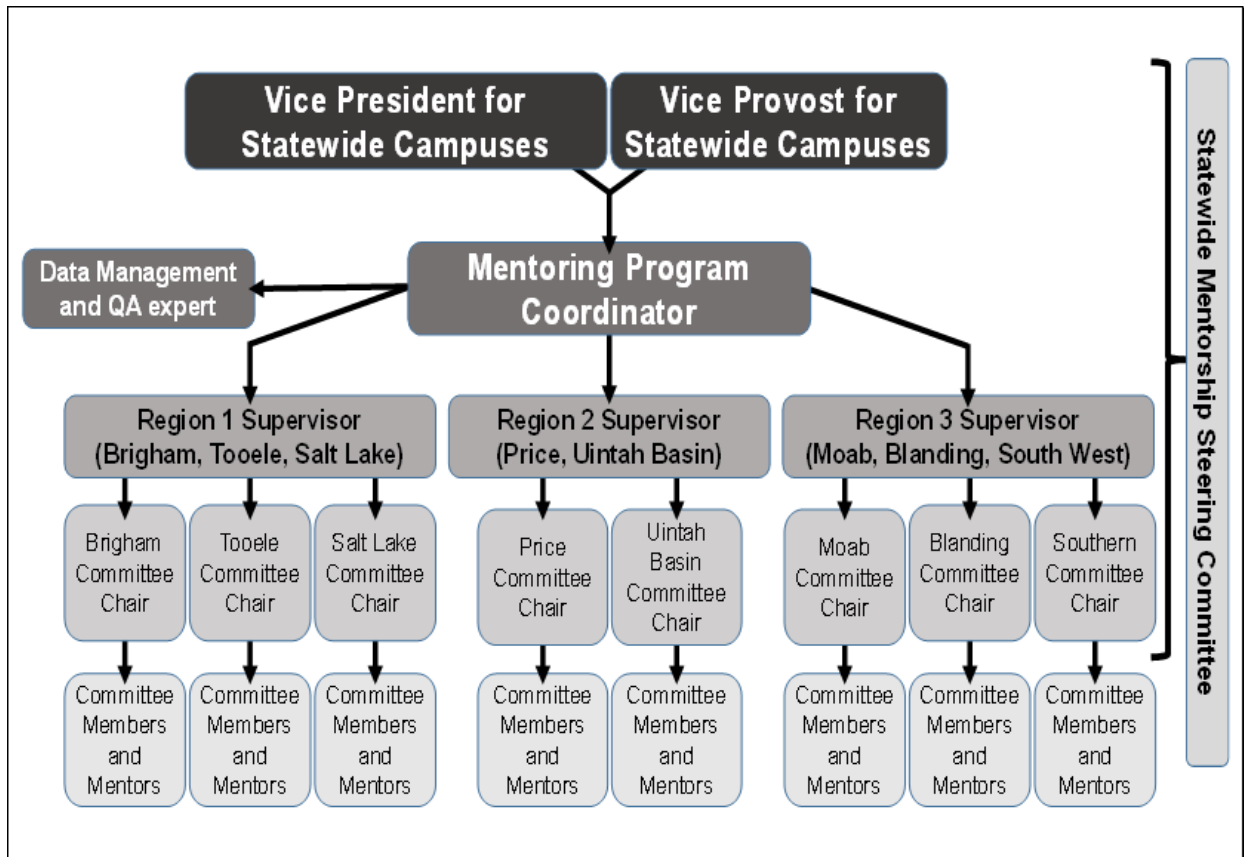
Mentoring Context

Utah State University is a land-grant university specializing in research endeavors and student-centered retention efforts. As of 2020, the enrollment for USU was 27,601, with 6,352 students enrolled in the statewide campuses. USU utilizes eight statewide campuses and 23 statewide education centers throughout Utah. Faculty are located throughout various departments on eight statewide campuses, with distance-education options available to the other campuses throughout Utah (Busenbark, 2020).

Infrastructure

The vice president and vice provost for statewide campuses provide oversight and funding for the faculty-to-student mentoring program. The steering committee (see Figure 18.1) for the faculty-to-student-mentoring program is comprised of a mentoring program coordinator and data manager. The rest of the committee is comprised of three regional supervisors and one faculty chair from each of the eight statewide campuses. The steering committee implements the overall focus and program requirements, while each statewide campus retains some latitude for implementation. The chair recruits, trains, and oversees the program at their respective campus. Each chair also oversees their respective student success committee. The steering committee meets once a month to discuss program issues and successes, and each committee convenes several times per semester to develop a strategic recruitment plan to increase retention and mentor undergraduate students. The importance of securing institutional support for mentorship programs can be reviewed more in Chapter 8.

