

Administrative Influences on Mentoring Activities of Junior Faculty at Two Institutions of Higher Education

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Abstract

This study examined administrative influences on mentoring activities of junior faculty at two institutions of higher education. The increase of junior faculty on college campuses provides a vital need to understand what activities effect junior faculty persistence to tenure and promotion. Therefore, this study used descriptive statistics to review activities and perceptions by junior faculty as it relates to mentoring. The findings may serve as information for administrators to address the professional needs of junior faculty by either creating or enhancing their current activities on campus whether those activities are in the form of a formal or informal program.

Mentoring has provided opportunities for networking especially in instances when junior faculty and those with various backgrounds enter higher education. For example, it has been suggested that networking can be used to connect junior faculty with other members of a campus community such as administrators and community partners by building a bridge among the various campus constituencies. Quinlan (1999) asserted that junior faculty have the opportunity to develop a useful and productive relationship that widens the range of skills and experiences available to them that is provided by several mentors. Also a wide network is established through team mentoring but with a traditional hierarchically based mentoring approach. Mentoring networks involve developmental network, social systems, community, and employment that are vital to an individual's professional needs (Higgins & Kram, 2001). In addition, mentoring networks can be beneficial because they involve multiple individuals providing guidance from a different perspective. These relationships are vital for the development of junior academic women (Quinlan, 1999). However, faculty must be strategic in utilizing the network within their own unit. Furthermore, key local contacts can be found largely within the same department.

The purpose of the study was to investigate the administrative influences on mentoring activities of junior faculty at two institutions of higher education. The following research question was addressed: How do academic administrators support mentoring activities at their institution?

Literature Review

A disconnect exists between junior faculty and their environments at their respective institutions. Junior faculty members arrive into academia with various backgrounds, but oftentimes they do not connect to other persons on campus (Ambrose, Huston, & Norman, 2005). In some cases junior faculty enter academia with uncertainties of how to navigate through the processes of teaching and research. In many instances, they find it difficult to identify themselves in institutions of higher education when some of them have never taught or engaged in scholarly work (De Simone, 2001).

Junior faculty members are also concerned about pursuing the tenure process. One of the requirements for tenure is scholarly research publications. Incorporating meaningful research practices along with their teaching loads and other responsibilities can be overwhelming. They often feel coerced into behaviors that are of no benefit to their students or their scholarship, such as writing for quantity as opposed to quality publications or having to use standardized teaching evaluations that are not compatible to their teaching philosophy (Gillespie, et al., 2005). Giving into the pressures of their institutions, junior faculty may decide that teaching is not as important as the elements necessary to gain tenure. Mullen & Forbes (2000) contended when faced with the immediate pressures of research, scholarship, and tenure, junior faculty often relegate teaching to a lower priority status.

Junior faculty at institutions of higher education should be encouraged to be involved in ongoing mentoring activities. The interaction between junior and senior faculty should serve both career enhancing and psychosocial functions (Kram & Isabella, 1985). Junior faculty should receive coaching, job strategies, emotional support and personal feedback to be effective in their roles as professors while learning how to balance their work and personal lives.

Some junior faculty members are interested in mentoring in order to address their individual needs for tenure. Huston and Weaver (2008) insisted peer interaction makes a profound impact on junior faculty by addressing their immediate needs, which ultimately benefits the institution as a whole. It is imperative for the longevity of junior faculty as indicated by the type of institution they are employed to have positive experiences such as mentoring and collegiality that is supported by administrators.

Mentorship

Gillespie et al. (2005) accounted when junior faculty are provided with adequate guidance from senior faculty they learn how to systematically operate for the entire school year. Sufficient guidance from senior faculty through mentoring can provide junior faculty with the confidence they need to successfully navigate in academia. More so, it becomes essential in mentoring relationships for senior faculty to stay abreast of the needs of junior faculty as they can easily become overwhelmed in the demands of teaching in higher education and abandon their responsibility to engage in research. Junior faculty need to be reminded to remain conscientious about their scholarship in order to keep it high on their priority list (Cramer, 2006). Cramer adds that junior faculty are in need of unambiguous signals to help underscore the high priority of ongoing scholarly activities.

