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The Challenge of Mentoring in Academic Settings: A pilot study¹

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Abstract

In the last decade academics have been facing increased pressures on their time and the way they work as professionals. Occupational stress amongst academics is higher than the national average for workers more generally (Winefield et al, 2002). Both the education and business management research literature contain a strong body of evidence supporting the application of workplace mentoring and coaching as a means of further enhancing the contribution and work satisfaction of knowledge workers and managers.

This paper reports initial findings from a cross faculty (Education & Social Work with Economics & Business) pilot mentoring project at the University of Sydney. Commenced in 2005, it aimed to enhance the teaching, research and work/life balance outcomes for the twenty six participants. Data gathering occurred during all stages of the project and included surveys, analysis of submitted expressions of interest and participants' reflections, recordings of group activities, focus groups and interviews.

The project did provide the opportunity, resources and space for participants to engage in positive and relational processes and discuss major concerns about their work. In addition the project provided a catalyst for academics to consider and reflect upon their own professional development and how they might contribute to the mentoring of others in the academic context. The general enthusiasm and positive outcomes cited by participants (including increased productivity) suggest that the pilot project was a major step in developing a culture and community of mentoring in both faculties although the brevity of the program makes it impossible to cite a reduction in participants' stress. Further work in the area of pairing mentors and the issues around gender are suggested. The project has continued in 2006.

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The Challenge of Mentoring in Academic Settings: A pilot study

Professionals are at risk of stress and overload, affecting both their performance outcomes and their work satisfaction. This is the experience of the professions to which the students in the faculties of Education and Social Work and Economics and Business at the University of Sydney belong or to which they aspire, including primary and secondary education and the various business management professions. Equally, it is also the experience of many academics in higher education currently teaching these students.

In the last decade academics have been facing increased pressures on their time and the way they work as professionals. These pressures have arisen from larger enrolments and larger class sizes, reduced funding, greater student diversity, greater accountability frameworks, stronger demands from students for value-for money, and meeting their consumer preferences and advances in technology, to name but a few. Occupational stress amongst academics is higher than that of the workforce more generally. A recent survey (Winefield, 2002) revealed that approximately 50 percent of Australian university staff who participated in the survey (n=8,732) were at risk of psychological illness, compared with just 19 percent of the Australian workforce. The same survey disclosed that job satisfaction amongst academic staff was low relative to other occupational groups. Noting that high stress and low satisfaction were taking a major toll on academic performance, the researchers proposed that 'interventions aimed at enhancing job satisfaction and reducing stress within universities will in turn enhance individual and organisational productivity' (Winefield, 2003, 13).

This paper reports on a cross faculty pilot project at the University of Sydney that aimed to assess the potential of academic mentoring as one such initiative. Initially a brief overview of relevant mentoring research is provided. The aims and intended outcomes of the pilot study undertaken in 2005 are then outlined followed by an analysis of the data gathered through surveys, analysis of submitted expressions of interest and participants' reflections, recordings of group activities, focus groups and interviews. Project findings are then discussed together with the recommendations for the 2006 phase of the project.

A brief overview of relevant mentoring research

Whilst mentoring in the professions has been a longstanding practice Ehrlich, Hansford and Tennant (2003) claim that it has traditionally been informal and that only in the last two decades have more formal mentoring been introduced. In both the business management and education literature, there is now a strong body of theory and a growing body of research evidence supporting the application of formal workplace mentoring and coaching methods as a means of enhancing both the contribution and the work satisfaction levels of knowledge workers and managers (Skiffington & Zeus, 2003). For example, research indicates that effective mentoring of new professionals in primary and secondary education can significantly increase the likelihood that they will continue in the teaching profession (eg, Birimac, 2003, Ewing & Smith, 2003, Hatton & Harmon, 1997). In addition, opportunities to mentor can rejuvenate a mentor's career (Levinson, 1978) and result in their increased confidence and personal fulfilment (Douglas, 1997). Perhaps one of the most important benefits to be gained from the mentoring process is its facilitation of reflective practice (Smith, 1999, Barnett, 1995, Frost, 1993).

