

CARING FOR THE WHOLE PERSON: GUIDELINES FOR ADVANCING UNDERGRADUATE MENTORSHIP.

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CARING FOR THE WHOLE PERSON: GUIDELINES FOR ADVANCING UNDERGRADUATE MENTORSHIP

Most commentaries and empirical investigations on mentorship have focused on academic and professional outcomes to date. Drawing on literature from various areas of mentorship, we propose an approach of effective mentorship based on caring and compassion for personal aspects of young adult mentees. As such, we outline characteristics of a successful mentor for undergraduates and provide suggestions for hiring considerations and research.

Young adults entering college confront a myriad of social, academic, and psychological challenges. College students face pressures to achieve, become active on campus, and explore social groups, often while coping with being away from loved ones for the first time. Although many students make the transition successfully, some fall prey to anxiety, depression, and alcohol and substance abuse.

University instructors have a unique opportunity to serve as personal connections, informational resources, and professional role models for young adults. The role of mentor is an often overlooked, yet invaluable, aspect of faculty jobs. Indeed, freshmen assigned to mentors show greater gains in problem solving, goal setting, and decision making compared to their non-mentored counterparts (Cosgrove, 1986). Faculty mentorship programs have also been positively associated with effective college transitioning, bolstered college self-efficacy and happiness in a higher education setting (Santos & Reigadas, 2002), as well as improved research skills (Kardash, 2000).

Although the need for mentors is clear, the exact role of mentors on college campuses is far more complex. Most mentorship models focus solely on the development of professional or academic skills (e.g., Kardash, 2000; Pfund, Pribbenow, Branchaw, Lauffer, & Handelsman, 2006; Walker & LeBoldus, 1993), and often pertain only to graduate students (e.g., Cesa & Fraser, 1989; Zvolensky, Herschell, & McNeil, 2000). Although these models appear largely successful, they may not apply to the broader scope of issues experienced by undergraduates. Therefore, we propose that mentorship of undergraduates involves more than a typical apprenticeship model in which a professor or researcher guides a student/trainee through academic material or research design, respectively. Rather, successful mentorship of young adults requires adoption of the notion of "cura personalis" or caring for the whole person. Mentoring of young undergraduate adults from such a perspective can facilitate remarkable outcomes.

In the following sections, we outline qualities of the successful mentor drawn from empirical literature in other areas of mentorship (e.g., mentorship of graduate students) and personal experiences. We additionally offer recommendations for future advancement of mentorship of young adults. Although we acknowledge a paucity of empirical data to support some of the proposed characteristics of effective undergraduate mentorship, we should note that this discussion represents one of the first efforts to articulate a compassion-based mentorship model above and beyond those with goals of academic or professional training.

Available

In a sample of general internists, Luckhaupt et al. (2005) reported that mentorship is most effective when done in person. Likewise, availability has been cited as a pivotal factor to seek in mentors (Haack & Smith, 2000) and maintain reciprocal mentor-mentee relationships (Glazer & Hannafin, 2005). This principle applies to undergraduates especially. At a time when many college students have feelings of isolation, face-to-face availability is crucial. A faculty member can convey availability by in-class and syllabus statements, having an open door policy, being visible in the department and on campus, and using small time slots before and after class to get to know students. Fleeting

moments of communication and involvement with students can go far in establishing an approachable demeanor. Related to personal availability is the notion that a mentor conveys openness to students by maintaining a classroom in which students freely express opposing viewpoints and by promoting intellectual discussion of topics. This openness may easily translate into student perceptions of being approachable. Likewise, being perceived as an approachable educator can be a pathway to becoming a mentor for students.

Although there is a relative lack of empirical data in this specific aspect of mentorship, availability of mentors through many of the strategies above have proven personally successful. As an undergraduate, I (the first author, RC), was fortunate enough to have a mentor encourage me to visit during office hours, attend to me via personal contact after class, and offer regular reminders to his students of availability. In beginning my commitment on the other side of the mentor-mentee relationship, I have tried to emulate such openness with some degree of success.

Let us reiterate a word of caution concerning availability first put forth by Casto and colleagues (2005): It is imperative to both set aside enough time for mentees while still allocating sufficient efforts for other obligations. This can be a difficult task. It may prove prudent to openly discuss times and limitations of your availability with students upfront. This will encourage them to come to you while also avoiding causing them feelings of discouragement or infringement on your time. Establishing boundaries of your availability is equally as important as being available at all.

Knowledgeable

An effective mentor is cognizant of the variety of unique issues college students face. The college experience presents a host of potential difficulties such as rejection, homesickness, and academic stress. Inadequate adjustment to such challenges produce elevated risk for depression, anxiety, and interpersonal conflict. Faculty in clinical or counseling psychology, social work, and other helping professions are often approached by students with personal concerns. Although these, and other, faculty should not act as therapist, their knowledge of the developmental issues of young adults is helpful. Regardless of one's field, a mentor's familiarity with referral resources (e.g., counseling center, LGBTQA organizations) can provide proper guidance to students in need.

