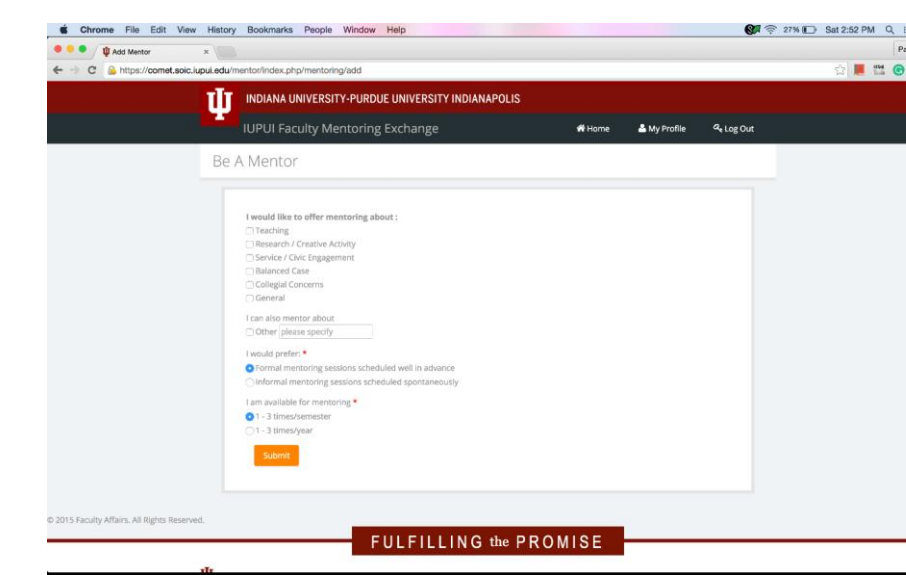


Abstract

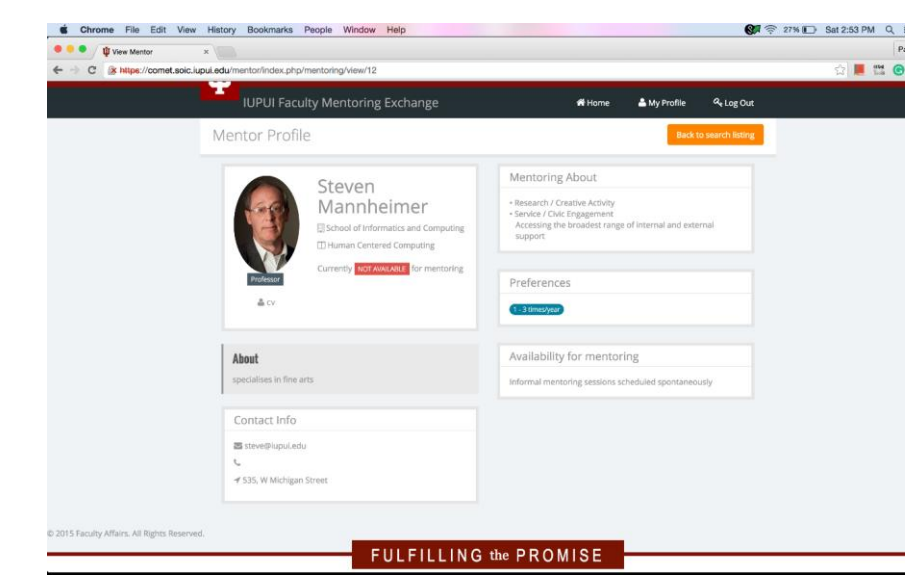
The advent of universal online access for faculty in American universities has made it possible –if, perhaps, not always ideal – for many, most or all of traditional collegial practices to be at least partially structured around some type of virtual or online interaction. As a profession that relies overwhelmingly on the use of language to perform our academic duties, it is inevitable that we would embrace new channels that promise to increase the speed and convenience with which we access verbal information, and distribute our ideas, as well as handling the logistics of meetings, reminding our students of deadlines, etc. However, the process of peer-to-peer mentoring is still very much understood as a face-to-face relationship requiring a nuanced interaction (something that email may never achieve, while video conferencing can at least aspire to). Traditionally, finding a good mentor-mentee matched often relied on a third-party matchmaker or liaison to suggest the initial connection, then hope the match worked. Often department chairs would serve as that liaison. Although this third-party process can work well, it is generally limited by the chair's network of connections (which is not always a qualification for that job), and is inherently a top-down approach that relies on the chair's judgment. As a supplement rather than a replacement for chair-based matchmaking, online platforms (Websites like the IUPUI Faculty Mentoring Exchange) can facilitate the matching of potential mentors and mentees among a cohort of professionals who share common interests and, ideally, are geographically close.