Equally, mentoring and individual coaching has the capacity to substantially enhance the ability of high performing academic staff to further enhance both their teaching and research outcomes

(e.g. Gardner, 2005, Ehrlich, Hansford and Tennant, 2003). To date, much of the literature about mentoring in higher education relates to informal mentoring processes and mentoring students.

At the same time, mentoring relationships are not always positive. In her analysis of *The Dark Side of Mentoring* Long (1997) suggests that lack of time, insufficient planning, poor matching and little understanding of the process mentoring can be detrimental to the mentor, mentee or both. It is clear that being successful in one's chosen profession is not a sufficient prerequisite for being an effective mentor (eg, Orland-Barak, 2001). The mere establishment of a mentoring program is not enough (Norman and Feiman-Nemser, 2005). Mentoring programs must take time to ensure careful matching of mentors and mentees – 'contrived collegiality' can undermine trust and openness (Long, 1997). A number of studies (e.g. Moberg and Velasquez, 2004, Quinlan, 1999, Ragins and Cotton, 1991) have also suggested that mentoring of junior academic women has often been problematic and based on male models of career development. Birimac (2003)'s study highlighted the importance of the role of language used in conversations between mentor and an early career teacher.

To be most effective, then, a mentoring program should be designed, developed and implemented in an inclusive and well-resourced manner. A mentoring program is less likely to succeed if:

- Insufficient time is made available for mentoring to occur
- Mentees are not involved in the choice of their mentor
- Insufficient professional development, morale and other resources are provided to support the mentoring process
- Mentors are insufficiently recognised for their participation.

An academic mentoring and leadership team was formed in response to these issues recognising that while there were a number of mentoring programs in place throughout the University of Sydney, they were limited in their effectiveness. The pilot project described below spanned the Faculties of Education and Social Work and Economics and Business and was funded by a Teaching Improvement Fund Grant from the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Sydney. It aimed to explicitly address these requirements for effective mentoring and coaching intervention.

Intended outcomes of the project for stakeholders

The broad aims of the project were fourfold: to reduce academic stress; to ensure that academics were encouraged to engage in quality teaching and research; to develop a culture and community of mentoring in both faculties; and, to encourage cross faculty collaboration. It was hoped that mentees, mentors, the project team, the faculties and the university would all benefit from the project. Outcomes for the various stakeholders are listed below:

Mentees

- Enhanced teaching and learning outcomes in each faculty by involving productive researchers who would benefit from mentoring in teaching
- Improved capacity for research-led teaching outcomes in each faculty by involving innovative teachers who would benefit from mentoring in research-led teaching (eg. early career academics and stalled researchers that may benefit from a range of mentored skills such as time management, research prioritisation, research methods, grant getting or pedagogical research and other opportunities).

Mentors

- Increased capacity to participate as a mentor
- More developed academic leadership by involving senior academics in both faculties as teaching or research-led teaching mentors

Project team

- Improved understanding of key success factors necessary to expand mentoring within the respective faculty
- Enhanced research-led teaching opportunities

Faculties

- Greater collegiality between the faculties
- Enhanced academic leadership
- Expansion of the set of strategies in staff development portfolio

University

- Cross faculty collaboration and sharing of professional practice
- Opportunities to expand the program to other faculties
- Development of an alternative approach that could be used as an accredited Unit of Study in the Graduate Diploma in Higher Education
- Demonstrated research-led teaching outcomes.

The mentoring program was designed and implemented in three stages. Ongoing project management and evaluation were built into each stage to ensure success. The next section of the paper describes the mentoring program.

The mentoring program

Stage 1: Pre-program activities (June - December 2004)

Initial program planning identified four key areas which needed designing and planning prior to the commencement of the project. These included:

- Design of mentoring program (professional development activities)
- Design of evaluation activities
- Promotion, recruitment and selection of mentors and mentees
- Data gathering and evaluation

Promotion, recruitment and selection of mentors and mentees occurred over several events:

Academic Mentoring and Leadership Information Session

This session, held 12th August, introduced the concept of a cross-faculty project, its aims and objectives and the experience of academic mentoring. Registrations and formal expressions of interest were taken from interested participants. A total of forty-four people attended the Information Session, including the Deans of both Faculties, the Dean of the Faculty of Law and the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning & Teaching).

