

## **Mentoring Online Faculty**

Mentoring is commonly viewed as a promising strategy through which new faculty are oriented to their institutions and to teaching (Yun & Scorcinielli, 2009). Weimer (2009) notes that not only do those who are mentored benefit from a mentoring relationship, but the mentor also benefits from the interaction. Effective mentoring for new instructors in the face-to-face environment is seen as having the impact of reducing professional isolation, providing support and feedback on performance, and helping mentees achieve greater levels of confidence in their teaching (Mohono-Mahlatsi & van Tonder, 2006). When it comes to teaching with technology, however, the understanding of the role of mentoring is not quite so clear (Boulay & Fulford, 2009). Because faculty who are new to teaching online need examples, models, and individualized support, a number of institutions are now turning to mentoring programs to meet that need.

Institutions, such as Florida State College at Jacksonville and Park University in Missouri, have adopted mentoring programs as a means of orienting online faculty, providing ongoing training and development, and retaining faculty. Creating a mentoring relationship through the pairing of faculty who are more experienced online with those who are just starting helps break down barriers and provides real, concrete examples of what works and what does not. Studies on faculty development through mentoring reveal that without the support of a more experienced colleague to guide them, many faculty would most likely have discontinued their involvement with online teaching beyond their first course (Mandernach, Donelli, Dailey & Schulte, 2005). Using a mentoring approach to the training of online instructors can help determine who will succeed and who might not be well suited to teaching online, given that mentors may also be asked to play the role of assessors of their mentees. We review mentoring approaches in this chapter along with suggestions for the development of effective mentoring programs.

## **Common Elements of Mentoring Approaches**

Chuang, Thompson, and Schmidt (2003) reviewed the literature on technology mentoring programs for faculty and found that all programs and approaches discussed included several common elements: providing visions for technology use; individualizing technology support; breaking down hierarchical structure; establishing open dialogue and collaborative relationships; providing mutual benefits for mentors and mentees; and emphasizing the creation of a learning community for those participating in the program. Let's look at each element and how a mentoring program might address them.

### **Providing Visions for Technology Use**

Novice instructors often have difficulty seeing the myriad ways that technology might be infused into their teaching. As we have discussed, this along with fear of the technology itself are some of the needs that novice faculty have as they begin to move into online teaching. By working collaboratively with a mentor or a peer group, novice faculty can begin to "catch the vision" in terms of ways in which technology might enhance the work they do with students, as well as develop understanding of the pedagogy involved in online teaching. Chuang, Thompson, and Schmidt (2003) noted that faculty who completed mentoring programs indicated that they were

able to gain a deeper level of understanding in terms of how to use technology effectively along with a greater sense of confidence in their ability to do so.

## **Individualizing Technology Support**

Individualized support, such as that offered through a mentoring relationship, provides learner-focused instruction. Given that a learner-focused approach is what we promote for online teaching, doesn't it make sense to provide the same to those who are learning how to do it? Working with a mentor to learn how to use technology and teach online allows the new online instructor to work at his or her own pace while allowing for the specific needs of an instructor's discipline or teaching approach. Furthermore, providing an individualized approach reduces perceived risk on the part of the new instructor, by allowing experimentation and exploration without feeling or looking foolish in front of a group of students. This approach allows the instructor to practice and make mistakes before "going live" with a group of students in an online class. Often this involves first shadowing a more experienced instructor in his or her online course, followed by the mentor shadowing the new instructor as he or she teaches for the first time. Observations should be coupled with ongoing discussion about technique and designed to support any needed changes. What should be avoided, however, is putting the mentor in an evaluative position in terms of job performance or job retention. Feedback should be for the purpose of performance and quality improvement.

## **Breaking Down Hierarchical Structure**

Group and network approaches and the use of students as mentors help break down the traditional hierarchical structures that exist with traditional mentoring. When a more experienced instructor is assigned to a novice instructor for mentoring purposes, a power imbalance is established. There is also an inherent risk when mentors are assigned rather than chosen that the individuals involved will not develop a strong relationship resulting in the desired outcomes (Goodyear, 2006). When group and network approaches are used, however, mentees often set the direction of mentoring, determine the norms by which the group will operate, and set the agenda for the group. Not dependent on a one-to-one relationship, mentees are able to get needs met from multiple sources and power imbalances are erased, thus resulting in a more collaborative, community-oriented approach. This is particularly important when students are used as mentors—they need to feel comfortable approaching their mentees on equal footing in order to support them in learning about and using technology effectively.

