Magna 20 Minute Mentor

Transcript

How Do I Create a Successful Faculty Mentoring Program?

Presented by:

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Tyler Griffin, Ph.D.:   Hello and welcome to this Magna 20 Minute Mentor on how to create a successful faculty mentoring program.

Ken Alford, Ph.D.:   We are presenters. I'm Ken Alford, currently an associate professor at Brigham Young University.

Tyler Griffin, Ph.D.:   And I'm Tyler Griffin, an assistant professor at BYU.

Ken Alford, Ph.D.:   Our goal in this 20 minutes is to help you set up a mentoring program if you don't currently have one at your college or university or, if you have an existing mentoring program, to provide, hopefully, some ideas where you can improve that program and make it even more useful for your faculty. Our opinion is that there ought to be some kind of mentoring program at every institution of higher learning.

Tyler Griffin, Ph.D.:   Very good. We want to begin with the famous interchange between Alice and the cat. Notice Alice starts by saying, would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here? And the cat's response was, that depends a great deal on where you want to get to. Her response, I don't care much where. And the cat's famous reply, then it doesn't much matter which way you go.

Ken Alford, Ph.D.:   We find that that's kind of the way it is with mentoring. If you don't know what you want, then we tend to stumble through. And so our goal here, again, is just to help give you some ideas that can help you focus and bring into clearer identification those things that, for your institution, will be beneficial to especially your new faculty as you help bring them in and prepare them to succeed in your environment.

We want to do this through a couple of things. We want to talk about some basic principles of mentoring programs, some of the practices that you may wish to consider implementing and including, and then provide some resources, beyond this 20 Minute Mentor, where you can go for additional help because, as we've discovered, there's a tremendous amount of material that has been developed over the years, and we want to make it easy for you to access that.

In other words, you're going to create kind of a mentoring mosaic, so that all of these pieces come together, so that as you hire new faculty, you bring them into an environment that's welcoming to them and helps them to succeed and to achieve tenure.

Tyler Griffin, Ph.D.:   Very good. So let's begin with the notion that when universities hire a new faculty member, certain departments will spend upwards of $100,000 to make one hire, with all of their recruiting and all of their search efforts, to

get that one person. And then if we don't take care of that hiree, we don't mentor them appropriately, then they wash out and we have to start over the process of finding a new person to take that slot again.

So the first step in mentoring is to show people in your mentoring program at all levels, your supervisors, your administration, your mentors, your mentees, show them what is it that we're trying to accomplish, which leads us then to helping them. You'll notice the show-them is them just watching you do what you're expecting them to accomplish or do, what it looks like. Then you start passing the baton, step by step, to them.

Step two is help them. It's a team effort. You're working with them, which then leads you to watch them. Now you're observing as they do most of it. Number one, you're doing all of it, and, number two, it's a shared. Number three, they're doing most of it under your observation as an administrator.

Which then leads to number four, which is your goal to let them, and hopefully it's succeed as the end goal here. Let them succeed as you've trained them. They're on their own now. They can do it.

Ken Alford, Ph.D.:   Showing, helping, watching, and letting applies also in the classroom for all faculty as we prepare students to go out and do those things that we're training with them. But we contend that, as far as teaching and scholarship and citizenship go, the three legs basically of any kind of tenuring stool or faculty participation, that these four points, showing, helping, watching, and letting, is a wonderful progression that applies in each of these areas.

It clearly applies in teaching, but it applies equally well in scholarship and citizenship. And so we think it's kind of a great framework and basic principles to establish your program.

Tyler Griffin, Ph.D.:   So with the program design, there are a lot of decisions that an administrator, or an administrative council, have to make when setting up or improving a mentoring program, lots of decision points that will define what your mentoring program is going to look like and what kind of success you're going to experience.

So the first step you have to decide is are we going to set up a formal or an informal, and maybe that's the wrong question. The better question might be, what formal mentoring aspects do we want to establish, and which informal mentoring aspects do we want to encourage, foster, maybe incentivize?

And so the formal is obviously something that is more top-down. The administration or the department, the college, the university, any of those

administrative levels, they can set the standard for the mentoring. And they can say, here's what our formal mentoring program is going to look like.

Whereas, the informal is obviously that more grassroots, where people at the ground level are getting together in mentoring-mentee kinds of relationships so that they can push the work of your department, your college, your university forward with your students.

Ken Alford, Ph.D.:   You'll find out that, in most cases, it's been our experience, that the informal relationships will actually yield the most fruit because those develop naturally. But as new faculty are starting, it's especially important to have a formal relationship so that they have someone formally designated. They know they're expecting to answer questions. They know someone they can go to and provide them as kind of a safety net and almost a faculty big-brother or big-sister kind of relationship.

The second thing to look for as you consider these various options, is your program going to be primarily established as a one-to-one relationship in which you have a formal mentor assigned for that person to go to and they have one mentor for one few faculty member? Or are you going to designate someone on your faculty as the new-person, go-to guy or gal so that if they have questions in a specific area, there is one person designated in the faculty?

