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MENTORING POSTSECONDARY TENURE-TRACK FACULTY: A THEORY-BUILDING CASE STUDY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR INSTITUTIONAL POLICY

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The featured research uses theory-building case study to understand the experiences of junior faculty in a mentoring program. Findings suggest the importance of professional interaction for faculty members' integration into their campus communities. An explanatory model illustrates the findings and supplements discussion of the implications for administrators in terms of retention of new faculty members in postsecondary settings.

Keywords: faculty, mentoring, tenure-track, theory

Higher education institutions now recognize the importance and benefits of mentoring to meet the needs of junior faculty. Benefits of mentoring include collaboration and career enhancement. The following provides a brief overview of traditional and nontraditional formal mentoring strategies in academe.

Traditional Mentoring: Three Common Strategies

In traditional mentoring, a more experienced person (the mentor) guides, facilitates, and counsels a less experienced protégée (Holmes, Danley, & Hinton-Hudson, 2007). Wasburn (2007) views traditional mentoring as an informal process in which mentors and protégées come together without administrative procedures. These relationships are most successful when the participants share a common vision. Research reveals that faculty members receiving traditional mentoring services attain increased job success, while the mentor gains career improvement, departmental recognition, or personal gratification (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004). An assumption exists that mentoring renders greater benefits when a mentor and protégée are of the same gender and race or ethnicity, in the same discipline, and share similar professional interests (Budge, 2006).

Three common strategies of traditional mentoring programs include matching mentors and protégées, intradepartmental matching, and cultural mentoring. The first common strategy occurs when tenure-track faculty are paired up with senior tenured faculty. Traditionally, mentoring via this strategy takes place as an informal relationship in which the senior faculty (the mentor) is assumed to be chronologically older and more experienced than the new faculty (the protégée), the selection process is not handled with much thought or care, and mentoring consists of unplanned meetings (Budge, 2006). Savage, Karp, and Logue (2004) criticize this strategy's inherent power differentials due to the fact that the mentor, a senior tenured academic, may be older and hold more experience and power within an institutional context. Furthermore, they argue that this mentoring strategy does not encourage collaboration, but instead reflects a hierarchical structure, which may prompt intimidation. Wasburn (2007) agrees that this strategy presents numerous potential difficulties, as correct matching between mentor and protégée can be challenging, and unclear goals or expectations may precipitate problems.

Employing intradepartmental dyads, the second common strategy, occurs when protégées are matched with more experienced faculty within the same department. Time constraints and time management can become burdens between the mentor and protégée due to scheduling differences (Ewing et al., 2008). The mentor and protégée may

hold different goals and expectations. Consequently, June (2008) reports that tenure-track faculty often do not seek answers to specific questions from their assigned mentors, but seek mentors who can address questions about the academic environment generally. Mentors outside the department could become important resources (McDaniel, 2006). Such interdepartmental mentoring could result in greater collegiality between faculty members and increase interdisciplinary networking opportunities across departments.

Traditional mentoring can result in a lack of cultural awareness between two parties. Having the same race or same gender is a major commonality of many informal mentoring pairs. In fact, studies have illustrated mentoring relationships in which mentors' inadequate cultural awareness resulted in novices receiving less career and emotional support than protégées who had mentors of similar cultures (Chan, 2008). When discussing cultural awareness, it is imperative to keep in mind the increase of faculty of color in higher education settings. However, faculty of color continue to remain disproportionately low within U.S. institutions. Providing effective mentoring strategies that consider the importance of race, ethnicity, and gender offers a method for retaining the junior members of this group (Stanley & Lincoln, 2005).

Insufficient time, poor scheduling, unplanned pairing processes, and inadequate understanding of the mentoring process can be devastating to the mentor, to the protégée, or to both (Ewing et al., 2008). Pairing junior and senior faculty does not always result in effective mentoring relationships or assure success in novices' chosen fields. Nevertheless, continued research on mentoring promises to unveil best practices that lead to mutual benefits within mentoring relationships.