Figure 18.1

Organizational Structure of the USU Faculty-to-Student Mentoring Program

Operational Definition

Prior to establishing the program, the steering committee was tasked with developing an operational definition of mentorship. The literature lacked a consistent definition for mentoring, with over 65 varying definitions (Law et al., 2020). A literature review conducted by Gershenfeld (2014) acknowledged the importance of certain aspects of mentorship and recommended the definition developed by Nora and Crisp (2007) as providing psychological/emotional support, goal setting, career path guidance, academic subject knowledge support, and role modeling. In conjunction with Gershenfeld (2014), the steering committee also decided on the operational definition from McWilliams (2017), a leading expert in the field from Wake Forest University. McWilliams defined mentoring as "building a purposeful and personal relationship in which a more experienced person (mentor) provides guidance, feedback, and wisdom to facilitate the growth and development of a less experienced person (mentee)" (2017, p. 70). The committee decided to follow the definition of mentoring by McWilliams (2017) with the operational components of mentoring from Nora and Crisp (2007) for measurement purposes. The following definition encompasses the important aspects of the key definitions from previous literature.

At Utah State University, we define mentoring as *building a purposeful and personal relationship in which a more experienced person (mentor) provides guidance, feedback, and support to facilitate the*

growth and development of a less experienced person (mentee). Operationally, mentors provide mentees with services such as:

- · *Academic subject knowledge and institutional support*
- · *Education/career exploration and goal setting*
- · *Psychosocial support*
- · *Role modeling*

Theoretical Framework and Methodological Rigor

About 30% of mentoring programs lack a theoretical framework in a collegiate setting (Gershenfeld, 2014; Johnson et al., 2010). Theoretical frameworks are essential for explaining the connection between mentoring and academic success and for concentrating on what is being emphasized in the mentoring programs (Law et al., 2020). Adopting the recommendations of Gershenfeld (2014), the statewide steering committee chose three different and unique theories: (a) Kram's mentor functions (Arthur & Kram, 1985); (b) social learning theory (Bandura, 1977); and (c) social integration theory (Tinto, 1987, 1993). Based on these theoretical constructs, the outcomes and measurement instruments were documented in the logic model, discussed more in-depth later in this case study and the Appendix.

Typology of Program

The program has a traditional 1:1 hierarchical model. This design creates a relationship where a more senior or knowledgeable individual uses their influence and experience to help with the advancement of the mentee. (Kram, 1988). The Statewide Mentoring Committee chose this model because it best facilitates the program's goals for students to (a) successfully adjust to university life, (b) feel like they are a valued member of the university, (c) have a clear sense of purpose, and (d) achieve their educational goals. While some group interactions may occur, the design is primarily meant for the mentee to have an individual relationship with their mentor that allows for specialized guidance.

Mentoring Funding

As a component of the SEMP, the faculty-to-student-mentoring program has been supported by the Provost's Office and funded through the statewide system to increase graduation and retention rates.

Mentoring Activities

Formative and Summative Evaluations

Formative and summative evaluation is discussed in detail in Chapter 13. For the USU program, mentors are evaluated on job satisfaction and fulfillment through providing mentorship. Mentee experience is measured on objective assessments, including persistence rates, grade point average, and graduation status. To meet the program's objectives, students also completed assessments for subjective data purposes: sense of belonging, adjusting to the university, and satisfaction with the mentoring relationship. This objective data is gathered from USU's Registrar's Office and the Office of Analysis, Assessment, and Accreditation. Student and mentor evaluations are analyzed each month and

disseminated to the local committee chairs for follow-up and quality assurance. The local chairs meet once a month to discuss the program. Key summative evaluation findings show that (a) mentors find mentoring to be a rewarding experience, (b) mentors report mixed results on whether mentoring improves their job performance and if they receive recognition for mentoring, and (c) mentors and mentees are satisfied with their mentoring relationships, feel that the program is effective, and understand their responsibilities (Law, 2022).

Recruitment, Selection, Training, and Matching Strategies

The steering committee oversaw the recruitment of students and faculty on the statewide campuses with strategies implemented by each chair and their committee of faculty. Each campus developed a campus-specific strategic recruitment plan. Strategies included in-person recruitment booths, emails from advisors, announcements in the classroom via Canvas, calling campaigns, and pamphlets in the residence halls. Mentors were recruited by a personal email sent by the vice provost encouraging the faculty members to attend a virtual workshop in August. The mentors were selected based on characteristics reflective of the program's goals.

