

TITLE: Comparing Models of Faculty Mentoring: Internal and External, Term and Tenure-Track

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ABSTRACT: What makes for a successful faculty mentoring program? Based on well-accepted research on mentoring of new faculty, Grinnell College has established a program that connects new faculty to a network of mentors and support resources, with an individually assigned guide called an “accountability partner.” Our faculty have also utilized external independent mentoring programs. Despite offering very similar support and services, faculty members respond more positively to external support programs.

We describe the characteristics of our internal program, including the published research that led to its construction. In addition to mentoring tenure-track faculty, we provide parallel services to term faculty. We similarly describe two different external programs that have enrolled some of our faculty in their program. Finally, we describe a grass-roots support group for early career faculty. These different models provide for us an opportunity to compare their effectiveness with faculty.

Based on faculty surveys and interviews, we attempt to address questions facing college administrators wanting to provide the best possible support to new faculty as economically as possible, such as:

- Do mentors actually follow mentoring advice, or do they “know better?”
- Is there greater credibility attached to outside (off-campus) advice than to local (on-campus) support?
- Does the cost factor make faculty pay more attention?
- Are new faculty more interested in support from near peers, or senior colleagues?
- Are there differences between what term faculty gain from the mentoring relationship versus what their tenure-track colleagues gain from the experience?

CONTENT

Introduction

Over the past decade, Grinnell College has seen a significant growth in deliberate mentoring of new faculty members. These mentoring programs have developed from multiple directions—from administrative initiative, from grass roots, and from off-campus providers. Beginning three years ago, we, from our position in the Dean’s Office, made a deliberate effort to combine these support systems into a “Faculty Mentoring Network” starting with our New Faculty Orientation. While not originally a research question, this has now provided us an interesting perspective on the relative success of these various programs—an opportunity to gain insight into various questions, such as:

- Do new faculty value peer advice or senior colleagues wisdom more?
- Are there advantages to “advice from outside” supplied by off-campus entities?
- In what ways are term faculty members’ needs and experiences different from those of tenure-track faculty?
- How important is perceived expertise of the mentors and the sophistication of the program?
- How well do mentors actually follow advice and training?

Investigation of these questions has enabled us to formulate ways to improve our own program as well as ways to make better use of other mentoring programs on- and off-campus.

Grinnell’s Internal Faculty Mentoring Program

Our own program developed primarily from two sources. First, Grinnell College has experimented with assigning mentors to new faculty over a number of years with only marginally satisfying results. On more than a few occasions, the mentors were actually counterproductive. This arose from highly motivated mentors who felt that to help a new faculty member be successful, the mentor needed to mold that person into a clone of the mentor. Not surprisingly, because of variations in personality, teaching styles, and intellectual strengths, this recipe was often a poor one. Even if the advice was potentially good, a heavy-handed delivery could easily undermine its reception. Especially on a small campus, stories of negative mentoring experiences can travel quickly and far, potentially sabotaging other mentoring relationships. In addition to this handful of negative experiences, the ability to recruit strong mentors was difficult. Without time compensation, many mentors found the role overly burdensome to take on year after year. It was at the same time clear that in good relationships, mentoring was extremely valuable, leaving the question of how to develop a sustainable program that could successfully include a large number of potential mentors.

The second source for our program came from research on faculty development, primarily through the work of Robert Boice. The work of Boice, and in particular his book *Advice for New Faculty Members* (2000) was originally recommended by a new faculty member a number of years ago, and the college has for several years given copies of this book to arriving faculty members. The advice in this book is both humanistic and comprehensive, advocating deliberate, thoughtful allocation of time to the various tasks of being a faculty member, and in particular avoiding the temptation to over-prepare, especially in the area of class preparation. We also took note of faculty reactions to off-campus providers of mentoring programs, which we describe below, and saw how those messages resonated with the central ideas that Boice advocates in his

book. This provided us with a framework to give to mentors (and to their protégés) that placed the primary responsibilities on the new faculty member, with the mentor providing accountability and referrals to other campus resources and networks.

Grinnell's program was intentionally embedded in a broader faculty development program administered by the Dean of the College office. This is the office of the chief academic officer, and supports a wide variety of faculty development programs for faculty at all levels. From this office, information about faculty success through personnel processes can inform support for junior faculty. This sort of comprehensive approach to a mentoring program is recognized as an effective framework for a mentoring network such as ours (Beane-Katnor 2014).

New faculty are provided a copy of Boice's book early in the summer, and are encouraged to read at least some designated sections. At the same time, we solicit faculty volunteers to participate as mentors, with an attention to a wide range of disciplines, interests, personalities, and demographic characteristics. Mentors are also offered a copy of Boice's book. New faculty are introduced to our mentoring program during New Faculty Orientation, which takes place a couple of weeks before the start of classes. During the orientation, we have an opportunity to get to know the new faculty personalities and interests, and we use that information in an intuitive way to match mentors with protégés. These assignments are never within a single department. Typically, an individual mentor will be paired with two new faculty members, usually one new tenure-track faculty member and one new term faculty member. Both mentor and protégé are encouraged to arrange frequent, brief meetings that emphasize accountability and referral. For tenure-track faculty, we ask their discussions to focus deliberately on the following topics that lead to tenure and a sustainable work life: 1) classroom success, 2) scholarly productivity, 3) making professional connections with other faculty within and outside of the department, 4) preserving time for wellness, family, and friends. For term faculty, the same four areas of discussion apply, but with a slightly different goal, since success for these faculty is measured by securing a permanent job. In particular, the development of relationships with colleagues should support the job search process, through advice, possible connections with other institutions, and class visitation that informs letters of recommendation.