Designing the Mentoring Exchange

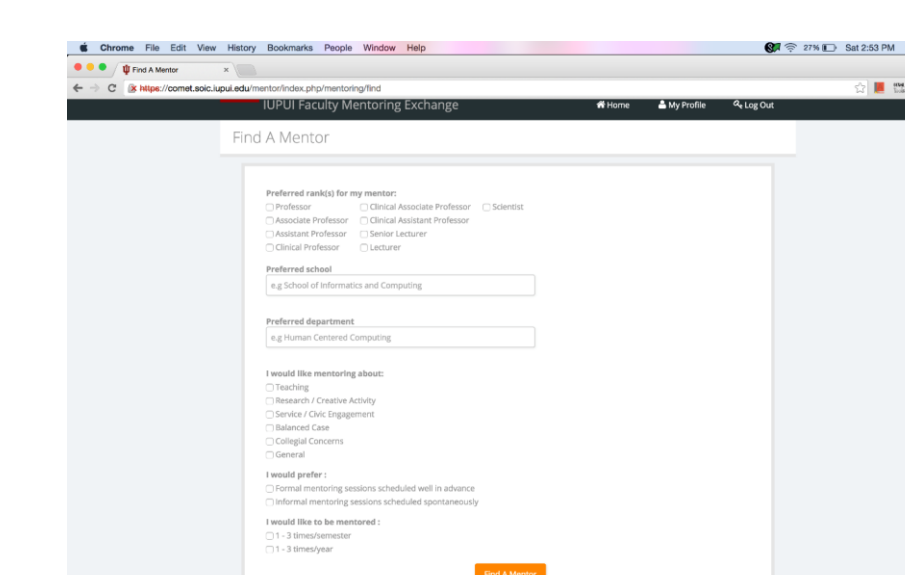
In 2015, members of the Department of Human-Centered Computing (HCC) in the School of Informatics and Computing (SoIC) began consultation with the office of the Senior Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, to design the IUPUI Faculty Mentoring Exchange. From the beginning, this was conceived as a simple, intuitive Website that would operate automatically, without a third-party intervention. The automated process would require potential mentees and mentors each to complete a checkbox questionnaire enumerating their areas of expertise and interest (e.g. "I would like mentoring about effective classroom teaching." And, "I have experience in developing effective classroom techniques."), along with other self-identified categories or preferences ("I would like to be mentored by a woman.") With a checklist of several dozen categories, the database backend of the Website could then perform a relatively simple calculation to offer mentees a list of potential mentors ranked by the number of categorical matches, a sort of academic mentoring "compatibility." It was decided that it was best if the Exchange would generate such compatibility lists only for mentees seeking mentors, and then leave the responsibility for any further transaction or communication to the mentee. Further consultation with various faculty groups and committees helped broaden and refine the Exchange checklist with categories and language that were more inclusive of a broader range of individuals who might self-identify in different ways. It was also decided that the Exchange would not attempt to facilitate any peer-to-peer communications from within the Website, simply because developing such an internal communications process would be very time-consuming and expensive, and because other established communications mechanisms already existed, e.g. campus mail, email and telephone. The overall functional strategy of the Exchange focused on a very lean, "Yellow Pages" approach in which providers offered services and potential clients initiated the contact – and the system did not intervene before, during or after that. Although more pro-active functional systems were discussed – perhaps, for example, including an automated feature that regularly communicated with participants to determine if they had successfully established a mentoring relationship – the SAVC believed this would feel intrusive, and perhaps a little "Big Brother-ish."



"Find A Mentor" Form



"Be a Mentor" Form



Mentor Profile

Future Work

In order to continue to improve the IUPUI Mentoring Exchange, and even to determine if it continues to merit institutional support, it would be valuable to pursue these goals:

1. More promotional activities to solicit a greater number of Exchange users.
2. Focus-group discussions, interviews and follow-up questionnaires delivered among current and potential users (and institutional stakeholders) to identify the perceived and functional strengths and weaknesses of the Exchange, and areas for improvement.
3. Design and implementation of supplementary platform features or services identified in #2.
4. Conduct a process of data analysis to detect usage patterns in the Exchange, correlate these to established best practices in other mentoring programs and strategies, and implement new features and functions to enhance the value of the Exchange to the IUPUI community.