Academic Mentoring and Leadership Workshop

On 28th October, 25 interested academics attended a half day professional development workshop presented by the project team. The purpose of the workshop was to establish a shared understanding of what mentoring is, to facilitate the development of some relationship-building between potential mentors and mentees, and help clarify what people needed and wanted from their involvement. Participants met in small groups, to discuss their interests, expectations and goals. Participants were also encouraged to develop personal action statements. Informal discussions over refreshments provided an opportunity for further relationship building. Seventeen of the attendees continued on the program (having successfully found mentors/been approached to be a mentor).

The Pairing Process

A list of potential mentors was created, based on expressions of interest plus some invitations from the project team. This included sixteen potential mentors plus four who were already paired but were willing to suggest another mentor or, in two cases, to be paired with an additional mentee. Names, phone, email contacts and areas of expertise were listed. The list was sent to all potential mentees and mentors. The list was updated regularly (to take into account pairings and new potential mentors) and re-sent to participants. Additionally, a lunch meeting was arranged to further assist the pairing process.

Meeting over lunch to assist pairing to give people an additional opportunity to meet potential mentors. Six of this group continued on in the program.

Stage 2: Program activities (February-June 2005)

The second stage of the project involved implementation and included:

- Training events for mentors and mentees
- Structured paired activities
- Structured group activities
- Data gathering and evaluation

Once the twenty six participants in the program were finalised, this group met three times over Semester 1. At the first meeting in February, participants discussed the agreement process and refined their agreements (which included clear goals, meeting times, use of the funding and reporting responsibilities). Participants were also provided with a list of answers to frequently asked questions.

A meeting in May was held to discuss progress and also to determine whether participants were interested in being involved in research on the project. Three opportunities were proposed: 1) generic papers based on participants' experiences 2) co-authored papers between participants and project team members on particular themes 3) participant papers/case studies. Ten participants were interested in being involved in such research.

The final group meeting was held in June and consisted of two focus groups to evaluate the program. In addition, a draft template for individual reflective writing activity was circulated for discussion(see Appendix).

Stage 3: Post-program (July 2005-January 2006)

The final stage of the project also involved four key areas:

- Data gathering, evaluation and analysis
- Report writing
- Dissemination
- Evaluation methods: poems etc; artefacts; analysis of agreements, participant reflections; interviews (phone and email); reflective writing.

Data was collected from participants, both collectively in focus groups, and individually through reflective writing. The participants were encouraged to undertake reflective writing throughout the duration of the mentoring process to record reflections, feelings, processes and outcomes. A series of open-ended questions were completed by the participants, to record their reflective responses more specifically and systematically. These responses were then grouped for analysis according to specific themes.

The next section provides more detail about those who chose to be involved in the pilot project.

The participants

Demographics of participants

Mentors

The mentors included 3 men and 9 women with positions ranging from lecturer through to professors. Two mentors had two mentees each. While only one mentor indicated they had formal training in mentoring and career management, another had been engaged in a formal supervisory role and six indicated they had previously participated in mentoring informally as part of their roles as senior academics. One mentor also participated in this program as a mentee.

No.	Years of service at USyd	Years of academic service	Years in current position
1	15	16	2
2	10	22	1.5
3	15	15	13
4	19	19	5
5	27	27	7
6	2.3	18	2.3
7	Not provided		
8	16	26	5
9	Not provided		
10	1.2	14	1.2
Average	13.2	19.6	4.6

N.B. Two mentors did not respond to this question.

Mentees

The fourteen mentees comprised 2 men and 12 women. Their positions in the organization were: 1 Research Associate, 2 Associate Lecturers, 8 Lecturers, and 3 Senior Lecturers. One mentee reported that she had previously been mentored by her PhD supervisor while three cited earlier

informal mentoring experiences. Two had participated in formal mentoring programs and one participant had been mentored through the Graduate Certificate in Higher Education program.

No.	Years of service at USyd	Years of academic service	Years in current position
1	4.5	7.5	1
2	12	17	12
3	3	3	3
4	8	12	2
5	Not provided		
6	2.5	2	2.5
7	Not provided		
8	7	10	1
9	6.5	3.5	3.5
10	3.5	5.5	3.5
11	3	7	3
Average	5.6	8.6	3.5

Three mentees did not respond to this question.