Mentors attend a training session to discuss the program's purpose, expectations, and evaluation tools. Each statewide committee organizes training for faculty at their individual campus. Gershenfeld (2014) suggests a coordinated effort in training to ensure each mentor understands their responsibilities in the program. The steering committee released a mentoring guidebook indicating best practices for mentorship as well as possible issues. The guidebook provides academic, health and wellness, crisis, financial, and career resources. Mentees are not required to participate in formal training or instruction but have access to the mentee guidebook, which provides suggestions and resources.

Mentors are matched with mentees based on "positive personality characteristics . . . and behavioral characteristics" (Law et al., 2020, p. 31). Each statewide campus committee considers the major of each student and the expertise of the faculty member. For students without a declared major, prior class history is reviewed, and recommendations are provided. The committee reviews the pairings each academic year.

Each mentor is responsible for meeting with their assigned mentee once a month, and once a month the mentor and mentee evaluate the experience and complete a final evaluation at the end of the academic year. The mentoring matching strategies are a formal process that includes expectations of participants, third-party mindful matching, and university support for time, space, and activities (Cornelius et al., 2016). Additional training is left up to each individual statewide campus as warranted. The setting for the mentorship is at the discretion of the mentor and mentee. Face-to-face meetings are encouraged, but pandemic pivots saw telecommunication modalities including Zoom, telephone, and Skype utilized. Sessions typically last 1 hour, focusing on academics, social/emotional/professional well-being, and questions from the student.

Strategies for Follow-Up

The strategies for follow-up include individual consultations from the committee chair and faculty

chair from each statewide campus with faculty and students when necessary. These consultations include unsatisfactory mentoring relationships, mentees not responding to emails, and problems arising outside the scope of the mentor's expertise. The results from each mentoring evaluation are sent to two data managers for research and monitoring. If a problem arises, the committee chair or faculty chair initiates a consultation. Each faculty/student dyad receives an evaluation each month to measure the success in meeting the outlined objectives.

During the steering committee monthly meeting, chairs are invited to give updates and discuss concerns. The steering committee offers feedback or provides suggestions.

Sustaining the Mentorship Program

The steering committee meets once a month during the academic year. The faculty chairs provide updates and ideas related to increasing the number of mentors and mentees. Each spring, individual campus committees revise and implement a recruitment, training, and mentoring timeline for the next academic year. The committee chair will also update the USU SEMP committee and other stakeholders on retention and graduate numbers and new research findings. The program coordinator meets annually with the vice president, vice provost, and eight campus associated vice presidents to report on the data, answer questions, and foster positive relations for continued support of the program.

Mentoring Outputs

In the first 2 years of data collection, the mentorship program increased the total number of mentees and retained mentors at a successful rate. In the fall of 2020, the mentorship program started with 74 mentors and finished the 2022 spring semester with 73 mentors. The program started with 83 students in the fall of 2020 and concluded with 152 mentees in the spring of 2022. The highest number of students served by the program in a semester was 157 in the fall of 2021. Statewide campus student numbers for spring 2022 included: Uintah Basin, 58; USU Eastern, 31; Blanding, 17; Southwest, 11; Tooele, 11; Salt Lake, 11; Moab, 4; Brigham City, 9.

Outcomes of the Program

During the 2021–2022 academic year, the first summative evaluation of USU's program was conducted by the Mentoring Program Coordinator, David Law (Law, 2022). Key outcomes from that evaluation depict the following:

1. Students in the mentoring program had a persistence rate from fall 2021 to fall 2022 of 78.57%, compared to 65.22% for the statewide control group and 61.36% for the propensity-matched control group. Because our research design included this propensity-matched control group, we have more confidence that this 17.21% increase in persistence rates for the treatment group compared to the propensity-matched control group is attributed to students participating in the mentoring program.

2. From the beginning of the year to the end of the year, students in the mentoring program significantly increased their sense of belonging at USU and their success at managing the academic environment.

These outcomes support our theory of change logic model in the Appendix. This model describes that when mentors provide their mentees with academic expertise, career guidance, psychosocial support,

and role modeling, this will lead to the mentee feeling like they belong to the USU academic family and that they are successfully adjusting to university life, which will help them persist as they reenroll at the university.