From an anecdotal perspective, we have benefited from knowledgeable mentors and had the opportunity to guide several undergraduates based solely on awareness of campus organizations. For instance, during a campus program, a student approached me (RC) with a problem of a psychological nature. I was able to use knowledge of campus resources in order to walk with him to seek assistance. Knowledge of campus resources, in combination with being perceived as available and empathic, can convey trustworthiness to students. As I have learned from firsthand experience, knowledge of resources can aid students in social connections and, in the best instances, improve physical or psychological well-being for young adults.

Educated in Diversity Issues

Minority students who drop out of higher education often cite lack of career goals or academic direction as reasons (Thile & Matt, 1995). These students may benefit from mentorship for not only professional guidance, but also for a sense of belonging. Young adults prefer mentors of the same gender (Gumbiner, 1998) and ethnic background because such similarity produces higher perceptions of support (e.g., Santos & Reigadas, 2002). Two important notes can be drawn from these data. First, potential mentors might seek students of similar demographic characteristics to enhance the chances for success with students. Second, some cases exist where establishing same-sex or same-ethnicity relationships may not always be feasible. In such instances, mentors can draw on empirical data and consultation to become educated in issues of diversity. This process may take time, but the benefits to students will be well worth the energy.

Empathic

Empathy was shown to be linked with both willingness to act as a mentor and actual service in the role of mentor (Allen, 2003). Furthermore, empathic mentoring bolstered perceptions of mentorship effectiveness and teaching self-efficacy in a sample of early childhood educators (Clifford, 1999). Teachers in the helping professions are at an advantage to mentor; they are trained to be attuned to verbal and non-verbal cues, and are often involved in psychotherapy or counseling practice. In turn, mentors can apply basic therapeutic skills to mentoring young adults. For instance, using the tenets of empathy and positive regard can aid the mentor-mentee relationship without it becoming therapy. Such skills are not limited to practicing psychologists; faculty in many areas of higher education and those with ample experience are likely to be familiar with such principles. Also, training programs can be developed by higher education administrators and/or psychology faculty to teach faculty basic empathic skills such as active listening and communicating understanding. By communicating understanding and care, young adults are provided a source of worth and someone to rely on in the framework of a potentially daunting college life.

Norman and Ganser (2004) proffered an example of how humanistic components of empathy can facilitate mentorship in the context of mentoring neophyte teachers. One sagacious offering authors provide is that "it is essential for the mentor to listen to the mentee" (p. 133). Listening includes attention to both verbal and non-verbal behaviors of mentees in order to accurately capture what is going on in their world. Norman and Ganser (2004) advise mentors to ask questions in order to fully explore the mentee's experience. They further discuss an "empathic attunement" in which the mentor can reflect or echo the mentee's feelings. Although their discussion is not of undergraduate mentorship, these humanistic principles hold true for young adult mentoring. Listening to undergraduates' concerns, and subsequently communicating that understanding, can build feelings of understanding and a sense of connection.

Personable

College life is not limited to classes. Conversations about other topics allow a mentor to get to know students over time so that faculty advice given can fit the student's broader goals. Modeling an appropriate level of self-disclosure assists these discussions, as does well-timed humor. Indeed, self-disclosure and showing a lighter side demonstrate that faculty have experienced many of the same challenges as students. There is some evidence that a degree of personal intimacy, or self-disclosure, facilitates mentorship relationships in a professional domain (Rogers & Holloway, 1993). Additionally, we can attest to this notion from the perspective of both an undergraduate mentee and graduate instructor mentor. Experience has shown us that, in many successful mentorship relationships, there is a willingness of the mentor to take a personal interest in the student's life. From this standpoint, a successful mentor does not pry into a student's life; rather, they communicate a willingness to be open by asking basic questions and utilizing appropriate self-disclosure. If the young adult mentee is comfortable, humor and self-disclosure can result in better reciprocal understanding of each others' personalities.

Encouraging/Supportive

Much was written on the link between supportiveness and mentorship (e.g., Gibson, 2005; Puntill, 2005). Gibson (2005) showed that supportive and mentorship relationships are perceived as distinct entities. In a mentorship framework, graduate students indicated support as a key characteristic for effective mentorship (Cronan-Hillix, Gensheimer, Cronan-Hillix, & Davidson, 1996). While we acknowledge that a supportive faculty member does not necessarily equate to a mentor as is suggested by Gibson, we maintain that supportiveness is a vital facet of a successful mentor's character.

Encouragement is especially important to undergraduates because they are usually less independent and emotionally mature, and they face more novel circumstances than do graduate students. The effective mentor does not coddle, but rather guides students through critical thinking about academic and life choices, and encourages them as they learn new skills. To quote Casto and colleagues (2005), mentors can "catch students on the edge" (p. 335), or identify and reach out to those students who may be on the fringe of academic society. Undergraduates who may

not seek out mentorship on their own are possibly those most in need. Recognizing and extending mentorship opportunities to those students can have tremendously positive impacts.