Data Analysis

Responses from the focus groups and reflective statements were content analysed. Eleven themes were identified:

1. Pairing process
2. Entry Participation barriers - recognition and time
3. Ongoing Participation barrier - time
4. Participation incentives – rewards
5. Cultural compatibility
6. Gender
7. Goals
8. Outcomes – intended and unintended
9. Nature of relationships
10. Structure of program
11. Agreement

Each theme is discussed briefly below.

1. Pairing Process

Literature examined in the area of mentoring suggested an important relationship exists between the mentees being able to choose their mentors, and their having a selection of mentors to choose from, and the success of the mentoring process. Nevertheless, despite gaining expressions of interest from a greater number of mentors than was needed, concerns were expressed that there were not enough mentors for the mentees to choose from.

Despite considerable attention paid to the pairing process, this was perhaps the greatest area of challenge for many participants: Some found the three meetings, Introductory Session, Workshop and Lunch, helpful and others quite difficult. For example, although the lunch was designed to allow an informal opportunity to get to know potential mentors, some participants still reported

finding it difficult to identify, who may, or may not, be suitable partners. Others had very high expectations that the pairing would involve a relationship of depth, even though the project was short-term, and expressed their desire to be paired with someone in which they had a sense of the mentor's "person" – not just their expertise in research or teaching.

In contrast, participants that knew one another prior to the process found the process considerably easier. The degree of comfort with the process was highest amongst those pairs who had an existing working relationship such as a research partnership, belonging to the same teaching team, or an existing informal mentoring relationship.

Some participants particularly wanted to be paired with someone from their own discipline so that the mentor understood the context and work environment of the mentee. Additionally, it was considered by some that coordination of meetings with someone in close proximity would be easier to organise. While others considered the opportunity to be mentored by a mentor from another discipline or faculty as desirable for the opportunity to gain fresh views.

A number of participants thought that the process ought to be reviewed. Some made suggestions as to how the pairing process might be improved for example, if the program were to be run again, the list of potential mentors could be made available from the very beginning (together with a very brief bio and list of teaching /research areas).

2. Entry Participation Barriers - recognition and time

Time constraints were recognised as a major concern to the development of the project. Establishing support for the project from senior faculty managers enabled the participants to have time out from other duties to participate freely.

3. Ongoing Participation Barrier – time

Time limitations meant that it was difficult to achieve long-term goals. Several participants cited time management and stresses associated with managing time as a specific outcome area for improvement during the mentoring project. A number of participants pointed to the difficulty of scheduling time and sticking to it once the mentoring project had commenced.

Some pairs mentioned that their goals were medium to long term (and more behavioural rather than concrete) and therefore in the time available it was difficult to adequately assess their success.

Most pairs met fortnightly or monthly and many said that they communicated by shared emails in between. One participant commented that due to time constraints she felt it was important not to force meetings. A few staff were on Special Studies Program (SSP) leave during the mentoring program and one suggested that it is much less time effective when staff on SSP are part of the program and in hindsight she felt she should not have participated in the program. Some pairs set an agenda for the following meeting and felt that this kept them focused.

4. Participation Incentives – rewards

Receiving funding for participating in the process was generally surprising to the participants and the majority considered it a supportive gesture and incentive, enabling time to be more easily allocated to the project. One participant suggested that it was both vital to sealing commitment

from the mentor and mentee and prevented people just drifting away. In contrast one participant was concerned that the amount of funding provided was too generous when other areas of research and teaching were comparatively under-resourced.

5. Cultural compatibility

Some concerns were expressed about cultural compatibility within individual faculties including: concerns that senior academics in the faculty had failed in their responsibilities to mentor their more junior colleagues; differences in culture between faculties and how that might adversely affect the mentoring process; the 'boys club' culture was identified in one faculty by several participants; the strength of the pecking order in a particular faculty and the difficulties newcomers faced just to feel welcome. Additional comments were made concerning the fragmented nature of one faculty and the barriers associated with this fragmentation including age, gender, personality etc.

6. Gender

Of the 28 participants, 21 were women and this gender imbalance was mentioned as an important issue by several participants. Several women expressed their preference to be mentored by other women. However one woman suggested that she expected not to be able to achieve this due to the lack of senior female staff in the Faculty. Another suggested that she was very keen to be involved in a mentoring process, especially with a senior woman outside of her Faculty. This was due to what she regarded as a shortage of senior women in that particular faculty. Furthermore, she suggested that she was very keen to be mentored by a woman – as she felt that women have a different appreciation of the various pressures that academic women might experience at various stages of their career cycle, than do academic men.

