



ADVANCE Mentor Training Workshop December 2005

On Friday, December 2, 2005, the ADVANCE Program sponsored a pilot Mentor Training workshop for faculty. The target audience was science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) junior faculty, their mentors, and chairs in all STEM departments.

- Sixteen junior STEM faculty attended. This was approximately 59% of those hired in the past 3-4 years.
- Twenty-one mentors, senior faculty with assigned mentees, also attended. This number represents approximately 58% of STEM faculty mentors.
- Seven department chairs also participated.

Based on input from attendees, ADVANCE plans to fine-tune the workshop and repeat it for a larger audience. The ultimate goal of this program is to implement more formal and accountable mentoring procedures in each department and college, perhaps even establishing a university-wide mentoring policy.

Introduction

There is increasing recognition that a more formal focus on mentoring, both in the academy and the general workplace, is needed. Effective mentoring leads to more effective job performance, increased job satisfaction across many dimensions, and therefore, higher employee retention rates.

It is a myth that mentoring derives from a natural ability and that everyone knows intrinsically how to mentor well. Mentoring has both a career and a psycho-social focus, and covers a wide array of roles, from teacher, to advisor, to advocate, to role model, to counselor. Knowing how one functions best as a mentor is worth spending some time considering, as well as knowing the particular needs of the mentee.

Varying degrees of mentoring relationships exist between junior faculty and their mentors here at URI, from highly engaged and productive, to nonexistent. Mentor assignments have been largely informal, and expectations of the mentor as well as the mentee are usually not made explicit.

Although there may exist an intuitive sense about what defines a good mentoring relationship, engaging in a more structured analysis is a valuable activity for both mentors and junior faculty. This workshop provided an opportunity to:

- Concretely identify particular mentoring preferences or needs as a junior faculty member
- Understand what the mentee is entitled to expect, and what is expected from the mentor
- Consider ways to improve the mentoring relationship, if necessary
- Consider whether or not the mentor is providing everything necessary to the mentee, and if additional resources might be helpful
- Consider aspects of the mentoring relationship that will assist the department chair in most effectively matching mentors and junior faculty

Evaluations and Expectations: Summary of Written Responses

Both groups — mentees and mentors — expressed an overall favorable response to the workshop. The most common request with regard to improving the meeting was to provide more time for mentee-mentor interaction, both one-on-one and

in small group discussions. At least one participant from each group suggested that the materials could have been provided in advance of the workshop. One individual suggested that the workshop be held at a different time of year. An appreciation was expressed by both groups for the opportunity to hear the concerns of all who participated. Breck Peters' presentation was a highlight of the event.

Mentees reported that they were prompted to think in more specific terms about their needs and wants from the relationship. But only four mentees indicated that what they had learned would improve their current relationships. Three individuals reported that the content of the workshop would not improve their situations, but reasons for this were not given. Small group discussion notes describe the ideal mentoring relationship as a continuing dialogue between mentee and mentor, with the mentor sharing advice about past experiences and giving guidance about how things work at the University. The relationship, not necessarily formal, should provide positive feedback and be collaborative.

Mentors expressed a desire for more concrete suggestions, possibly through case studies. Responses indicated that the workshop yielded an increased awareness of the mentees' needs, the need for good mentoring, and the desire for this initiative to involve efforts at the dean's level. Nine mentors reported that the workshop would improve their mentoring relationships.

The most common reason for wanting a mentor, reported by the mentee group, was to receive advice in balancing work and other responsibilities, and setting priorities. Mentees expected to be able to engage in, and gain from, discussions surrounding career advancement (promotion and tenure, academic activities that would be of benefit, facilitating professional contacts, assisting with proposal preparation). Expectations regarding the amount of time spent with the mentor ranged from 2 hours/week to 2 hours/month. The most common response was 1 hour/week.

The most common reasons for wanting to be a mentor included the desire to be supportive, pass on knowledge, and assist with career advancement (prepare for tenure, etc). Other reasons of note included a desire to improve the academic quality of the University, build the reputation of the school, and ensure high departmental standards. The most common response given for the amount of time that the mentors would be available for this activity was 1 hour/week.

