

## MENTORING FOR LIBRARIANS

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### **Introduction**

In 1989 the Professional Status Committee of the Library Association of the City University of New York (LACUNY) presented a similar program with all topics on today's agenda except a discussion of mentoring. One reason that mentoring is included in today's workshop relates to the fact that library administrators have come to realize the increased importance of mentoring in the professional career of CUNY librarians, and the crucial role it plays in achieving tenure and promotion.

Why has mentoring become an increasingly valued practice in recent years? With organizations' budgets and staff shrinking and demands for productivity and assessment measurements increasing, institutions and their libraries tend to invest more in staff training and mentoring so that they can retain a productive, well-trained and multi-faceted staff. The most economical way to provide mentoring is using experienced senior in-house staff.

The term mentoring dates back to ancient Greece and Homer's Odyssey. Mentor was the teacher of Telemachus, Odysseus' son. Webster's Third New International Dictionary defines a mentor as an "experienced or trusted counselor."

Mentoring has had a long-standing tradition in many professions: law, medicine and business, to name a few, and the literature in these disciplines abounds with articles on the topic. Women in science place great emphasis on mentoring as do doctoral students and under-represented groups in law and business. Medical and health professions, where practitioners also have academic appointments, are probably most similar to librarianship in their emphasis on mentoring. In these fields an experienced colleague is often asked to provide guidance and share expertise with new, younger persons in the profession as they seek a higher level role within the organization and try to secure permanent appointments.

Library science literature deals extensively with mentoring. In recent years, it has included reports on mentoring programs initiated in various academic libraries. One such paper outlines the experience of Oakland University Library<sup>1</sup> which has an informal mentoring program. Jetta Culpepper in "Mentoring Academic Librarians: the Ultimate

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<sup>1</sup> Keyse, Dana. "Mentoring Untenured Librarians." *College & Research Library News*. 64 (June 2003); 378-379.

Career Guidance,” a mentoring literature review, provides an excellent overview of the various elements in the mentoring process.<sup>2</sup>

Several years ago, a formal mentoring program for new teaching faculty was developed by the Provost’s office at Queens College. It is now offered at the beginning of every fall semester and covers the following areas: overview of the University and College; promotion and tenure; information technology; educational technology; governance and the Library. As part of the orientation, new faculty are introduced to mentors from their departments. Newly hired library faculty participate in these meetings and get their first introduction to the College and to the requirements for tenure and promotion.

### **I. Mentoring Librarians**

Mentoring should be viewed as an important supplement to on-the-job training. It provides new librarians with a nurturing, ongoing relationship which helps overcome the anxiety that nowadays accompanies the tenure and promotion process.

Two types of mentoring, both voluntary, are available to librarians seeking tenure and/or promotion: informal and formal. Informal mentoring is an ongoing process in which library and teaching faculty are potential mentors. Its success depends somewhat on the mentee’s initiative and willingness to seek guidance from colleagues and teaching faculty whom he/she works with as bibliographer, library instructor, or reference librarian, and on the availability and willingness of senior library faculty to offer guidance and advice. Formal mentoring is a three-pronged process provided by a single mentor, by members of the Library Personnel and Budget Committee, and by the Chief Librarian. All three have a common goal, to guide candidates through the tenure and promotion maze and prevent surprises and pitfalls at the end of the process.

#### **A. Individual Mentors**

A new librarian is informed of the availability of mentoring when he/she is hired, and is paired with a mentor soon thereafter. If possible, the two are matched by subject matter or discipline, but this is seldom possible in today’s environment of shrinking library faculty. A mentor is usually a senior tenured librarian with a recent publishing record who is willing to give of his/her time to guide a new librarian as a mentor. Mentoring is usually most intensive in the first years, but should, if possible, continue after tenure has been granted.

Formal mentoring programs discourage immediate supervisors from assuming the role of mentors for those reporting to them since their responsibility is to teach librarians their jobs and evaluate their performance. Mentors, on the other hand, help with broader university requirements for tenure and promotion. Teaching faculty, especially from a Library School, if one exists in the same institution, can and sometimes serve as mentors, but a senior colleague from the library department is usually selected. Not much has been

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<sup>2</sup> Culpepper, Jetta Carol. “Mentoring Academic Libraries: The Ultimate Career Guidance.” *College & Undergraduate Libraries*. 7 No. 2 (2000) 71-81.

reported in library literature on whether intra-departmental mentor-mentee pairs have been more successful in the case of librarians than cross-departmental mentor-mentee pairs.