Passionate

A common principle identified in management literature is that passion breeds passion (Seifer & Economy, 2001; Weinreich, 2004). Thus, mentors should have passion for their field and for their mentees. Communicating passion in your mentoring relationships with students (as well as teaching style) spreads positive thinking and galvanizes young adults to action. Passion or commitment to the mentorship relationship is also significantly predictive of quality and support for graduate students of color (Ortiz-Walters & Gilson, 2005). What we can take from work on passion and commitment to mentees is that the best lesson a mentor can instill in a young adult is to pursue his or her goals vigorously and for the sake of happiness. We see no better function a mentor can play.

Guidelines for Advancement of Mentorship of Undergraduates

The present discussion should not be considered an exhaustive list of effective mentorship traits. Moreover, we acknowledge that not all students require mentorship (Stead, 1997). Many students are resourceful and find their way without much assistance. However, mentors are a crucial option for young adults who are overwhelmed by life choices, large classrooms, new living situations, and little stability. Mentors who care for the whole person can provide students with a smile and sense of connection, and at best, become a tremendous springboard for personal and professional development. Finally, we admit that some of the anecdotal information offered may have more to do with the individuals involved rather than span across all potential mentor-mentee relationships.

These limitations notwithstanding, we provide several recommendations for advancement of mentorship of young adults:

Training for Mentors. In light of the significant role mentors play in encouraging personal and professional growth, we argue for Greenback's (2006) position that mentorship and service should be an important consideration in departmental and university-wide policy. Indeed, Johnson and Huwe (2002) suggested that mentorship potential should be a hiring criterion and that new faculty mentors should receive training to develop their skills. We advocate for mentorship as a component of tenure decisions as well. Mentorship can be learned (Pfund et al., 2006), and although some faculty members possess an inherent talent, training programs would benefit virtually all faculty.

Training for mentors may include, but not be limited to, any or all of the following methods: (a) pairing new mentors with an experienced mentor, (b) assigning of readings on the topic of mentorship, (c) reviewing of mentorship ratings from student mentees as a source of constructive feedback, and (d) establishing training situations for practice purposes (e.g., Gagen & Bowie, 2005; Parker, 2002). Daresh and Playko (1992) proffer a conceptual model of matching new and experienced mentors. Of note is that authors emphasize the importance of flexibility of styles for both new and veteran mentors. They also enumerate four distinct styles of mentorship that we view as potentially important in considering effectiveness of training models. The four styles are scientific, directive, supportive, and facilitative.

Attracting Motivated Mentors. Mentorship has unequivocal value for young adult development. A logical question follows of how to attract motivated and skilled mentors, especially in academic settings replete with pressures to publish research, participate in service, and teach effectively. One way to attract mentors is to compensate them for training and/or active efforts toward mentoring undergraduates in organizations such as honor societies, support groups, and student government. Academicians are faced with overwhelming time constraints and financial pressures just as any other professionals. This fact may hinder potentially successful mentors from electing to pursue mentorship in favor of other monetarily-driven undertakings. Small compensation may serve as sufficient motivation to attract mentors for young adults in need.

Another manner mentors can be obtained is to highlight this as an important portion of tenure and promotion. Admittedly, this goal is easier said than done. Current zeitgeist in academia often emphasizes external funding, number of publications, and other factors unrelated to mentorship. Indeed, tenure and promotion review guidelines arguably focus more on research and teaching above service and mentoring. Accomplishing inclusion of mentoring or service activities may prove an arduous task due to the prevailing approach to tenure and promotion. However, we support careful consideration and concerted efforts by other academicians and higher education administrators of reframing current thought on what constitutes promotion. While research productivity is important toward the aim of advancing scientific knowledge and application, we urge educators to heed advice of Gonzalez (2006) not to ignore the equal importance of mentoring the next generation of scientists, scholars, and professionals in order to foster continued success of academic settings. Only with a shift in current focus on tenure and promotion requirements can this be achieved.

Colleges and universities can also incorporate emphasis on mentorship in public advertising. This idea is beneficial on two levels. First, public promotion of mentorship as a portion of advanced education will appeal to consumers. Many college students are away from home for the first time. Communication of mentorship as an expressed part of the aims of a college can reassure parents of their children's well-being. Advertising of mentorship may, in turn, help appropriate administrative funding for mentorship recruitment and training in light of consumer (parent and student) desire for mentorship as an integral part of the educational experience.

Research Development. The paucity of empirical data on mentorships provides a unique opportunity for further inquiry. While some of the present components of successful mentors have shown empirical effectiveness, others are drawn from our experiences in and out of the classroom. Design and implementation of the compassion/sensitivity-based mentorship approach is a research undertaking worthy of study. This idea may be well suited to a private or public institution with smaller class sizes because mentorship in larger universities may be more difficult due to the mere size of classes and resulting anonymity of many students.

Conclusion

Mentorship is not easy. It is, however, a significant factor in healthy development of adolescents and young adults in search of Erikson's (1968) notions of identity and intimacy. Young adults are in search of self-image, belonging, and social bonds both at the personal and professional levels. Good mentors facilitate such processes. We provided a detailed, but not exhaustive, list of traits we deem necessary for excellence in mentorship toward these goals. We also discussed methods to develop mentors and advance the field mentorship. It is our hope that higher education institutions will galvanize efforts to help developing young adults.

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