One college dean participated in the event and indicated that his role was not recognized.

The Day's Agenda

Junior Faculty Session (mentees) : 10:30 am – 12:00 pm
Lunch (junior faculty are joined by their mentors and chairs): 12:00 – 12:50 pm
Mentor/Chair Session: 1:00 pm – 2:30 pm

Workshop Agenda (for both sessions)

- Introduction – Barb Silver, ADVANCE Program Director (10 minutes)
- Small Group Discussion Activity & Report Out: Mentoring Experiences – Faye Boudreaux-Bartels, Professor & Chair, Electrical & Computer Engineering (30 minutes)
- Best Practices Presentations (35 minutes):
 - Types of Mentors and Types of Mentoring – Faye Boudreaux-Bartels
 - Potential Pitfalls/Challenges to Mentoring – C. Breck Peters, Professor Sociology & Anthropology
- Importance of Expectations – Karen Wishner, Professor Oceanography (15 minutes)

Workshop Findings and Evaluations

Junior Faculty (Mentee) Session: Small Group Discussion on Mentoring Experiences

Faculty were asked to consider the following questions individually, discuss their answers with their group, and report back to the larger group. The responses are tallied below.

1. How Are People in Your Department Mentored Now?
 - Informal Style — both here and at former institution
 - Time Management — focus, prioritize
 - Answer Questions — i.e.; “How to”; “Where do I go?”
 - Provide Information — What you don't know to ask, Deadlines, Etc.
 - Open Doors — advocate, networks,
 - Keep spirits up — Cheerleader, build Confidence, Realistic expectations

2. Who Were Your Mentors?
 - Many- Informal and Formal- Most faculty are helpful
 - Anyone can be a mentor- All over campus- senior, staff
3. What Makes An Ideal Mentor?
 - Separate — no conflict of interests, i.e. different area
 - Proactive — Takes initiative
 - Political Advisor — How to avoid conflicts- be a buffer, Advocate in political situation
 - Create opportunities professionally — Big talks, Papers Collaborations, Review of work- 2nd opinion
4. How Do Your Experiences Compare?
 - Not very much
 - More accessibility
 - Level of Involvement
 - “in” versus “out” of department
 - whether mentor is in same field — if not —> lack of understanding
 - has advantages and disadvantages
 - sometimes better to be unfamiliar
 - whether they connect you with others

Senior Faculty (Mentor) Session

1. What Does Mentoring Mean To You?
 - Networking
 - Listening — Advice re administration, students, etc.
 - Social aspects
 - Modeling
 - Promote professional success, Tenure advice
 - Protection from too much advocacy — Need clear definition and university sanction, Do they want to be mentored
2. What Would You Like Mentoring To Look Like?
 - Have a formal process
 - Accountability and rewards
 - Mentees know what to expect
3. How Has It Changed?
 - What mentor? (it was Anti-Mentor)
 - Was pro-active-both mentees and mentors (May or may not be effective)
 - Was a secret- “only when I was in trouble”
 - Every person should serve as a mentor, from junior faculty on up to provide a shared sense of responsibility
 - Department should have a clear sense of where it is going
 - How URI operates — How to listen, Prof. Know, Life experience

Small group discussion among mentors:

1. What does mentoring mean to you?
 - Creating networks, making introductions, making connections — Providing collaborative problem-solving
 - HELP! Sounding board, supportive advice
 - Protection, support, advocate — Helping mentee to learn about rights
 - Discussing opportunities and situations with the mentee
 - Integration
 - Listening and understanding problems of the mentee
 - Provide information about how University & government functions — Provide assistance in navigating the system
 - Being available to answer questions — Teaching philosophy, based on own experiences, Career direction
 - Sharing my own experiences in order to help — Providing thoughtful guidance on all aspects of a new career

Ideas for future:

- Have specific advice
- Have specific case study discussions – list of sticky situations – ask for suggestions for list of other mentoring dilemmas – ask for solutions from group
- ideas for policy creation at end
- Have worksheet that both share together

Next Steps: Develop policy – college/university