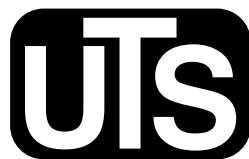


# Mentoring

A Strategy for Career Development





University  
Teaching Services

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## *A Strategy for Career Development*

Research indicates that scholars and researchers develop successful careers more rapidly in academic environments where expectations for successful performance are explicit and intellectual strengths and career development are supported. In contrast, academe is often characterized as an environment in which norms which define successful performance are unwritten or vague and new faculty learn their roles primarily through experience.<sup>1,2</sup> One strategy through which new faculty can learn information essential to successful careers in new academic environments is to establish a mentoring relationship with a more experienced faculty member.

A mentoring relationship is characterized by an experienced faculty member (mentor) taking an active role in the development of the academic career of a less experienced faculty member (mentee) by offering guidance, support and advice. A mentor's guidance is rendered with an "inside knowledge" of the norms, values and procedures of the institution and from a depth of professional experience. Access to this often tacit knowledge enables a mentee to enjoy a "quick start" in a new academic environment and to receive support in the development of his or her academic career. Although mentor-mentee relationships do develop on an informal basis, mentoring support for new faculty is not the norm.<sup>3</sup> Based on an overview of the characteristics of successful mentoring programs, suggestions for implementing mentoring programs have been developed to assist faculties and departments in taking an active role in mentoring pre-tenure faculty at The University of Manitoba. Further support for the development of mentoring programs is available through University Teaching Services.

### *The Mentoring Relationship*

The essential characteristic of successful mentoring relationships is that they are built around the career needs of the mentee. Each mentoring relationship must be negotiated on an individual basis to match the needs of the mentee with the resources of the mentor. However, there are several areas of emphasis which frequently emerge in mentoring relationships:

- (1) getting to know the institution. Mentors frequently assist new faculty in:**
  - (a) understanding the academic culture of the institution;
  - (b) identifying and using resources to support teaching and research activities;
  - (c) building a network of junior and senior colleagues;
  - (d) appreciating the social and political dynamic in their new departments and faculties.
  
- (2) career development. Mentors can advise mentees on:**
  - (a) the promotion and tenure process;
  - (b) provide feedback on the quality and quantity of their work in terms of tenure consideration;
  - (c) provide general support and encouragement.
  
- (3) professional development. Mentors can support mentees by providing:**
  - (a) constructive feedback on grant and research proposals;
  - (b) assistance in the development of a long term research and writing plan;

- (c) suggestions for the development of effective teaching strategies;
- (d) advice on the selection of appropriate service commitments;
- (e) access to an expanded network of professional contacts.

Given the broad range of possible mentoring activities, it is essential that mentees articulate their career development needs in order to select an appropriate mentor and plan an effective mentoring relationship.

Successful mentoring relationships are dynamic and transient in nature. The career needs of mentees typically involve goals ranging from entry level concerns to promotion and tenure requirements to professional development issues. Once started, the mentoring relationship will undergo changes as the career needs of the mentee are gradually met. For most mentoring pairs, the goals of the mentoring program can be met over the course of two to three years.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Successful Mentee**

The primary characteristics of successful mentees include the ability and willingness to:

- clearly articulate career needs
- assume responsibility for their own professional growth and development
- set goals and make decisions to achieve those goals
- spend time reflecting on the achievement of goals
- be receptive to constructive feedback.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Successful Mentor**

The primary resource of successful mentors is a knowledge of the norms, values and procedures of their institutions. This knowledge is essential to mentees in meeting their objectives, but there are also personal characteristics which contribute to effective mentoring. These include the ability to:

- value the mentee as a person
- develop mutual trust and respect
- maintain confidentiality
- listen both to what is being said and how it is being said
- provide constructive feedback.
- help the mentee solve his or her own problem, rather than giving direction
- focus on the mentee's development, and resist the urge to produce a clone.

Successful mentors avoid negative criticism and confrontation and do not prevent mentees from taking reasonable risks in meeting their objectives.<sup>6 7</sup>

### **Suggestions for Establishing a Mentoring Program**

- (1) **Mentee preparation.** Before entering a mentoring relationship, potential mentees should clearly articulate their career development needs, since meeting these needs will form the structure of the mentoring relationship.<sup>8</sup>
- (2) **Forming mentor-mentee pairs.** Although traditional mentoring relationships involve mentees voluntarily seeking out a mentor within their own department, other options have also proven effective:
  - (a) Pairs formed by the arbitrary assignment of mentees to mentors by department heads or deans have fared as well as pairs that picked each other.
  - (b) Pairs formed across departments have worked as well as pairs from within departments.<sup>9 10 11</sup>