And that may change from year to year. But new faculty always know how to get their questions answered. As department and college leadership, this is really beneficial because it means that they're not always going to the department chair or the dean, which is really not where they need to be going for most of these kinds of questions.

It also means that there is someone on the faculty that has been set up that knows the answers and is prepared to handle these kinds of questions. Now, the one-to-many relationship can work well, but you have opt recognize, depending on the number of new faculty, it can be quite a heavy load added onto their already-heavy load in most cases.

There are, for example, in a one-to-many setting, you may want to have something like a new-instructor-hard-questions seminar. This is something our college has done, where we have a very senior faculty member who is brought in, who meets with new faculty members over lunchtime for several weeks, answering some of the difficult questions that exist in that field. And this will be specific to your discipline.

But it's very helpful to let them see that there are places to get these answered rather than confronting them for the first time within a classroom setting.

Tyler Griffin, Ph.D.:　One thing that really helps on the one-to-many setting is if administrators can figure out what are the things that are the rule, the standard, the same answer every time. Plug those into the one-to-many settings so that you don't make your one-to-one mentors have to keep doing the same stuff that is much easier to take care of in a big-group setting.

It's the same answers. It's basic facts. And let the one-to-one relationships deal with more of the specifics relating to that individual teacher or faculty member.

Ken Alford, Ph.D.:　The third consideration you have to wrestle with as administrators is are we going to make our mentoring program mandatory, or is it going to be opt-in? And there are pros and cons to both, and it doesn't have to be all or none. You can make certain aspects of your mentoring program mandatory. They're expected that you do this. And others that are more of a nice thing for faculty, make those opt-in, and you could even incentivize those.

Tyler Griffin, Ph.D.:　Which raises the fourth issue you need to consider, and that is, can your program be incentivized? It's an idealized world that believes that altruism will cause this program to function. We live in the real world. It's very nice if you can incentivize your mentors and those being mentored, if you can somehow make it worth their while.

It doesn't always have to be cash, although many universities and colleges do provide some kind of financial incentive or stipend during normally a one mentoring year, but it doesn't have to be. There could be funds added to a research account. There might be additional teaching assistant resources. There might be lightened teaching loads. There's any number of ways.

It might even be something as simple as a parking space, which on most university campuses is better than funding. But there's lots of ways to do this.

But I guess our recommendation would be to look at what kind of incentives you can provide. It may be nothing more than a recognition in an annual stewardship letter or something, that they did this, but there needs to be some kind of incentive so it's just not another extra duty and seen as a burden.

Ken Alford, Ph.D.: For those who are weighing out the option of financial incentives in these kinds of programs, all you have to do is go to your controller, or somebody who handles the finances for each department and college, and just ask them how much money is spent on an annual basis, on average, on hiring new faculty and what the success rate is for those faculty.

You start plugging those numbers in and you say, wow, we can plug quite a bit of money into an incentive program and come out way ahead by helping our faculty to succeed that we've spent all this effort and money and energy on bringing to the university, rather than saying it's too expensive to incentivize with cash or bonuses in that regard. Most of the time, you're going to find out you're going to come ahead if you can succeed with those faculty that you've recruited.

Now the fifth decision you have to make is, is this for the entire faculty or for subsets? If you start looking across the universities in the world, there are all kinds of themes and variations of mentoring programs. So some work really well in certain settings with the entire faculty being on board. And others, that would be a big mistake. You would alienate a lot of your faculty, and you don't want to do that with a mentoring program.

So then you can target certain subsets. And when making that decision as an administrator, one simple thing you can do is look at your past 10, 15, 20 years, however far back you want to go, to see where have your successes come in reaching tenure, and where have your failures been experienced in reaching tenure? Which groups have had the hardest time getting to that tenure mark?

And then you might be able to say, hmm, we need to work on that subset of faculty that we're bringing in. Help them. Make them capable of being able to succeed in that tenure process.

Tyler Griffin, Ph.D.: One easy way to do a subset is if you have large general education courses. Is the faculty teaching those courses, of which new faculty are often assigned? That becomes an easy subset to work with.

A sixth consideration is single mentor versus team. And the question here is are you going to have a single mentor try to mentor new faculty in all areas, that is, teaching, research, and citizenship?

It may be more effective, based on your particular discipline, to have a teaching mentor and assign a separate research mentor for individuals as they come in, based on the specialized discipline they're bringing, skills they're bringing. That's just a decision that's going to have to be made locally because there's not really general guidance that can be given across all mentoring programs.

Ken Alford, Ph.D.:   Very good. So with those six items, what you're going to end up doing is creating a mosaic matrix for your mentoring program in your setting. So we've given you one little example here of plugging in two of the options of the six that we've been talking about, to say, hmm, we need to have these aspects be in a one-to-one formal mentoring setting.

And so we've categorized them, and we've helped our faculty come onboard to say, here's the reason, the rationale behind why we're doing it this way, so it makes sense to them. They buy in that way.

Then these are the aspects that are going to be one to many in a formal setting. These are the ones that are one to one, in the C part of the grid there, informal one to one, and informal one to many. You can plug in any of the options that we've talked about into this kind of a grid and start mapping out, what do we want this to look like? What are we going to try to accomplish with this, and what's the best solution based on our setting?