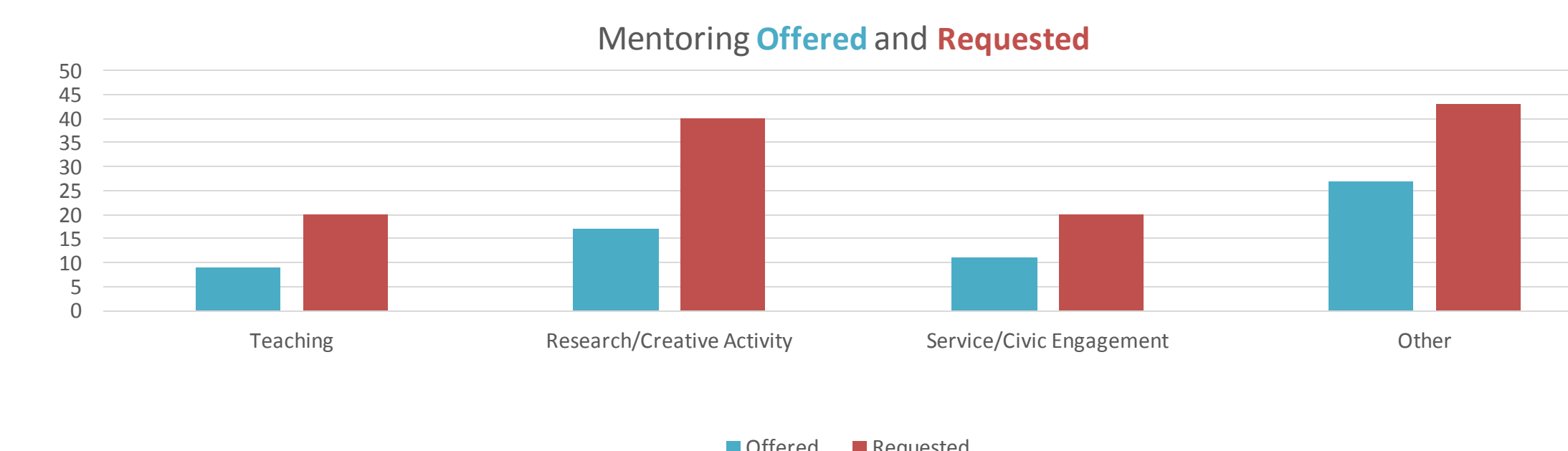
Previous Work

The international organization IEEE offers the MentorCentre: "an online program that facilitates the matching of IEEE members for the purpose of establishing a mentoring partnership." This platform allows mentors and mentees to self-identify and self-match. [1][2]. Another relevant example might be found in the British government website intended to match mentors and mentees for business development and entrepreneurship: [3] And an Indian (not Indiana) company offers this rather grand opportunity:[4]. Although many universities offer mentoring services and assistance through various types of internal websites, there seem to be very few programs at major universities similar to the voluntary, user-controlled network that we proposed. The University of California, San Bernardino offers this [5]. The University of Michigan-Flint offers the Faculty Mentoring Network:[6] Scholarly studies of such process are similarly few and far between. For example, the term "online mentoring portals" yielded zero results in Google Scholar. Similarly, "online mentoring exchange" or "...exchanges" produced only one result. And, "online faculty mentoring clearinghouse" or "online faculty mentoring list" offered zero results. The simple phrase "mentoring portal" offers 19 results, and there is some promising information in these results. The number of search results rises as the terms suggest systems in which the mentoring occurs online. With so little precedent, the partnership of SoIC and SAVC believed it prudent to design the simplest online platform possible that still offered some value beyond a bare listing of available resources. We decided this should be a user-driven open exchange in which users (both those seeking and those offering mentoring) would be able to declare their interest/availability – and then to let the users complete the communications that could begin the mentoring process.

Results

The Exchange has attracted 70 users. Of these, 28 volunteered to serve as mentors, and the other 42 have asked for mentoring. It would be premature to say these numbers indicated significant trends, because as a trial or prototype project, the Exchange has not yet established itself as an obvious useful and accepted platform – like, for instance, the Yellow Pages – so the initial cohort of users may not clearly represent the general population of faculty colleagues. Still, these data seem to suggest the campus has a faculty population interested in finding mentoring. Again with the caveat that these numbers are open to interpretation, this initial analysis also would suggest, perhaps surprisingly, that potential mentees do not obviously feel that their research efforts require any more mentoring than their work in teaching and service – although there does seem to be a general eagerness from potential mentors to mentor about research. In view of the fact that these self-selected categories were not mutually exclusive – i.e. any Exchange user could check as many categories as he/she chose – these relatively equal categorical selections would seem to suggest that our colleagues are seeking mentoring in all areas of academic work more-or-less equally.