Administrative Support

Administrators should support senior faculty who perform mentoring activities at their institutions. This is by far one of the most important aspects of implementation on any campus in higher education. Administrators should be proactive in their support of junior and senior faculty collegial interactions for the purpose of mentorships (Wilen, Springer, Ambrosino, & White, 2006). While some institutions may have top down initiatives for faculty development, it is critical that all institutions employ some form of mentoring activities for their junior faculty. In particular, HBCU administrators should commit to developing scholarly junior faculty (Perna, 2001).

Institutions with department heads committed to the condition of mentoring will enhance the likelihood that mentoring will be promoted within that environment (Gibson, 2006). The increased number of adjuncts in one School of Social Work influenced the dean and program director to include adjunct faculty into the broader academic program (Wilen et al., 2006). Furthermore, Grunwald and Peterson, (2003) asserted that some administrators support specific type of professional development activities for their faculty in regards to academic assessments designed for students. This type of support should be expanded to meet all aspects of the tenure requirements for junior faculty.

Positive relationships among administrators and faculty can positively impact faculty commitment, investment and teaching at the institution (Grunwald & Peterson, 2003). Some believe the success and viability of institutions of higher education can be tied to the support junior faculty receive from his or her academic administrator (Sorcinelli, 1994). The entire department can be instrumental in assisting the department chair in developing professional habits that will promote continuous scholarly pursuits for junior faculty (Cramer, 2006).

Administrators should be more inclined to address the needs of junior faculty and make sure they have the same access to information and resources as senior faculty (Wallin, 2007). In addition, provost/vice president for academic affairs, deans and department chairs ought to provide clarity and resources to influence scholarly activities. As a result, consensus building can be a viable tool used by department chairs to establish a department wide commitment to scholarship (Cramer, 2006).

Conceptual Framework Theory

The conceptual framework in Figure 1 is based on the Social Capital Theory in which Lin (2001) explained is the production of human capital and economic profit that is a result of the investment of education and training that inherently produces skills and knowledge that involves individuals investing in social ties to access resources of others. As a result, this theory best describes the process that occurs in mentoring. Hezlett and Gibson (2007) concurred that the interest in mentoring has expanded because of an increased need for continuous learning, reliance on informal learning, on-the-job development, and an emphasis on employee responsibility for career management. These elements have created a demand for employees to direct their own development and for organizations to provide tools and resources to support employees' efforts. Informal mentoring, which evolves as people get to know each other on their own, and formal mentoring, which is arranged through organizational intervention, are means by which experienced individuals can offer more junior colleagues career-related support and assistance. Furthermore, Seibert, Kraimer, and Liden (2001) proposed that career mentoring is one of the key variables mediating the relationship between the characteristics of social networks to include weak ties, structural holes, contacts in other functions, and contacts at higher levels while producing favorable career outcomes.