Several commented about the lack of presence of males, both as mentors and mentees. Comments were made as to why more men didn't participate in the program. Interestingly, some men had made themselves available as mentors but were not chosen by the mostly female participants. Comments were made that perhaps men don't perceive the need to be mentored because they already have strong networks and more males have senior positions.

7. Goals

Although participants recognized the importance of mentoring for both teaching and research, generally the responses were less specific to the area of teaching and were more concentrated on developmental issues. It was suggested that it is easier to quantify research goals than teaching improvement. While many of the mentees' goals overlapped and merged due to their inter-relationship, the following categories helped link the actual mentoring to the project aims:

- a) *Learning and teaching*
- b) *Research*
- c) *Career development*
- d) *Work life balance*

- a) *Learning & Teaching*

These included:

- Develop broader understanding of teaching and to value and enjoy teaching by input to new course design and developing research-led teaching component
- Develop a paper in the area of research-led teaching
- Help the faculty recognise the importance of mentoring for teaching

b) Research

Research goals were also expressed as a combination of specific goals such as:

- Write a conference paper or a journal article
- Develop extra-university networks around research planning
- Project management training
- Prioritise workload that enhances PhD progress
- Develop strategies to build networks with international academics and industry participants
- Increase publication productivity
- Publish a number of articles for journals and conferences
- Help faculties understand the importance of mentoring for research
- Increase use of research assistants
- Using faculty resources to advance career by strengthening research profile
- Make the mentoring process part of a research project for example, action research

c) Career development

- Develop academic career directions
- Examine the scholarship of academic development
- Plan for academic future post-PhD
- Build an academic identity
- Critically reflect upon specific aspects of career
- Make a deliberate, informed and strategic decision about my future
- Gain a little support in a fairly individualistic working environment

d) Work life balance

- Develop strategies for managing academic workload
- Balance an academic career that blends with personal life
- Overcome fears and other negative emotions in making progress
- Identify, balance and prioritise commitments
- Develop time management skills
- Make explicit spaces for conversations within the mentoring relationship

8. Outcomes – intended and unintended

The relationships between the goals set by individuals in the program and the outcomes listed are extremely positive. All mentees and mentors had particular and deliberate responses in this area. Each pair described the achievement of their outcomes, some were more process oriented, others substantial. Interestingly some participants reported harder to quantify outcomes which were nevertheless felt to be very important such as: emotional support, increased sense of direction, and benefit from taking time for reflecting on otherwise unreflective activities.

Some mentors were inspired and encouraged by the process to continue the mentoring relationship beyond the pilot project, while others were encouraged to mentor others within their faculty.

While some of the goals set by participants were aimed at the longer-term and beyond the time-frame of the pilot project, other important outcomes were achieved during the pilot process. The list below does not seek direct correlation with the earlier list of goals, as the project was not designed in this way (and therefore the data presentation is not structured) to capture that direct relationship. However, the achievement of excellent outcomes, many of which were based on intentional goal setting at the outset of the mentoring process is clear.

Participant responses to the key areas included:

a) Learning and teaching

- New unit of study structures developed
- Acceptance for publication a conference paper in the area of teaching law

b) Research

- The development and submission of a first successful research application
- Acceptance for publication of a conference paper in area of teaching law
- Effective research and networking trip to meet international industry partners and academics employing strategies from mentoring process
- More confidence in approaching other researchers and marketing individual research
- Publication of four refereed conference papers
- Significant progress made to ARC linkage application
- Draft of article submitted
- Research priorities established
- Two articles sent off to journals, an idea for a textbook and a research application
- Plans made for two joint papers
- Two publications and a conference paper
- Development of a research partnership

c) Career development

The following outcomes indicate some very positive developments in this area:

- Recognition that colleagues at all levels can benefit from mentoring
- The process encouraged a mentee to consider mentoring other junior staff in her faculty
- Identifying that others, particularly women, recognise the need for mentoring in relationship to their career development
- Senior academic made to think harder about how to effectively support junior colleagues in her discipline
- Timetable established for promotion application

- Increased capacity for supportive and critical feedback

d) *Work / life balance*

Again participants indicated positive responses such as:

- More conscious of balancing different priorities
- Saying no to activities – improved time management
- Importance of carefully planning academic work

9. Nature of Relationships

Most participants specifically commented on the benefits of the relationships developed in the mentoring process. For example one participant suggested that as well as increased research output they developed a very good professional relationship extending to teaching as well as research.