## **Establishing Open Dialogue and Collaborative Relationships**

When nonhierarchical models are employed for mentoring, the result is often increased levels of mutual respect and trust (Chuang, Thompson, & Schmidt, 2003). It is not uncommon to see mentees engaging in collaborative work with one another as they become more comfortable in their use of technology—we have seen the development of wikis, projects in Second Life, coteaching, coauthoring articles, and copresenting at conferences resulting from group and network mentoring programs and have often seen such collaborations between faculty members and their student mentors. In fact, we have also benefited from such collaborations when we have worked with our own students to learn a new form of technology. Most recently, we

collaborated with a graduate student to support our faculty training and development work with a group of K–12 math teachers. Our student has developed significant expertise in the use of cell phones in his math classes—something he is now teaching us. We brought him into an online training to present his work in this area and also to support the teachers in their exploration of constructivist approaches to math instruction. His involvement was extremely positive and moved the group much farther in their acceptance and understanding of this approach than if we had worked with them by ourselves.

## **Providing Mutual Benefits for Mentors and Mentees**

All of the literature we have reviewed on mentoring, along with our own experiences in this area, underscores that mentoring processes benefit everyone who participates in them—whether mentor or mentee. Whether helping or being helped, self-esteem and confidence increase along with mutual respect. All parties feel a sense of empowerment as well and feel as if they are able to influence those who will carry on in the profession (Goodyear, 2006). Bright (2008) suggests that the collaboration can also create a greater sense of ownership of the institution's online program and greater willingness to participate in evaluation activities, a topic we discuss further in the next chapter. Consequently, not only do mentoring programs benefit those who participate, they also have the potential to benefit the institution as a whole and support their efforts to implement and grow online learning programs.

## **Emphasizing the Creation of a Learning Community**

The positive benefits and outcomes of mentoring that we have been describing—increased collaboration, willingness to experiment with new approaches, mutual respect and trust, mutual learning goals, reduction of hierarchy, and open communication—are all important elements involved in the development of a learning community. Add to that the fact that online teaching can be a very lonely endeavor. Creating a learning community through mentoring relationships can significantly reduce isolation and create a stronger sense of connection to the institution—something that is particularly important for adjuncts at a distance.

Establishing and promoting a mentoring program for online teaching can help infuse a learning community approach into training and, thus, into teaching in the online environment. If we teach the way we were taught, and if we are taught differently as we move into online teaching, the end result is likely to be a more learner-focused, constructivist approach and the development of truly excellent online instructors. We now turn to proposed ways in which mentoring programs can be developed and implemented in the institution to support these goals.

## **Approaches to Mentoring for Online Teaching**

Mentoring programs for technology use and online teaching take several forms. The most common is matching a more experienced insider or master faculty with a novice or beginner, mirroring mentoring programs commonly seen in face-to-face teaching. This approach to mentoring is typically seen as hierarchical—an older, more experienced faculty member is paired with a younger, entry-level faculty member (Zachary, 2000). Given, however, that master online

faculty may be more experienced than their novice peers, but not necessarily older, hierarchical models for mentoring online instructors may not be applicable.