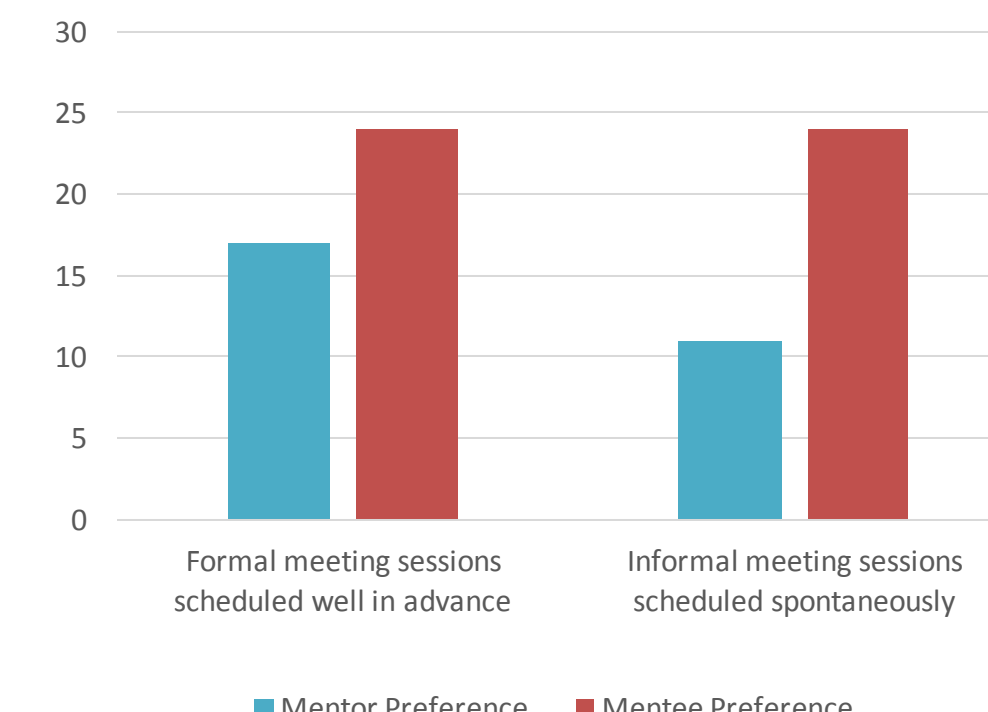
Total Users: 70
Number of mentors: 28. Number of mentees: 42
Mentoring offered: Research – 17; Service – 11; Teaching – 9
Mentoring requested: Research – 40; Service – 19; Teaching – 20



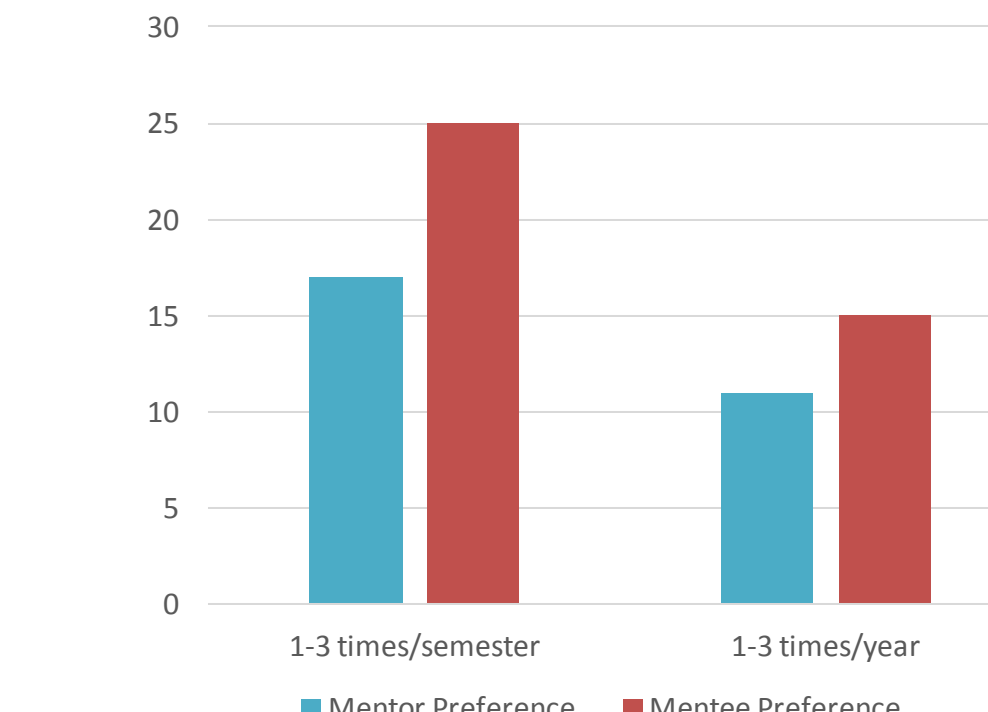
Exchange Registration (Mentors and Mentees)



Meeting Scheduling Preferences



Preferences for Meeting Frequency



References

- [1] <https://ieeetv.ieee.org/ieee-products/ieee-mentoring-connection>
- [2] http://www.ieee.org/membership_services/membership/young_professionals/mentoring_connection.html
- [3] <http://www.mentorsme.co.uk>
- [4] <https://www.procademia.com>
- [5] <http://facultymentoringnetwork.csusb.edu>
- [6] <http://www.umflint.edu/associateprovostundergrad/faculty-mentoring-program>