Cross-department pairings have the advantages of fostering more open relationships and more neutral analyses of departmental politics. Furthermore, external mentors are perceived as objective advocates for the mentee.<sup>12</sup> The disadvantage of cross-departmental pairings is that mentees may have to solicit department specific information (e.g. policies, politics) from a source in their own department. The general pattern reflected in the research literature suggests that while some degree of professional or personal overlap enhances the mentoring relationship, pairs that are too close (in the same research area) or too distant (from different faculties) are not as successful.<sup>13</sup> Mentoring relationships founded on previous friendships have been least successful.<sup>14</sup>

- (3) **The mentoring agreement.** To avoid misunderstandings of what is required of mentors and expected by mentees, it is useful to draw up a brief written agreement which defines the broad parameters of the mentoring relationship. Such an agreement varies, but can specify the general areas to be addressed, the time commitment and the expected duration of the mentoring relationship. Perhaps most importantly, the agreement should provide for the termination of the agreement by either party.<sup>15</sup> In addition to clarifying expectations, an agreement provides documentation which department heads can use in determining the service contribution of mentors.
- (4) **Structuring the mentoring relationship.** The structure of mentoring relationships is determined by the goals of mentees. Mentoring pairs who establish clear objectives and meet regularly report the most successful and satisfying experiences.<sup>16</sup> Clear objectives allow the mentee, in consultation with the mentor, to organize the mentoring plan around specific activities which will be part of the mentee's academic responsibilities (e.g. course design, grant proposals). The focus on specific activities provides opportunities for mentees to solicit advice and mentors to offer support on well defined career development goals. Linking objectives to specific events also provides target dates for meeting specific goals. Regularly scheduled meetings are also important to maintaining the mentoring relationship. Without a minimum schedule of meetings, such as once a month, mentoring relationships tend to wane over time.<sup>17</sup>
- (5) **The role of a coordinator.** It is essential that mentoring programs do not become institutionalized or bureaucratic. If a coordinator is involved, his/her role should be determined by the needs of faculties or departments and individual mentoring pairs. The involvement of a coordinator allows confidential third party brokering of mentor-mentee pairing and encourages the maintenance of mentoring relationships. Coordinators can also provide additional resources of support, including: setting up seminars on areas of common concern (e.g. academic writing or planning for tenure) or periodic meetings for faculty to discuss mentoring strategies.<sup>18</sup> At The University of Manitoba, coordination services can be provided through University Teaching Services.

In applying these suggestions, it is important to remember that the goal in establishing a mentoring program is to strike a balance between the strength of naturally occurring mentoring relationships in meeting the needs of the mentee and the degree of structure which will open the mentoring process to greater numbers of pre-tenure faculty and encourage the maintenance of mentoring relationships.

<sup>1</sup> Boice, R. (1992). Lessons learned about mentoring. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, no. 50. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

<sup>2</sup> Schoenfeld, A.C., & Magnan, R. (1992). *Mentor in a Manual*. Madison, WI: Magna Publications.

<sup>3</sup> Sands, R.G., Parsons, L.A., & Duane, J. (1991). Faculty mentoring faculty in a public university. *Journal of Higher Education*, no. 62, pp. 174-193.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Murray, M., & Owen, M.A. (1991). *Beyond the Myths and Magic of Mentoring*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- <sup>6</sup> Paterson, B. (1993). Mentoring: What does it involve and how can I be a good mentor? in B.J. Cameron, *Teaching at The University of Manitoba: A Handbook*. Winnipeg, MB: The University of Manitoba.
- <sup>7</sup> Taylor, L.J. (1992). A survey of mentor relationships in academe. *Journal of Professional Nursing*, no. 8 , pp. 48-55.
- <sup>8</sup> Wunsch, M.A., & Johnsrud, L.K. (1992). Breaking barriers: Mentoring junior faculty women for professional development and retention. *To Improve the Academy*, no. 11 , pp. 175-187.
- <sup>9</sup> Boice, op.cit.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>11</sup> Wunsch and Johnsrud, op. cit.
- <sup>12</sup> Boice, op.cit.
- <sup>13</sup> Wunsch and Johnsrud, op. cit.
- <sup>14</sup> Boice, op. cit.
- <sup>15</sup> Murray and Owen, op. cit.
- <sup>16</sup> Wunsch and Johnsrud, op. cit.
- <sup>17</sup> Boice, op. cit.
- <sup>18</sup> Wunsch and Johnsrud, op. cit.

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