Formal Non-traditional Mentoring

Formal non-traditional mentoring refers to any other type of professional relationship that does not reflect traditional mentoring models (Budge, 2006). As universities have recognized the benefits of mentoring and have begun working to meet the needs of diverse faculty, they have created formal mentoring programs. According to Budge, formal mentoring includes scheduled meeting sessions and methodical matching of a mentor to a protégée. It deviates from the traditional notion of the mentor being older, more experienced, heterosexual, or White male, and instead includes all individuals, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, class, or sexuality (2006). This less traditional approach to mentoring comprises two common mentoring strategies: forming collaborative relationships and exercising cultural awareness.

There are formal mentoring programs that include more collaborative learning relationships where the concept of exchanging ideas exists, as opposed to having a hierarchical relationship in which the novice provides little input due to less experience. Holmes, Danley, and Hinton-Hudson (2007) describe the concept of "co-mentoring," where both the mentor and protégée contribute to the learning experience of the other. In this mentoring strategy, even though one person may possess more knowledge or experience than the other, each is equally responsible for providing input for the mentoring process. This collaborative relationship is non-hierarchical and involves building a community of more than two participants, which Wasburn (2007) asserts increases the mentoring benefits for the protégée. Darwin and Palmer (2009) further report that junior faculty members are more likely to receive mentoring support from a variety of people—including those with similar rank—via peer mentoring. Peer mentorship provides advantages such as an increase in networking, confidence, commitment, professional advancement, and a decrease in isolation (2009). Furthermore, Wasburn (2007) states that such professional relationships empower mentors and protégées by providing them with a wide range of perspectives and advice. This non-traditional mentoring strategy increases the likelihood of more faculty members being mentored for success towards tenure and promotion.

Promoting cultural awareness has risen as a non-traditional mentoring strategy as universities diversify in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. Crutcher (2007) reports that mentors need not have the same cultural backgrounds as their protégées. However, there needs to be an understanding of the impact of race and gender in individuals' work and personal lives in the mentoring relationship. Also, Chan (2008) argues the necessity and empowerment of open discussions about race and culture, which may result in a wide range of understanding for both the mentor and protégée. Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2004) agree that mentors need to develop knowledge of novices' cultures and worldviews. Trust is an essential element that must develop in the mentoring relationship, and it has been suggested that ongoing and honest discussions about race and racism in cross-cultural mentoring

relationships need to take place in order for it to emerge (Chan, 2008). With this type of formal mentoring strategy, both the mentor and protégée develop a relationship, beyond teaching, research, and publication, towards a cultural awareness that allows for more open communication.

Regardless of the mentoring strategy utilized for non-traditional mentoring, formal mentoring relationships are created when there is a logical approach in matching mentors and protégées. This can result in increased job satisfaction (Barker, 2007). Having a comprehensive view of applicable, relevant mentoring strategies can help mentoring programs fulfill the needs of diverse staff in terms of race, ethnicity, and culture (Chan, 2008).

This study intends to highlight the experiences of junior faculty participants of a mentoring program and their perceptions of the tenure and promotion processes at their institution. Understanding the experiences of these members of the professoriate may offer insight into the challenges faced, as well as barriers to occupational satisfaction and productivity. Academics' perspectives promise to illuminate potential strategies for faculty development and retention.

HISTORY OF THE MENTORING PROGRAM

The featured mentoring program emerged from the activism of a research university's Women's Caucus of Faculty Senate. While all faculty were eligible for participation, the primary goal of the program was the retention of female and minority faculty (Davis & Single, 2009). A former member of the Women's Caucus served as the mentoring program's first director and was compensated by a one course buy-out. The program was co-sponsored by the Provost's Office and the Faculty Senate. This partnership ensured faculty input on the program's development. Upon the first director's retirement, a new director enhanced the program with research based practices to expand and strengthen the initiative (Davis & Single, 2009). Additional funding was provided to the new director for this expansion.