As we do not expect our mentors to be experts in all areas, and as we wish to avoid the cloning problem, we encourage connections with other mentoring resources on and off campus, and for the mentors to give referrals more often than attempting to provide direct support. This is also a deliberate design to make the mentor's job less burdensome, and to defuse the risk of an overly directive mentor. In addition to the resources we describe below, we also encourage mentors and protégés to see their departmental colleagues and the Dean of the College office (which currently is the main source of faculty development programs) as their primary resources as they settle into Grinnell College and their careers as academics. In addition to Boice's book, we provide introductory materials of our own describing the program and goals to each mentor and protégé, and we provide periodic (weekly at the beginning of the academic year) tips, which are designed to be helpful, but also serve as reminders of the mentoring program. All new faculty are encouraged to participate, and the responsibility of organizing meetings is put upon the new faculty member, not on the mentor. These features of a universal, protégé-centered program that emphasizes accountability rather than instruction diminish the risk of this being seen as a remedial, stigmatizing relationship.

Experience with External Mentoring Programs

Each year, our early career faculty, typically around their fourth year of service, are given an opportunity to participate in the Faculty Success Program operated by the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity (NCFDD, 2014). Six faculty participate each year – two in the fall, two in the spring, and two in the summer. The focus of the program is on helping faculty develop strategies for increasing scholarly productivity. The Program is built on the notion of community, which translates into weekly large group conference calls with the President of the NCFDD, small group conference calls with an NCFDD facilitator that keep individuals accountable for their work, and a private online community that helps participants keep track of their daily writing goals. At the end of each program, faculty at Grinnell are asked to reflect on their experience in a paragraph or more. So far, all the results have been positive. One faculty described the experience as a “key turning point in my development as a college professor,” while another said, “It has helped me achieve better work-life balance; prioritize consistent writing and research; and, in a more general sense, take a more active role in creating my professional profile beyond the particular position I occupy at the College.” Finally, another faculty member said the program helped her learn strategies for structuring her time before a research leave, as well as figure out ways to move her research forward while teaching. These are the types of feedback we receive consistently about the program. Another program that has been used by at least one member of the faculty is the Academic Ladder (2014), which provides an accountability structure via an Academic Writing Club, and offers individual coaching help as well, although not quite as intensive as that of the Faculty Success Program.

Several features of the Faculty Success Program and the Academic Ladder have been replicated on our campus, some intentionally, some coincidentally, into our formal and informal mentoring programs. Even so, one doesn’t typically hear our faculty rave about the benefits of home-grown support structures. It is the exceptional case in which a scholarly support group on campus is publicly credited with helping one or more of its members achieve a scholarly goal. It might be that faculty attach more value to external programs because they’re disconnected from the myriad ways in which faculty on the same campus intersect with each other. Moreover, the notion of being accountable to strangers across the country seems more daunting than being accountable to your counterparts at the same institution. Whatever the case, the College recognizes the value of using external resources to boost scholarly productivity so there are no plans to end faculty access to these services.

“Grass-Roots” Support Groups

Grinnell has a strong tradition of faculty support and development groups that arise independently from the faculty. Often these serve “special interest” groups, such as the Committee for the Fostering of Foreign Language Support, or the Science Teaching and Learning Group. Some of them organize around demographics, such as the faculty of color, or pre-tenure faculty. We have chosen to capitalize on these grass-roots organizations and create a network of support systems with our mentoring program at the nexus. This networking approach has a significant body of scholarship supporting it, as Sorcinelli (2007) describes in her review article.

One of our most active grass-roots support groups at Grinnell is the ECF or Early Career Faculty. This body is a mix of term and tenure-track faculty, who plan professional and social activities in an effort to make the most of their experiences at the institution. Throughout the academic year, they support each other's scholarship through the Grinnell Faculty Colloquium (GFC), in which two speakers from different academic divisions present their work. They also organize panels that focus on the tenure process, securing funds for conferences, and a range of other topics. Originally with a heavy focus on social activities, the group has grown a much more serious professional development program over the past five years or so. As a result, the group has also developed greater sensitivity to the different needs of term and tenure-track faculty. A self-organizing group, the leaders are elected from within, often faculty only in their second or third years at the college.