While for some the relationships and meetings were informal others were more formal and structured having set agendas, action items and meeting notes. The participants developed agreed ways of working in early meetings and this seemed to over-ride concerns about the formality or informality of particular relationships.

Some concerns were expressed by several participants that they particularly wanted informal mentoring and that the formal processes attached to this project were problematic.

10. Structure of Program

For some the processes of having formal meetings added information and ideas to the mentoring process. Others suggested that the project encouraged informal mentoring.

The pairing process was of particular concern (see theme 1), as was the under-representation of men in the project (see theme 6). These concerns will be addressed in future iterations of the program. Other areas of the overall process were considered to work well within the constraints created by time.

11. Agreement

Several participants emphasized the importance of the mentoring agreement as a means of regulating and monitoring the progress of the mentoring process. They suggested that it provided important structure to the project. Others used it iteratively, reflexively developing and shaping the agreement throughout the project.

Project Findings and Outcomes

Specific outcomes of the project are discussed according to the aims for the specific stakeholder groups:

Mentees

A major objective of the project was to identify the effectiveness of the mentoring program in reducing stress and enhancing job satisfaction for early career academics. Mentoring in the area of time constraints was particularly salient as both mentees and mentors discussed their increasingly busy and complex schedules and developing clear and obtainable priorities. The

mentoring process enabled newer academics to prioritise in the light of the broader experience of their senior colleagues.

The findings show that many of the mentees identified their need for assistance to prioritise their workload and effectively manage their time. As goals were prioritised, guidance given and support provided throughout the program, the mentees reported progression towards and/or achievement of their goals without exception.

Accordingly, mentees reported enthusiastically that they enjoyed the program and found it rewarding. From their comments it is evident that the mentees have a greater confidence to set, prioritise and achieve their goals. The achievement of these goals and attainment of concrete and specific outcomes has in turn resulted in mentees describing additional future goals that are now being pursued.

Furthermore, the development of the relationship was described by many of the participants as having continued beyond the program as joint goals were developed extending beyond the project. Despite some participant concerns relating to the pairing process the mentoring relationships were, without exception, described positively in the reflective writing feedback processes. The relationships were able to provide important personal and individual support for newer academics who were still coming to terms with their career development, workload and work/life balance.

In particular, the mentoring process enabled participants to discuss these key areas, and the associated constraints and pressures, which are increasingly a recognised part of academic life. For some women, just having another senior person/woman to listen and offer support, was greatly rewarding. Others described how they were able to develop strategic goals and processes to achieve them with the help of their mentors.

Enhanced teaching and learning outcomes

All of the mentees reported important outcomes as a direct result of the mentoring process. Outcomes were grouped in the areas of *learning and teaching, research, career development, and work life balance*. Clearly these groups overlap and are mutually related and developed.

A significant teaching and learning outcome is the primary area of academic publications in journals and conferences. This outcome was linked by many mentees to the more intangible area of time management and work prioritisation and therefore became a focus of the mentoring relationships. Pedagogical research was mentioned specifically in one instance. An additional area identified grant-getting as an area of achievement for participants. The grants ranged from an early-researcher achieving their first grant to others developing ARC Linkage grants.

Finally, many participants mentioned the benefit of the process for developing formal and informal networks both within and across faculties.

Mentors

Increased capacity of participants to be mentors in the future

The mentors were positive about the process and most responded that they would be willing to participate in future mentoring both formally and informally. There was a general enthusiasm amongst participants about mentoring others in the future. Some mentors expressed their preference to participate in the future within informal mentoring rather formal processes. Many mentors have continued informal mentoring relationships with their mentees.

More developed academic leadership

Mentors did not comment explicitly on how their own leadership skills had been developed, but expressed renewed and continued commitment to supporting their junior colleagues.