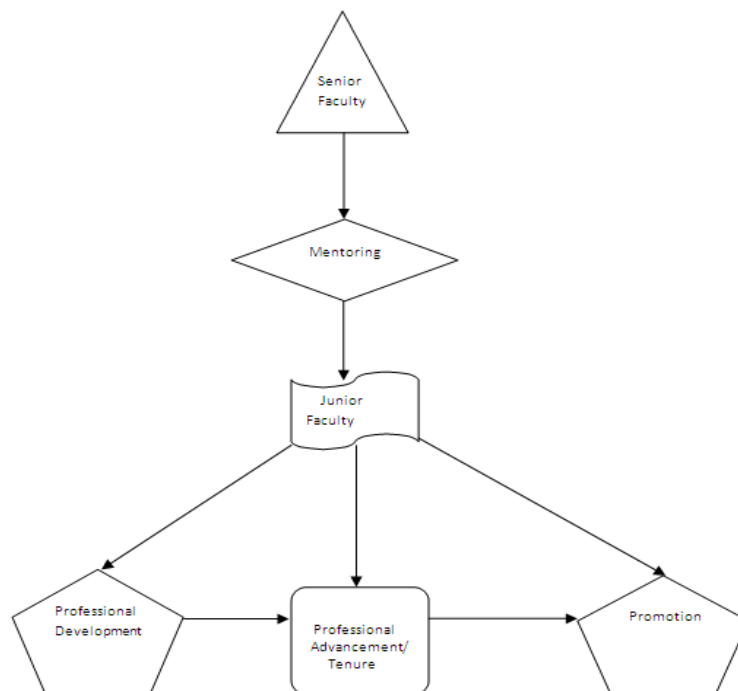


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of Social Capital Theory.

The conceptual framework is used to measure the mentoring activities of junior faculty at HBCUs. The mentoring activities used are not limited to collegiality support in the areas of teaching, research, and service; administrative support; and form of mentoring.

Methodology

Sample

The purpose of this study was to investigate administrative influences on mentoring activities of junior faculty at two institutions of higher education. This study investigated the impact of these influences through the use of quantitative processes. The population for this study included tenure track junior faculty at two public four-year HBCUs in the Southeast region of the United States. Tenured track junior faculty was defined as persons with 5 years or less of teaching experience. The population for this study derived from 100 tenure track faculty. The use of a web-based survey allowed quick access to junior faculty at two four-year institutions in the Southeast region of the United States. The quantitative results were gathered from the use of online surveys with a 52% return rate.

Instrumentation

The online survey used for this study consisted of four sections and a total of 46 items. Section 1 asked demographic information followed by Section 2 which asked primarily about the various forms of mentoring activities. In section three participants responded to their perception of the type of mentoring activities that impacted their overall professional advancement. Lastly, Section 4 asked about the nature of mentoring activities.

Reliability and Validity

The instrument used in the study was surveys for junior faculty. The data collected from the surveys provided the means for gauging the trustworthiness of the responses. As a result, conclusions drawn from the statistics provided the information needed to produce a higher level of reliability and validity. The Cronbach Alpha reliability for the survey instrument was .904. Nunnally (1978, p. 245) recommended that "instruments used in basic research have reliability of about .70 or better."

Results

Demographics

Table 1

Participants by Race

Race	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
African American	21	41.2	41.2
White	11	21.6	21.6
Asian	7	13.7	13.6
Hispanic	6	11.8	11.8
Other	6	11.8	11.8

In reference to race, Table 1 displays 41.2% were African American, 21.6% were White, 13.7% were Asian, 11.8% were Hispanic and 11.8% were other. Out of 52 participants, the largest number of respondents was African American. Moody (2004) asserted the academic field is unbalanced which makes it difficult for majority faculty and their departments to value the talents and strengths of non-majority faculty. As a result, an outsider in academia may receive modest or no mentoring or inside information to assist in navigating their careers.

Table 2

Participants by Mentoring Activities Related to Scholarly Activities

Activities	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Clarification of publication Goals	7	13.7	16.7
Co-publication opportunities	12	23.5	28.6
Professional membership	12	23.5	28.6
Conference presentations	8	15.7	19.0
Grant funding	3	5.9	7.1

Table 2 shows the type of scholarly activities the participants discussed with their mentors. Out of 52 participants, 13.7% responded that they discussed clarification of research and publication goals with their mentors, 23.5% responded they discussed co-publication and research opportunities with their mentors, 23.5% responded they

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In Table 3 four items were addressed by participants in the study. They responded by their level of satisfaction to each item. The first item asked whether they agreed their dean, chair or department head encouraged their mentoring activities. Out of 52 participants, 15.7% strongly agreed, 23.5% agreed, 33.3% were neutral and 11.8% disagreed.