THE PARTICIPANTS

The majority of program participants included tenure-track assistant professors, while one individual held a clinical assistant professor position. Eight men and three women participated in the study, for a total of 11 faculty members. While the majority were White, two participants were racial minorities. This research took place at a research intensive university in an eastern metropolitan area of the United States.

METHODS

Our theory-building case study takes a grounded theory approach to analyzing data regarding the experiences of junior faculty in four-year postsecondary institutions (Eisenhardt, 1989; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 2009). The strengths of building theory from case studies include the increased likelihood of developing novel theory and yielding less bias from previous research findings. Data included interviews, observation notes, and program reports. Individual semi-structured interviews ranging from 45 to 60 minutes in length were conducted at participants' work sites. These interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

Data analysis consisted of employing the constant comparative method to discover categories or themes in answering the research questions (Merriam, 2009). These themes worked to develop a theoretical framework for understanding the professional experiences of untenured members of the professoriate.

Major research questions this work seeks to address include: What are junior faculty work and mentoring experiences as they relate to the journey towards tenure and promotion? What outcomes are derived from participation in the featured faculty mentoring program? What recommendations do junior faculty members have for improvement of the featured mentoring program?

FINDINGS

Junior faculty work and mentoring experiences as they relate to the journey towards tenure and promotion were explored. The following describes and illustrates themes using the constant comparative method of analysis. These themes comprise elements of the work's emerging theory.

Degree and Frequency of Professional Interaction

Many junior faculty members believed they were too busy to meet with their assigned mentors, yet they longed for collegiality. While some were well integrated, others experienced isolation. One faculty member, Ron, described the poor collegiality and communication among his colleagues:

> It's sort of a little bit of a letdown…there's just not a lot of interaction on either curriculum issues or [research]… you know, it's always a meeting that doesn't really accomplish [much] and you can tell the people don't want to be at the meeting because it's not accomplishing a whole lot. But outside of those meetings, there's very little interaction about undergraduate curriculum issues, graduate curriculum issues, even content in courses. It's too bad, because it would really strengthen the program having that.

He continued to compare his then current less-collegial setting to a previous workplace with strong collegiality. He stated:

> I could go to any of them in my department, any of the tenure [or]…tenure-track faculty members and get some advice. The degree of helpfulness of that advice is unfortunately not a very wide spectrum, but [a] relatively narrow spectrum, and it's on the not terribly helpful side. So I don't go to those faculty members very often for advice…sometimes when I have gone, I've gotten sort of a "Well, figure it out yourself" kind of attitude. Not the most collegial…from…the younger faculty members…. And our head of the program is a bit too disorganized to really provide very good advice on that end, so that's been a frustrating part of my position…coming from the previous position I had…where…I would go to [the head] on a weekly basis, talk with him about those issues, [and] get really good advice from him…I miss that aspect of my previous position. And it's funny. He knows it and jokes about it now when I see him. He's like, "How's such and such going?" and gives me a blow in the ribs. I miss that interaction. It's just not [here] in our program, in our department. I don't see it in our college even, which is kind of sad. It's one of the things I really liked about an academic position when I first took an academic [job].

The "figure it out yourself" attitude observed in this junior faculty member's environment starkly contrasted with that of his previous academic workplace. While his daily experience has changed in terms of the diminished quality of collegial interactions, the continued positive relationship with his former department head is noteworthy. This points to how external networks can counter poor collegial environments. Networks, whether at one's home institution or outside of the work setting, comprise an important element of long-term professional development.

Mentor-Protégée Interactions

Participants were asked to comment on the degree and frequency of contact with their mentors. In some cases, there appeared to be sparse contact between mentor and novice. Some pairs met infrequently and experienced challenges in coordinating their schedules for meetings. When they did meet, information shared included teaching, research, and service activities. Overall, the bulk of these conversations focused upon tenure and promotion. Reasons non-participating novices identified for their lack of participation included knowledge of a negative reputation of their mentor, being too busy, and not feeling a need for mentorship.