In terms of professional development, some members of the ECF occasionally form writing groups in which they gather in one location and work on their scholarship for a few hours. From all accounts, there is a general level of satisfaction within the group regarding the types of support they provide for each other in their first years at the College. Because the group is comprised entirely of junior faculty, they naturally act as mentors for each other. Some term faculty reported that they not only received moral support from the group, but they got help with sharpening their syllabi, and practicing job interviews. In our interviews with term faculty who participated in our mentoring program, they all said the support they received from faculty peers was equally valuable to the support they received through the mentoring program from their senior colleagues. Nevertheless, mentoring from more experienced faculty was still seen as valuable; at least one interviewee remarked that his senior colleague was not "out of touch" with relevant issues.

We have endeavored to incorporate Grinnell's other "special interest" support and mentoring groups into a network of mentoring support. Although these groups do involve early career faculty, perceptions of them as part of a faculty mentoring network has had limited success. We are attempting to enhance the flow of information to the leaders of these groups, as well as to select them as mentors, in an effort to draw them more closely into our network.

Results from Interviews and Surveys

Over the past year, we used our weekly e-mail tips as a way to guide mentors and protégés into more closely following our model of a networked, accountability-based mentoring program. Our interviews with faculty revealed that sometimes their mentors relied on the weekly mentoring tips and advice we provided via email as a way to focus their discussion with protégés. Depending on the needs of the junior faculty member, some topics were covered more extensively than others, but the conversations covered the obvious areas of teaching, scholarship and service. They also got helpful support for setting research goals, job negotiations, and writing a book proposal. We also asked mentors to cover such topics as work/life balance, and establishing connections with other people and resources on campus, although these topics were less frequently covered.

The term faculty that we interviewed had mixed responses to the "weekly tips" emails. One faculty member didn't find the emails useful, another found them "helpful overall," while another said she didn't really need to be nudged, but she always read them. In contrast, several

faculty had mentioned appreciating receiving the similar weekly e-mail messages through the NCFDD. This seems to be a clear example in which the reception of advice from an external authority is distinctly more positive than a very similar message from a local resource. As we continue to evaluate the comparative effectiveness of NCFDD and our local program, we are pursuing more detailed interviews with faculty to identify the origins of perceptions of the respective programs.

Both mentors and protégés give similar responses to survey questions about the program. They find they meet less frequently, but for more time each session than our prescription of “weekly for 15 minutes at a time.” The primary topics of conversation are teaching and scholarship, with significantly less attention given to connecting with colleagues or wellness/community connections. For term faculty, the job search was a frequent topic of conversation. Both mentors and protégés describe the time burden as minimal to small, although invariably greater than the recommended 15 minutes; at the risk of encouraging too much time investment, we are changing our recommendations to “30 minutes at a time” with a more flexible schedule. The vast majority of responses from protégés termed the program “very valuable” or “of some value,” with a nearly even split between those categories. The surveys also ask for free comments; individual comments are almost universally positive, but rarely enthusiastic, in contrast to responses to the off-campus support systems. As the program expectations and guidance differed for term and tenure-track faculty, we have started tracking protégé responses by those two categories; at this point, there is no statistically significant difference in program satisfaction between these groups. Again, we are following up on these quantitative evaluations with individual interviews.

Conclusions and Future Directions

We have created a program that by all accounts is successful and sustainable—definitely an improvement over our previous history of uneven performance and exhaustion of mentors. The comprehensive coverage of term and tenure-track faculty seems to be equally successful. The inclusion of term faculty, different from prior practice, may well improve climate overall for new faculty, as these two groups tend to form social bonds naturally and through the ECF.

In comparison, the faculty impressions (and presumably effectiveness) of off-campus support offerings are significantly more positive than those of our in-house efforts. Some of this may well be due to greater value ascribed to an off-campus recognized authority, regardless of content. However, it is also likely that the execution and content of these programs have simply been optimized with years of feedback from many faculty. As a result, we will continue to provide these opportunities, even though they are more expensive; in addition, we will also endeavor to emulate those aspects of these programs that we can in our own programming, keeping in mind evaluations from our own faculty. We believe that for many of these, the devil is in the details, so careful refinement and revision of those aspects over several cycles will likely make a big difference. For example, we will continue to use weekly tips/reminders, but will endeavor to make them briefer, more targeted, relying on recognized authorities, and asking for feedback when a tip is particularly valuable.

Nearly all of our program emphasizes the first year for new faculty. Part of this is an assumption that the greatest needs are during that year, another motivation is to reduce the expectations of

the mentors. There is no question that the value of mentoring continues beyond the first year. We already have some pairings that persist into the second year—sometimes at the initiation of the Dean’s Office, sometimes by the desire of the mentor and protégé, but this is an area of growth that we are investigating. In addition, we have a few efforts in which the Dean’s Office meets with faculty at regular points in their progress toward tenure to identify their needs and to help them find good resources.

It is clear that greater training of our mentors will be beneficial. Finding the right balance between offering good training and overburdening our volunteers however will be a challenge. A simple suggestion from mentors is to have a gathering of just mentors to share experiences and ideas a few weeks into the semester; meeting over a meal likely would reduce objections to the time commitment. Our coordination of efforts with other support groups is another area where we believe we have had some success, but that extra effort to involve these groups more deliberately, and to promote them as resources to new faculty and their mentors, will likely have good payoff.

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