In the next item, participants responded by their level of satisfaction that their dean, chair or department head spoke with them concerning their plan on professional development. Out of 52 participants, 7.8% strongly agreed, 25.5% agreed, 43.1% were neutral, 13.7% disagreed and 2% strongly disagreed.

In the following item, participants responded by their level of satisfaction that their president, vice president or dean provided adequate resources for mentoring of junior faculty at their institutions. Out of 52 participants, 9.8% strongly agreed, 31.4% agreed, 33.3% were neutral and 9.8% disagreed.

In the last item in Table 3, participants responded by their level of satisfaction that their president, vice president or dean communicated the importance of mentoring junior faculty at their institution. Out of 52 participants, 17.6% strongly agreed, 35.3% agreed, 27.5% were neutral and 5.9% disagreed.

Table 3

Summary of Administrative Support

Item	Level of Satisfaction	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Encourage	Disagree	6	11.8	14.0
	Neutral	17	33.3	39.5
	Agree	12	23.5	27.9
	Strongly agree	8	15.7	18.6
Spoken	Strongly disagree	1	2.0	2.2
	Disagree	7	13.7	15.2
	Neutral	22	43.1	47.8
	Agree	13	25.5	28.3
Provide	Strongly agree	4	7.8	8.7
	Disagree	5	9.8	11.6
	Neutral	17	33.3	39.5
	Agree	16	31.4	37.2
Communicate	Strongly agree	5	9.8	11.6
	Disagree	3	5.9	6.8
	Neutral	14	27.5	31.8
	Agree	18	35.3	40.9
	Strongly agree	9	17.6	20.5

Research Question Findings

The following research question was addressed in this study: How do administrators support mentoring activities at their institution? Junior faculty responded that administrators communicated the importance of mentoring, provided adequate resources, and encouraged mentoring activities for junior faculty. These responses indicate how administrators support mentoring activities at the participants' respective institutions.

Discussion

The most important factor to draw from the study is the number of institutions with mentoring programs. Out of 52 participants, 49% responded their institutions currently do not have mentoring programs. This affects the pertinent training and guidance junior faculty need in order to approach and maneuver through the tenure evaluation process. Junior faculty should be equipped with the knowledge necessary to successfully obtain tenure.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations have been made for administrators of HBCUs interested in understanding the needs of junior faculty to assist them in persisting to tenure and promotion. The two recommendations are:

1. Mentoring should be a component of faculty evaluations. Deans and department chairs should use the information provided by the mentoring committee and director to include in the annual evaluations of both junior and senior faculty members. Mentoring should be incorporated as a part of the responsibilities of all senior faculty. Institutions should provide incentives for senior faculty who allocate more time for mentoring. Establish structures that support the provision of mentoring promises to foster career development and to transform academic institutions (Gibson, 2006).
2. Annual reviews should be administered for institutions with formal mentoring programs to ensure junior faculty are receiving adequate resources and exposure to be effective in their teaching, service learning opportunities and productive in their research and scholarly writing. For institutions without formal mentoring programs, mentoring activities should be implemented and supervised critically throughout each semester.

Conclusion

In order to continue to meet the goals and objectives of HBCUs, academic administrators should support the professional development of junior faculty and encourage senior faculty to assist by serving as mentors to prepare junior faculty for their roles in academia. Junior faculty should be able to embrace the three thrusts of the professoriate to include teaching, service and

research. Scholarly writing being the most challenging element often reported by junior faculty is the most critical for ensuring junior faculty will establish a pattern of publications that will continue beyond achieving tenure. Junior faculty should be consistently working towards a publication with their mentor throughout a mentoring program or activities. However, the ultimate goal of the mentoring activities or program should be for junior faculty to achieve tenure and persist to promotions.

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