Protégées who felt they had no need for mentorship and subsequently participated little in the program were all White males. However, the majority of men who participated in the program held close and productive interactions with their mentors. These interactions included frequent meetings and more scholarly collaborations than their female peers. This finding points to the continued influence of gender in faculty experiences, as well as the continued need for formal processes of mentoring non-Whites and females in academe. It further reflects prior research suggesting that women's work dissatisfaction relates to their weaker integration within academe as compared to their more integrated male peers (Glenn, 2007).

Climate in Academic Settings

The National Center for Education Statistics' 2004 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSPOF:04) database was utilized to examine a representative sample of junior faculty members employed at liberal arts institutions. The variables studied related to junior faculty members' opinions about campus environments. The sample size for this portion of the NSPOF study was 594. Half of the faculty were male and half were female; 86% were less than 55 years of age; 76% were White non-Hispanic; and 45% were married with children. Faculty respondents were asked their opinions with possible responses of *strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree*.

NSOPF:04 data revealed that, when asked whether racial minorities were treated fairly in academe, 3% strongly disagreed, 7% somewhat disagreed, 34% somewhat agreed, and 56% strongly agreed. When asked whether female faculty were treated fairly, 3% strongly disagreed, 9% somewhat disagreed, 33% somewhat agreed, and 55% strongly agreed.

The majority of the faculty interviewed for the qualitative portion of this study, many of which were White males, believed that the university possessed a positive climate for women and minorities. However, the Asian female participant, Lin, believed that her young age, race, and gender influenced student perceptions of her. She shared that she was sometimes nervous teaching due to interactions with White males. Though Lin began tenure-track with four publications and had published one journal article per year (which met her college expectations for tenure and promotion) the bulk of interactions with her mentor centered upon teaching, rather than on the culturally isolated backgrounds of students. Approximately 70% of these conversations centered upon pedagogy, despite her self-assessment that her class was going well at the time of the interview. While she claimed that most students were good to work with, Lin was the only participant that discussed the frequency of difficult or disruptive students:

> [The] first semester, one of the students went to the Dean and complained that he can't understand my English and the exam was written in such a way that it confused him…he did bad. I suppose it was harder for me the first semester…The Dean was very supportive and she didn't even…feel she had to talk to me. But you know she has to also take care of students' complaints as well…. That student was such a headache…and then after he complained he was just sitting in the back of the classroom giving me a contempt look. He did that the rest of the semester whenever he was in the classroom. So whenever he was there, I felt uptight. There's on average one student like that every semester…last semester was him. This semester it is some other guy. But this guy isn't that bad. At least I haven't heard anything from the Dean, so I guess he hasn't gotten to the Dean yet.

The fact that Lin was the only participant noting student complaints mirrors the literature on campus climate for minority faculty and student perceptions of faculty based on race, gender, and the intersectionality of the two (Davis, 2010). She expressed stress experienced when dealing with difficult students. While some may question her pedagogy when observing her challenges with students, these interactions may more reflect the students' own racial identity development (2010) rather than Lin's teaching.

One White female participant expressed a lack of support and discontent with her department, yet did not fully participate in the mentoring program. Limited professional interaction contributed to the negative departmental climate for the scholar. Truncated professional interaction may have influenced the quantity of opportunities and career enhancing information received by this faculty member.

Types of Professional Interaction

Positive professional interaction included having multiple mentors and forming connections with external allies. These relationships led to expanded opportunities and career enhancing information, particularly research and promotion information. An assigned mentor with external allies often provides multiple perspectives to novices (Tracey, 2006). The following illustrates various aspects of interactions with external colleagues.

Mentorship from External Colleagues. Participants valued their external mentors who often were former advisors, co-authors, co-presenters, or other academic peers. External colleagues were outside of the participants' departments or from other institutions. When asked his opinion on being assigned a mentor not affiliated with his department, Ron discussed the benefits of having an external mentor:

> Anything that would have been more helpful would have required his being in either the same college, the

same department, and possibly even the same program that I'm in. But then, I probably wouldn't have discussed with him at the level that I did discuss the information. So I wouldn't trade that…. There were a number of times where…he'd mention "this is the way things work in molecular biology"…"but that's going to be different in the College of Engineering"… and so forth…which is fine. It wouldn't have been worth the trade off to have that additional information about my college or my department for…the trade off of asking probing questions.