The mentor and mentee meet periodically as necessary, and regularly communicate in person or via e-mail. Mentees who are self-starters and organized will need fewer meetings. The experienced mentor who has a broad knowledge of the profession, the parent institution, and the tenure and promotion process, can be helpful to the mentee in the following areas: setting goals; formulating a research agenda; providing guidance on effective teaching and professional activities, and on time management.

### 1. Formulating Research Agenda/Publishing

Since publications count most heavily in tenure decisions in many academic institutions, mentors can provide valuable help in the following areas related to research and publishing:

- Help guide the mentee in the selection of subject matter for research, and set a timetable for publishing a sufficient number of articles in the years leading to tenure.
- Advise on the best format to select: e.g., publishing a dissertation as a monograph or excerpting several articles from it.
- Review drafts and provide constructive criticism as chapters or articles are completed.
- Explain rules for submission to various journals, guidelines for revisions, and the importance of setting deadlines and adhering to them.
- Help in selecting a refereed journal likely to publish the candidate's paper. Provide contact to an editor and editorial staff.
- Critique and edit completed papers, especially in case of foreign-born librarians for whom English is not a first language.
- Introduce the candidate to teaching faculty who might be helpful in the reviewing and publishing process and in providing advice on appropriate journals and editors to contact.

### 2. Service to the Profession

- Advise which national, regional and local professional organizations a mentee should join and at what point. Specialists such as music and art librarians have an advantage over generalists, because professional groups like Art Libraries Society of North America and the Music Library Association, which art and music librarians are likely to have joined before or shortly after their appointment, provide their own mentoring programs.
- Offer guidance as to which committees in professional organization a mentee should join and how much time and effort should be devoted to committee work.

### 3. Service to the College/Community

- Advise whether and when to join Academic Senate, ad-hoc committees, or Presidential task forces, which often are time consuming but are not given as much importance as research and publications in tenure decisions.
- Stress the importance of library instruction - credit and subject related courses.
- Help generate feedback from students and letters of recommendation from teaching faculty who know the candidate as instructors.

### B. Personnel & Budget Committee

This elected library committee, one of whose important tasks is to recommend library faculty for promotion and tenure, has a significant role in guiding candidates through the process. Its members, all but one of whom must be tenured, are knowledgeable about the candidate's interests and research plans. They meet with untenured librarians at least once a year to review professional activities and research, works published, submitted, and in-progress, and provide constructive criticism and advice on setting priorities and getting research published in a timely fashion. The Chief Librarian who chairs the Personnel & Budget Committee is ultimately the one who presents the candidate's case before the college committee. It is, therefore, imperative that this committee, the mentor, and the Chief Librarian work closely together and provide on-going guidance to prevent surprises when the time for tenure decisions approaches.

### C. The Chief Librarian

The Chief Librarian is the key person for getting librarians through tenure and promotion, because he/she presents their case to the teaching faculty Committee which makes decisions on tenure and promotion. He/she is the one who can best relate college goals and priorities to the candidate, and by presenting cases successfully, gains credibility and respect of the teaching faculty and administration. The Chief Librarian represents the library on the College Personnel & Budget Committee, participates in its deliberations and votes on tenure and promotion. He/she is familiar with requirements, the intricate tenure and promotion process, and with the "climate" around the decision making process in a particular year. He/she can, therefore, offer the best and most effective mentoring by overseeing the work of individual mentors and supervisors. During annual meetings with library faculty, the Chief Librarian reviews research, teaching, professional activities and service to the College. It is important that the Chief Librarian have the employees' trust and that he/she give the necessary time, attention and constructive and frank criticism during annual reviews and informally throughout the year.

Can mentoring for librarians be improved? In most libraries which have documented their experience, the process has been working well for years with a small number of volunteer mentors who have given generously and willingly of their time and expertise. Would mentoring have been as successful if libraries were able to hire many more librarians on tenure track lines? Probably not. It would have placed an inordinate

burden on the shoulders of a small number of senior librarians. At the University of Albany Library a mentoring program was instituted to support and nurture newly hired librarians and help them navigate the increasingly more rigorous requirements for tenure and promotion. The success of the program was attributed, at least partially, to the fact that no new librarians were hired during the first year of the program's existence, and no additional demands were made on the five librarians who agreed to serve as mentors.<sup>3</sup>

If and when academic libraries are able to hire a large number of librarians on tenure bearing lines, and the need arises for additional senior librarians to serve as mentors, there could be advantages to making mentoring programs somewhat more formal than they presently are. Mentors could meet as a group, sharing ideas, experiences, failures and successes to assure more uniformity. Mentors could offer formal orientation and provide periodic written evaluations of their mentee's progress and experience. The question remains whether more formal mentoring, with a loss of independence and creativity for individual mentors, will result in a more efficient program that will be as successful as it now is.