Project team

Improved understanding of key success factors necessary to expand mentoring within the respective faculty

Although some factors were identified from the literature review prior to the commencement of the pilot project, such as sufficient time being made available for mentoring to occur, the project team also gained improved understanding of the following factors:

- mentees' involvement in the choice of their mentor
- provision of professional development, morale and other resources to support the mentoring process
- recognition of mentors for their participation.

Faculties

Greater collegiality between the faculties, Cross faculty collaboration and sharing of professional practice

The project has resulted in greater collegiality between the Faculties. Additional collaborative activities have occurred, such as participation on selection committees and sharing academic honesty resources.

Recommendations

The project team recommends the following:

1. The ongoing development and implementation of a systematic and well-resourced mentoring process in both Faculties.
2. Further work should be undertaken in the area of the pairing process, drawing upon this report, in order to make the entry point of the project more participant friendly.
3. A sensitive and careful examination of the gender issues raised in the project should be undertaken, ensuring that future projects prioritise increased male participation and greater awareness of gender equity issues within faculties.
4. The implementation of the Women in Leadership program in the Faculty of Economics and Business as one strategy to address the lack of women in senior academic positions.
5. The encouragement of the professoriate to become more involved in mentoring (both formally and informally).
6. The exploration of potential similar mentoring schemes for general staff.
7. The exploration of opportunities to expand the program to other faculties.
8. Appropriate contribution towards university mentoring program initiatives.

9. The development of an alternative approach that could be used as (or towards) an accredited Unit of Study in the Graduate Diploma or Graduate Certificate in Higher Education.

Conclusions

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the project findings:

First, the project provided the opportunity, space and other resources, for the participants to engage in a positive and relational process enabling them to discuss major concerns about their work in its many different dimensions. Significant outcomes were achieved through the process indicated by the positive feedback about the process from the mentors and mentees. Mentees claimed that they were more organised, more able to talk about their concerns, less isolated and achieved important outcomes in their teaching and research. Although the brevity of the pilot program made it difficult to assess whether academics' stress was reduced, these indicators do suggest that a more sustained program may alleviate stress in the profession.

Second, the project provided a catalyst for academics to consider and reflect upon their own professional development and how they might participate in the development and mentoring of others in the academic context. The general enthusiasm for the project can be considered a positive endorsement of the project itself, as well as a major step to developing a culture and community of mentoring. The Faculties' capacity for delivering further mentoring programs was greatly developed.

Third, whilst the mentoring process was highly valuable for those involved, the project highlighted the need to address cultural change at the systemic level, especially in relation to the lack of women in senior positions in the Faculty of Economics and Business.

Finally, the cross-Faculty collaboration was generally a very positive feature of the project, importantly enabling greater choice of mentors and greater breadth of expertise (although this was not universally considered important by mentees). Further work in the area of the pairing process and issues around gender are imperative. The project has continued throughout 2006 with funding provided by the Deans of both faculties.

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Appendix: Questions used to guide reflective writing process

1. Describe the mentoring process – what happened? How did you get paired? How did a typical mentoring session go?
2. What were your reactions/feelings throughout the process (before the process, during and now)?
3. What difficulties did you encounter with the mentoring process, if any?
4. What were your original goals for the program?
5. Did your goals change? Why or why not?
6. Were your goals (whether original or changed) achieved?
7. How were your goals achieved? What evidence do you have?
8. What unexpected outcomes occurred?
9. What was it about your situation that had an impact on the process?
10. Will you make any changes to your work practices as a result of the program?
11. How much time did you spend? Was it more or less than expected/agreed? How did you feel about that?
12. Will you continue a mentoring relationship (either in your current pairing or with someone else)?
13. Would you be more confident to take on a role as a mentor in the future? (applicable to both mentees and mentors)
14. For mentors: what made you decide to volunteer to be mentor? Where did you learn the skills that allowed you to become a mentor?
15. What might you do differently if faced with a similar situation again?
16. In terms of how the program was run, what went well? What could be improved?
17. Were there other things related more to the University or Faculty that the project team should feed back to management?

Length of service at this university:

Time in current position:

Years of academic experience:

Have you been involved in mentoring before (whether formal or informal)?

Please describe briefly.