Others also valued having an external mentor to offer an alternative perspective from those in their home departments. Like other participants of the program, Ron held that mentor contact, departmental and university support, and external mentoring relationships worked to integrate him into academia and increased his satisfaction with the mentoring program. However, some protégées were concerned when these mentors were from different fields. Nevertheless, the majority of participants felt they had support within their departments to compensate for the different fields between them and their mentors.

Building strong relationships with senior faculty was seen as one of the most valuable benefits of the program. One protégée held strong relationships with four mentors from a variety of fields, which is of particular interest, given that the participant was a homosexual male of African descent. Despite his minority background, he established and maintained multiple professional relationships that enriched his academic career.

Mentorship and Collegiality. The importance of forming strong collegial relationships and friendships in professional interactions emerged for some faculty members. Sharon expressed gratitude for her mentor's willingness to share various aspects of her professional life as a tenured professor:

> It was nice that she felt comfortable sharing with me some of her experiences or things that she was dealing with right now as a peer, even though she is a full professor. It was really nice to be seen as somebody that she could share that information with…tweaking her course, how she allots her time each semester, teaching preparation, and then research. I always felt a little guilty…. I don't want to always be the person who is…gaining from the relationship…. It made me feel better that at least I could listen and be a [peer]…for her…. That it wasn't just all about me…. So yeah…it was nice. It was nice to have that kind of friendly relationship and to get a little insight into what her life was like as a full professor in her department.

By sharing various elements of her experience, this mentor made the novice feel like a peer and helped remove the veil of full professorship. Mentoring relationships that exhibited strong collegiality or friendships also occurred across gender. Ron shared his thoughts on his female mentor:

> The person I collaborate with out at UC Berkley [is my mentor]…. I did a post doc, an informal post doc with her and have continued to work with her since then…I talk with her about everything…I had a two hour phone conversation with her yesterday…. It usually starts with research topics and what we're jointly working on. But it often goes into personal and department things…. We talked about the reappointment process, …when that was happening, and how to respond and react to different situations. So she's my primary mentor…. I can talk with her about anything. She has good advice about anything…I know that even if we just talk for five minutes or so, I feel a sense of calm afterwards…and then periodically over the next week, I'll get an email from her with some additional thoughts she might have had about it, saying, "You know, maybe you should think about this." I've been really lucky with her. She's that way with all of her former students. She has a good mentoring umbrella, I would say.

Ron repeatedly mentioned his ability to talk "about anything" with his mentor. The transparency and openness his mentor created within her various mentoring relationships reflects attributes of strong interpersonal mentoring (Davis 2008). The varied quality of mentoring experiences held by participants resulted in insights into suggestions for the program's improvement.

Suggestions for Program Improvement

In terms of program improvement, protégées suggested that mentors should be in similar fields or in the same disciplines as their protégées. They also believed that implementation of a discussion group of mentors and protégées would be useful. Discussion roundtables would allow protégées to hear multiple perspectives on a given topic. This suggestion mirrors non-traditional mentoring strategies from the review of literature.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION: INFLUENCES OF PROFESSIONAL INTERACTION ON FACULTY EXPERIENCES

The findings from the interviews suggest patterns in how professional interactions influence the experiences of tenure-track faculty members. Figure 1 provides an illustration of these major findings. The professional interaction (PI) of mentors and junior faculty yielded differing outcomes depending on the frequency and type of professional interaction (e.g., email versus face-to-face meetings). These, in turn, influenced the protégées' overall experiences. Key experiences noted by participants included the degree of collegiality of mentors and co-workers, the quality and quantity of career enhancing information, degree of satisfaction, and their perceptions of campus climate.
Active participants' overall satisfaction with the program points to the effectiveness of overall mentoring efforts. However, the infrequency with which some mentoring pairs met suggests the need for additional structure or incentives to increase the number of interactions between mentors and protégées. Busyness, noted as the primary reason for not meeting, further suggests the need to consider the workload of junior faculty members in tenure lines. Prior research echoes these findings, indicating that expectations of faculty to maintain research without a decrease in teaching load results in insufficient time to fulfill various roles coupled with stress and frustration (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006).