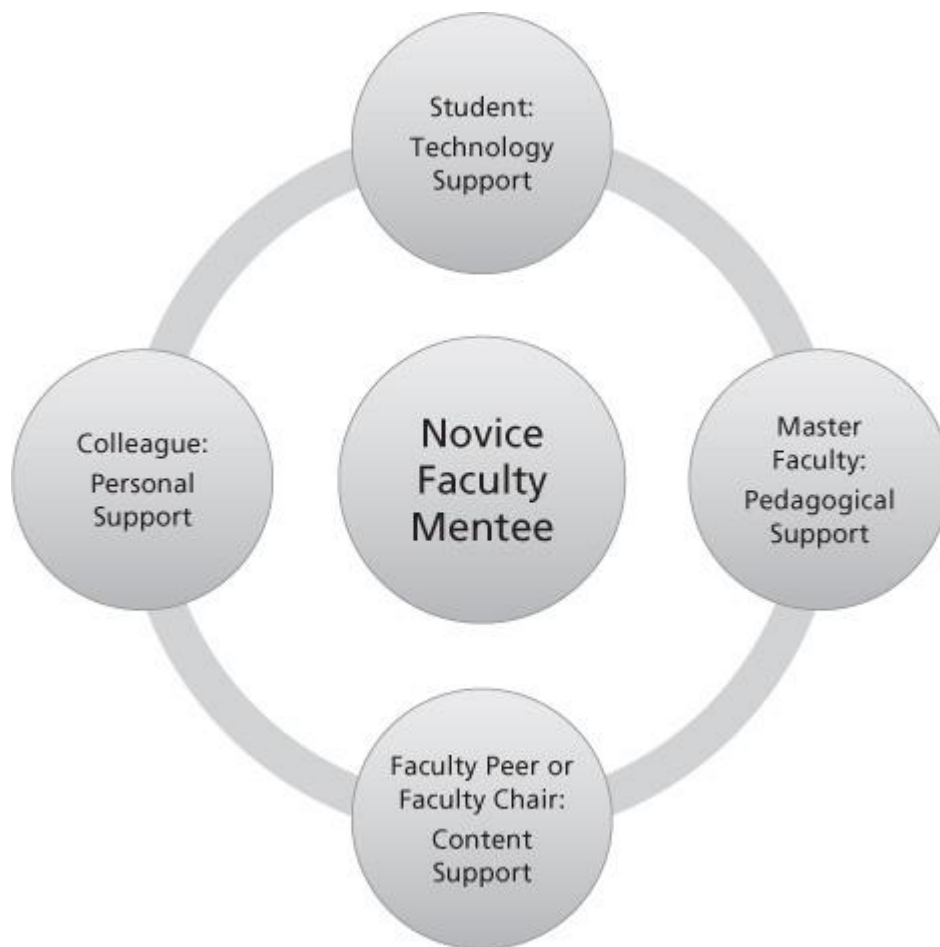
Other models of mentoring include informal or ad hoc arrangements in which insider or master faculty volunteer to mentor novice faculty as they express interest in attempting online teaching or in which novice faculty may approach a more experienced peer to request help. Often these relationships may emerge as the result of participation in a face-to-face training on campus or online communication on a faculty forum or listserv. They may not be formalized in an administrative sense but do still serve the purpose of providing modeling and support for novice faculty.

Yet another means by which mentoring occurs, and a significant departure from hierarchical mentoring models, is through the use of students as mentors. Some institutions are pairing undergraduate or graduate students with faculty members. The student's role in the relationship is to assist the faculty member in using and integrating technology. Often the student benefits from learning more about teaching in the process. The student-as-mentor approach has also been used with secondary school students acting as mentors. The Generation YES (Youth & Educators Succeeding) program, which began in 1996 in Olympia, Washington, trains students from grades 8 through 12 to act as mentors for K–12 teachers to assist with technology integration and to help them meet state level technology standards. Considered an exemplary program by the United States Department of Education, evaluation research concluded that the program had significant impact on technology integration on the part of participating teachers while documenting substantial learning gains on the part of the school-age mentors (Generation www.Y, n.d., Evidence of Effectiveness, para. 1–4).

Mentoring does not necessarily need to occur in a one-to-one relationship. Earlier in this book, we made reference to group approaches to mentoring. Gray and Birch (2008) discuss one such approach wherein a group of new faculty would mentor one another while seeking out individual mentoring relationships with more seasoned faculty. Although an interesting approach, this may not be as effective with online faculty who may be struggling to learn the use of technology and may not be able, therefore, to guide one another. However, group approaches to mentoring for online teaching do have merit.