## **II. Mentoring Students in the Graduate School of Library & Information Studies (GSLIS)**

Queens College Library shares its building with the only library school in the City University of New York. It currently has the largest enrollment of all library schools in the New York Metropolitan Area. As a result of the physical proximity, the presence of a library science bibliographer, and the fact that several librarians periodically teach in the school, relations between librarians and Library School faculty are extremely close. Library School students use the library extensively and receive ongoing instruction from the library liaison to the school. Each semester, several GSLIS students serve as paid information assistants at the Main Reference Desk where they work along side reference librarians and get academic library experience. For many it is their first exposure to the workings of an academic library. This is especially true in the case of foreign students who make up a large number of the school's student body. They are often the ones who need to have an income and welcome the opportunity to gain experience in a college library and earn some money simultaneously.

In 1994 the library and the Graduate School of Library & Information Studies, GSLIS, developed a formal internship program designed to provide future librarians with hands-on experience in an academic library. Since then, one or two students have been accepted as interns each semester. Pratt Institute and Long Island University (C.W. Post) Library School students have also participated in the program. GSLIS students are usually in their last semester and are enrolled in an internship course which requires that they do a 150-hour unpaid internship in a library. The formal program starts with a general orientation where students meet with library administrators and learn about the

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<sup>3</sup> Van Avery, Annalisa R.. "Facing Personal Evaluation: A Mentoring Program Supports Professional Staff Undergoing Tenure Review." *The Reference Librarian* 38 (1992): 121-131.

library mission, organization, staff and materials budget, staffing, committees, etc. They then spend approximately 15 hours with library department heads and observe the workflow in Bibliographic Access, Circulation, and other units of the Library. They also participate in department and bibliographers meetings and observe several bibliographic instruction sessions. Most interns select Reference as their area of concentration, but some have interned in Acquisitions, Art, and Interlibrary Loan. Interns spend close to 100 hours in the area of their choice and are supervised by the department head who serves as their mentor for the duration of the internship. Each intern's program is outlined in an action plan which is approved by the GSLIS faculty member who teaches the internship course. Interns keep a diary which they present as part of the course requirements. They are evaluated in mid-semester and at the end of their internship by their supervisor/mentor in the library, with input from the Associate Librarian who conducts a "wrap up" session during which interns provide comments about their experience and suggestions for improvement.

At a reunion of interns last October we were happy to learn that all interns landed professional jobs right after receiving their Masters degree, and that all considered the mentoring they received during their internship invaluable for securing their first professional position.

### **III. Conclusion**

As college administrators realize that mentoring new faculty is important for the institution and for its teaching faculty, so have library administrators come to see the value of mentoring in helping their faculty achieve tenure and promotion.

Mentoring is advantageous for the libraries and for their faculty. Some professions, like medicine, have developed tools to measure the impact of mentoring on career achievements and models to improve mentor training. In libraries, we tend to rely on experience and feedback. We take it for granted that there is a direct correlation between "profit" and library faculty development programs, such as mentoring. We also believe that mentoring has a positive impact on achieving tenure and promotion. It is to the library's advantage to have lower turnover, improved morale and better-trained librarians. Therefore, mentoring should be an on-going process and not end once tenure or promotion is granted. There is room in library literature for empirical studies on the impact of mentoring on librarians' careers.

As library budgets and faculty lines shrink, librarians are increasingly expected to perform multiple tasks. They now need infinitely more training in many more areas than in the past and have less time for research and professional service. As a result, they also need more guidance on how to manage their time and fulfill the requirements for tenure and promotion. Investing in mentoring for library faculty and ensuring that this investment pays off, that is, that qualified librarians achieve tenure and promotion, and with it higher pay, standing, and recognition on campus, has, therefore, gained importance.

As mentoring becomes part of the work environment in business and other professions, among women and minorities, it will no longer be viewed as a staff intensive and costly option but as a necessary service to young librarians in academic institutions around the country and at the City University of New York.