Lessons Learned

Undergraduate mentorship programs across the country seem to lack three specific requirements for success: a theoretical framework (Jacobi, 1991), operational definition (Gershenfeld, 2014), and methodological rigor (Jacobi, 1991; Law et al., 2020; Gershenfeld, 2014). This case study is one example in which a mentoring program attempted to address these concerns. Based on the pilot program and the first year of the statewide launch, the steering committee learned some lessons.

First, all three components are vital to the success and sustainability of the mentoring program. Theoretical guidance is essential to crafting an operational definition of mentoring, and an operational definition is necessary to bridge the connection to academic success.

Once the theoretical framework and definition of mentorship were established, the last component included describing and measuring the mentorship program's independent, intervening, and dependent variables. The independent variables included academic expertise, career guidance, psychosocial support, and role modeling, while the dependent variables consisted of job satisfaction and fulfillment for faculty. The mentees had objective assessments gathered, including persistence rates, GPA, and graduation status. The monthly surveys were crucial in identifying problems with mentorship pairing and providing real-time feedback on the mentorship process.

Second, the steering committee utilized the theory of change logic model (see Appendix) to explain how the mentoring program aids the educational trajectory of the students. Through a series of "if/then" statements, the committee explicitly stated how mentoring helps retain and graduate students. As Jacobi (1991) contends, models and frameworks must have measurable outcomes and not be designed on subjective goals. Chapter 8 discusses the importance of measurable goals. The steering committee spent a considerable amount of time developing the logic model to guide the creation of the mentoring program while establishing a robust methodological approach for evaluation.

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Theory of Change Logic Model of how Faculty-to-Student Mentoring Contributes to Culture of Student Success and Faculty Engagement: Constructs, Theoretical Frameworks, and Assessments USU Statewide Faculty-to-Student Mentoring Program—Revised 12 11 2019

IF/THEN
IF mentees enroll in the mentoring progran, THEN the mentor will provide academic guidance, psychosocial support, and role modeling.

Construct:
    Academic Expertise
Theory:
    Kram's Mentoring Model
Assessment:
    Qualtrics Likert Survey

Construct:
    Career Guidance
Theory:
    Kram's Mentoring Model
Assessment:
    Qualtrics Likert Survey

Construct:
    Psychosocial Support
Theory:
    Kram's Mentoring Model
Assessment:
    Qualtrics Likert Survey

Construct:
    Role Model
Theory:
    Kram's Mentoring Model
Assessment:
    Qualtrics Likert Survey

IF/THEN
IF mentors provide mentees with academic guidance, career support, and role modeling, THEN mentees will successfully adjust to the academic environment and feel like they belong at the university. Mentors will experience greater job satisfaction. (see mentor column.)

Construct:
    Successful Adjustment to the University

Assessment:
    Qualtrics Likert Survey

Construct:
    Sense of Belonging/Connectedness to USU

Theory:
    Tinto's Social Integration Theory

Assessment:
    Qualtrics Likert Survey

IF/THEN
IF mentors help mentees successfully adjust to and gain a sense of belonging, THEN continuing mentorship will motivate mentees to connect to an academic disclpine and delelop goals with a plan to achieve them. Mentors will experience positive intended faculty outcomes listed.

Construct:
    *Internally Motivated Purpose
    *Committed to Goals

Assessment:
    Declaration of major or plan of study. Commitment to goals with plan to achieve them.

IF/THEN
IF mentors help mentees feel like they belong to the university family and are motivated with a plan to achieve their goals, THEN mentees are more likely to obtain their educational goals, which will result in increased persistence, retention, and graduation rates. Mentors will experience positive intended faculty outcomes listed.

Construct:
    Persistence Rates
Assessment:
    Persistence Rates from Registrars Office and AAA

Construct:
    Retention Rates
Assessment:
    Retention Rates from Registrars Office and AAA

Construct:
    Grade Point Average
Assessment:
    Grade Point Average from Registrars Office and AAA

Construct:
    Graduation Rates
Assessment:
    Graduation Rates from Registrars Office and AAA

IF/THEN
IF mentors help the mentee achieve their educational goals, THEN mentors will experience greater job satisfaction and fulfillment.

Intended Outcomes for Faculty

*Greater Job Satisfaction
*Research Opportunities with Students
    *More Connection to Student Resources
    *Develop Relationships with Students/Generativity
    *More Connection to USU Organization
    *Support for Promotion/Tenure Advancement

Assessment:
Mentoring Benefits for Mentors from Qualtrics Likert Survey