Goodyear (2006) describes the developmental network, which shifts the focus of mentoring directly to the mentee. In this form of mentoring, mentees would develop their own networks in response to their particular needs; these networks are likely to change over time as the mentee's needs and experience level change. Mentees, in this case, might reach out to a number of people to help them with various functions and skills, as shown in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1 Sample Developmental Network



The networked form of group mentoring is particularly beneficial to those who do not have formal mentoring or faculty development programs at their institutions. By first assessing their individual needs, faculty at any level of development can identify and reach out to those who would best meet those needs. Mentoring might take the form of a one-time conversation on a particular issue, an ongoing e-mail or phone discussion, or regular face-to-face meetings when needs arise. Goodyear notes that the ability to reach out to a diverse group of individuals from various institutions, backgrounds, professions, and the like helps create a much broader perspective than if the mentoring relationship exists only between two people. Coupling this approach with group peer mentoring has the potential to create an extremely strong mentoring program—an approach we discuss in more detail later in this chapter.

## **Developing an Effective Mentoring Program**

Given the potential benefits that mentoring provides for new online instructors, developing a mentoring program as part of faculty development simply makes sense. Combining all or some of the approaches to mentoring also makes sense in terms of providing the greatest level of support, technical skill development, and connection to the institution. Consequently, we propose the following as a possible format for a mentoring program, which can be modified, expanded, or

contracted based on institutional culture and budgetary constraints. The program we propose consists of a combination of individual, group, and network approaches.

## **Plan the Program**

The first step in implementing a mentoring program on campus or at a distance is to incorporate the program into the strategic plan for the institution or the strategic plan for technology integration. The questions that need to be addressed and answered include

- What purpose will the mentoring program serve? What is the intent?
- Do we have insider and master faculty available to serve as mentors?
- What modes of communication do we have available to support the mentoring program (i.e., phone, e-mail, instant messaging, web-conferencing, and the like)? What communication tools are commonly used in our environment?
- How many faculty will need mentoring?
- What should the program look like at our institution? Should we match mentors to mentees for one-to-one mentoring? Should we set up groups with one mentor? Should we allow mentees to determine their own forms of mentoring and support the development of networks? Do we want a combination of all of these approaches?
- Will we be able to provide stipends or other incentives to mentors? What level of commitment to the program will we require?

Addressing these questions and more will provide the foundation of and direction for the program. Surveying faculty about their needs is a good place to begin, and factoring their needs into program design is likely to meet with success.

## **Begin with Mentor Training**

Regardless of the form the program takes, those who will serve as mentors on a formal or informal basis need training and preparation before they are called upon to mentor. Topics to consider in training include

- Adult learning theory and adult development
- Faculty leadership
- Knowing thyself: What strengths do I bring to the mentoring relationship and what are some areas of need? Where can I be most helpful?
- Requirements of mentors and the nature of the mentoring program
- Establishing and maintaining a mentoring relationship
- Effective communication skills
- Professional socialization—acclimating the mentee to the institution and the profession
- Mentoring the struggling mentee
- Planning and monitoring progress
- Modeling technology use
- Effective online teaching skills

Mentor training can be delivered in either hybrid or online fashion over a period of four to six weeks. Once a mentor is trained, he or she can then facilitate training courses for a group of mentees, be assigned to a single mentee, or be available to be part of a network of potential mentors.

### **“Market” and Evaluate the Program**

Novice and beginner faculty who are entering online teaching need to know what training they will be expected to complete, as well as the nature of the mentoring program they are entering. Just as the benefits and requirements of mentoring are communicated to the mentors, the requirements of mentees also need to be communicated, as well as the positive benefits participation is likely to yield. In many mentoring programs, mentors and mentees sign mentoring contracts; although this is more important in one-to-one mentoring relationships, an agreement to participate in training and mentoring is a good idea as it clearly delineates responsibilities.

Participating faculty, both mentors and mentees, should track their activities along the way and should also be asked at intervals to evaluate the effectiveness of their participation on their teaching and use of technology. Mentees who are creating a developmental network can use a coaching and mentoring plan (please see an example in Appendix A) to keep track of their felt needs for mentoring, the person they have designated to help address that need, and the activities being used to address it. This should be a fluid plan that changes as progress is made and new needs are identified. It can also provide a good source of evaluation data as time progresses.

### **Program Format**

As mentioned, the most effective mentoring program will contain elements of one-to-one mentoring, with mentors either chosen or assigned; group mentoring; and mentoring through a developmental network. Figure 5.2 illustrates how the program is designed.