Tyler Griffin, Ph.D.:   And the great thing is this can be modified over time. Your mentoring program will very seldom look the same two years in a row. That's just the reality.

As far as resources go, we want to let you know that we have added several additional pages of resource materials onto this 20 Minute Mentor. We've got rationale you can use with your administration, things to help you guy buy-in from the mentors, things to get buy-in from the mentees, some funding considerations, program considerations, and also an example of a formal program, as well as websites that have just a tremendous amount of material. Your local institution does not have to reinvent the wheel here. You can benefit what's been done elsewhere.

Ken Alford, Ph.D.:   Very good. So now let's switch into a few dos and don'ts. Let's begin with the don'ts. Don't make your mentors reinvent the wheel. Just because you call somebody in, and even if you incentivize it and say, congratulations, you're one of our mentors, in a formal program, it doesn't mean that they know what being a mentor looks like in your college or your department in that setting.

So that's what you don't do is assume that they know everything. Here's what you do do, mentor your mentors. You'll notice that in life, you're usually a student before you're a teacher. You're a child before you're a parent. You get mentored before you then mentor, same thing here.

So pick your very best in the mentoring realm to be the mentor for your mentors so that those future mentors can actually experience exactly what

you intend for them to be able to do for the newer faculty, the junior faculty. Mentor your mentors.

Tyler Griffin, Ph.D.:   Please recognize the hardest time to get started on a mentoring program is as you begin. That first year is going to be difficult. It's not going to be completely successful. But what happens over time is you have a mentoring program and you have faculty who themselves were successful mentored.

Then when they are asked to mentor junior faculty, the program will just build on itself and continue to get better. But recognize, and please set the expectations of the administration a little lower than probably where you would like them to be, because that first year will be rough, and you will have some that will not be successes, as well as many that will be. So the point is don't put all your eggs in one basket when it comes to mentoring. Final comment?

Ken Alford, Ph.D.:   I was just going to say, when you're mentoring the mentors, you can't just mentor them in one aspect. You have to also mentor them in all of the eggs in your basket. You can't assume that because you've done mentoring in the teaching realm, that they know now how to be mentors in the scholarship and the research realm.

Again, whatever you want them to be able to do, make sure that they experience first on the front end. Otherwise, we're setting them up for failure and for them not meeting your expectations. And you're getting more frustrated in that first year with your mentoring program.

The more you can show them and then help them, then the more capable they are when you start watching them and letting them, as they then go out and mentor.

Tyler Griffin, Ph.D.:   So if you don't want to put all your eggs in one basket, what you do want to do is you want to create, as we referred to it earlier, that mentoring mosaic. You need to let your faculty know that it's absolutely okay that if they were not selected as a formal mentor, then they are perfectly free, and in fact encouraged, to set up informal mentoring relationships.

There's nothing that should be stopping any faculty member having any kind of mentoring relationship with new faculty members. And a new faculty member can benefit from having multiple informal relationships, as well as a few formal relationships.

The other thing you need to do in creating this mentoring mosaic, and it's especially important in the first couple of years but continually important

throughout the program, is to seek feedback from those that are involved in this program.

You need to periodically meet with your mentors without those who they're mentoring. Let them speak freely. What's working well? What's just not working? What are the problems? But also, at the same time, you want to meet fairly frequently with those who are being mentored. What are their frustrations? What about the program is institutionally painful? Let's find it and fix it so that when you have the next round of hiring, you've knocked off some of those rough corners, and you've got a little bit easier time for the faculty.

Because the goal of this whole program is to give you successful faculty who achieve tenure who can feel satisfied and provide a meaningful contribution, both in scholarship and teaching and citizenship. That's the goal, and a mentoring program can help get you there.

Ken Alford, Ph.D.: Now one thing to consider here is a lot of times, administration will take the full burden on their own shoulders, the full weight of creating that mentoring program on themselves. And that's less likely to succeed than the administrator who says, hey, let's get together, let's build this mentoring mosaic together, so it's a process.

You're more likely, again, to get buy-in from your faculty. They're more likely to be excited about it if they've helped make some of those guiding decisions along the way of what's going to work best. Here's our end goal, we want to increase success in the tenure process and success in our scholarship, research, and teaching. What mentoring aspects do you all feel like would help us get there most effectively? That's powerful.

Which now brings us to the bottom line. For most universities, most colleges and departments, the bottom line is we're working with people, and we've got limited resources of time and money. And so a mentoring program is a way to treat people and help people succeed, rather than to bring people in so that we can weed them out or to make them less successful.

It's a more humane thing to give them opportunities to succeed, as well as, we would say, in the process, any money you spend in your mentoring program is going to be money well spent. You can either spend it on prevention or on the cure. And prevention is usually a lot cheaper than the cure.

Tyler Griffin, Ph.D.: We wish you success. Our bottom line is give it a try. If you haven't had a mentoring program, your program will benefit. Well, we hope you've

enjoyed this. Please feel free to give us any feedback, and thank you very much.