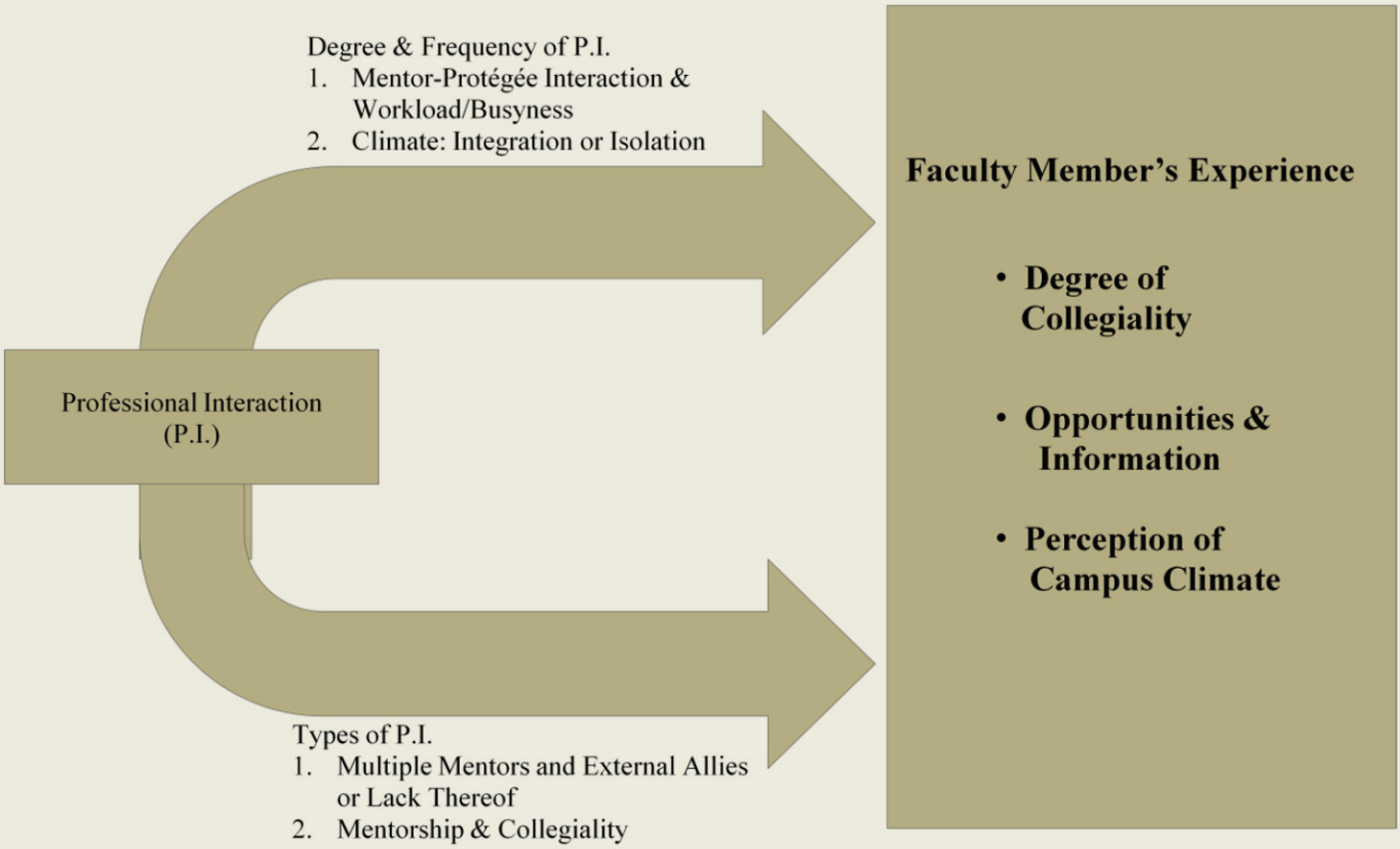

Figure 1. The Influence of Professional Interaction (P.I.) on Faculty Experiences