Figure 5.2 Mentor Program Format



Combining all approaches is likely to meet a variety of needs while assisting novice and beginning online faculty to make the transition to online teaching successfully. In addition, combining approaches provides new faculty with exposure to multiple people with a variety of skills and expertise in different areas, thus allowing them to develop a variety of skills and abilities in a shorter period of time.

## What Organizations Can Do to Promote Mentoring

Zachary (2000) talks about the importance of creating a sustainable mentoring program. She contends that in order to do so, the organization or institution needs to embed mentoring an organizational culture that values continuous learning. She presents ten signs that indicate that a mentoring culture is present:

- *Accountability*—with an eye toward continuous quality improvement, the mentoring program is evaluated regularly, progress is benchmarked, and results are communicated.
- *Alignment*—mentoring is embedded in the culture and not seen as an additional activity; high priority is placed on learning.
- *Demand*—people want to participate in the program either as mentors or mentees and seek out both informal and formal opportunities to do so.



- *Infrastructure*—human and financial resources support the program.
- *A common mentoring vocabulary*—people throughout the organization speak positively about the program, value mentoring experiences, and seek out additional resources and opportunities for learning.
- *Multiple venues*—a combination of mentoring options are available.
- *Reward*—bonuses and stipends are offered to mentors; recognition for participation occurs.
- *Role modeling*—excellence in mentoring is visible in the organization and successes are publicly shared.
- *Safety net*—support is readily available.
- *Training and education*—training and education are strategically linked as part of an overall plan; skill building and renewal training for both mentors and mentees is part of the program (pp. 177–178).

Overall, organizations can promote mentoring by supporting mentoring efforts and building them into their faculty development plans. Even when budgets are tight, mentoring can happen to support the development of high-quality online teaching by making use of the resources provided by master faculty. Recognizing their contributions as mentors is invaluable.

## **Key Points About Mentoring Online Faculty**

- Mentoring programs have been shown to be effective in promoting technology integration and online teaching.
- Mentoring programs can take several forms—individual one-to-one mentoring with mentors assigned to or chosen by the mentee, peer mentoring, group mentoring, and networked mentoring. All are effective—choosing a mentoring approach should depend on budget resources and organizational culture.
- Regardless of the method of mentoring chosen, training for mentors should be available to help them be as effective as they can be.
- Top-down approaches to mentoring and assigned mentors seem to be the least effective of the mentoring approaches. More recent mentoring practice favors mentoring that is nonhierarchical, infused into the organizational culture, and flexible over time.
- Both mentors and mentees benefit from mentoring relationships. When students are used as mentors, they gain exposure to teaching practice and also demonstrate their own learning gains.
- Mentoring programs support the development of faculty learning communities, as well as supporting collaborative work among faculty members.
- Mentoring programs, along with the development and maintenance of faculty learning communities, can help reduce faculty isolation and provide a point of connection to the institution for adjunct faculty.
- As with any faculty development effort, a mentoring program should be well planned and evaluated regularly.

## **Becoming Your Own Faculty Developer**

At the end of Chapter Two we asked you to determine your training needs and begin the development of an action plan to meet those needs. We'd like you to revisit that plan and, based on the needs you determined that you had, begin to think about who in your larger network you might be able to contact to mentor you around each need. In Appendix A, you'll find an Individual Faculty Training Plan that asks you to identify a member of your network, the mentoring function that person will serve for you, and the potential activities you might ask that person to engage in with you. In addition, at the end of Chapter Four, we asked you to identify people you could include in a learning community. Think of this group as a peer mentoring group: What topics or activities might you engage in together that would further your mutual needs and skills? How might you include members of your network to support all of the members of your mentoring group? Add those ideas to the second part of the Individual Training Plan. Then set timelines for yourself in terms of when you will contact the people you've identified and when you will get started on your mentoring plan. Remember that your needs will change over time—the sooner you get started on this initial plan, the better!

The Excellent Online Instructor. Strategies for Professional Development  
Chapter 5: Mentoring Online Faculty  
ISBN: 9780470635230 Authors: Rena M. Palloff , Keith Pratt  
Copyright © John Wiley & Sons Inc. (2011)