The findings herein debunk the assumption that academic work must be hyper-competitive, with faculty isolated in their individual ivory towers. They further reflect previous work on faculty mentoring and its importance to tenure and promotion processes (Schrodt, Cawyer, & Sanders, 2003). These results also point to areas of additional inquiry, particularly reasons why struggling faculty choose not to participate in structured mentoring programs and alternative strategies they use within their work environments.

IMPLICATIONS

The featured theory and its implications "may serve as building blocks to the construction of well-articulated programs, policies, and ideas" (Flowers, 2006, p. 6). Specifically, the findings of the work suggest the continued need for mentoring programs geared toward postsecondary faculty. Such programs may be particularly critical for the maintenance and establishment of research intensive institutions. The work may contribute to the understanding and practice of senior administrators such as Provosts, institution-based directors of faculty development programs, and department chairs and Deans. Specifically, this information might be employed in the development, implementation, or expansion of faculty mentoring and development initiatives.

During this economic recession, institutions are working towards more efficient operations. However, faculty mentoring remains a critical element in the retention and success of tenure-track faculty members. While some institutions would argue against the continued funding of mentoring initiatives in an effort to save resources, our research suggests that a critical need for such initiatives remains for the maintenance and viability of institutional research goals.

The benefits of faculty mentoring go beyond promotion and retention within the professoriate by increasing the quality of scholarship and improving teaching through learning from those more experienced in the field. This in turn may improve the learning experiences of students. The presence of faculty mentoring programs also assists in recruiting emerging scholars to institutions. Hosting a faculty mentoring program tells candidates that the university invests in its tenure line faculty and encourages their success.

Such an investment in faculty mentoring could have both national and international ramifications. States vary in terms of their financial resources and ability of supply tenure-track positions. The current economy makes interest in retaining new faculty even more critical as resources must be used wisely. In essence, investment in faculty mentoring programs and the resulting retention of faculty is sustainable by saving financial resources and employee time.

Given the professional pressures faculty face within institutions around the globe, which lead to anxiety, fatigue, and stress (Acker & Armenti, 2004; Gaskell et al., 2004; Samble, 2008), this study applies to policy and practice beyond the confines of the U.S. postsecondary arena. Retention and the development of faculty members inform policy makers and higher education administrators, regardless of nationality. Structured faculty mentoring programs may serve as institutional strategies for increasing research productivity and strengthening pedagogy.

In terms of facilitating democratic parity, mentoring programs such as the one featured herein work to even the playing field for women in underrepresented fields and racial minorities who may not be privy to insider information and strategies for promotion and tenure. Through mentoring from senior colleagues, these programs render the promotion and tenure processes more transparent and ultimately more egalitarian, resulting in steady movement towards faculty reflecting the rich racial, cultural, and socioeconomic background of the nation. This shift towards faculty parity not only validates the experience of postsecondary minority students, but enriches the education of all students, including Whites, by providing professors possessing a broader array of experiences.

Overall, an effective mentoring program should be designed, developed, and implemented in a well-resourced manner to meet the needs of junior faculty members. Higher education institutions must further assess the mentoring programs they are implementing and determine if the strategies utilized are meeting the needs of faculty. Further research may explore how higher education institutions can employ effective mentoring strategies to keep the diverse faculty of excellence they seek. Once institutions select programs fulfilling the needs of faculty, research might explore mentor training to understand effective deliverance of these mentoring strategies.

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