

Mentoring for Success

Hal Mendelsohn
Reference Librarian, University of Central Florida

Alyssa Martin
Interlibrary Loan/Reference Librarian, Troy University Montgomery Campus

John-Bauer Graham
Dean of Library Services, Houston Cole Library, Jacksonville State University

Amanda Stone
Training & Development Coordinator, SchoolRooms, South Carolina State University

Elizabeth M. Doolittle
Public Services Librarian, University of Southern Mississippi Gulf Park Campus

Abstract

A panel of five librarians shared their experiences and thoughts about successful mentoring and its importance along the career path for those in our profession. Panelists discussed the purpose and importance of becoming involved in professional mentoring programs such as the Southeastern Library Association's (SELA) Mentoring Program and the American Library Association's NMRT Career Mentoring Program. The benefits of starting a formal mentoring program within an academic library setting were described from the standpoint of both the mentee and the mentor. Also emphasized, is the increasing importance of using Mentoring 2.0 (online tools) to help create a mentoring program, find a mentor, and provide a mentoring time & space. The program wrapped up with a discussion of the organizational benefits of mentoring programs and their power to improve not just our own professional competencies, but the power to improve our users' lives and our community as a whole.

Southeastern Library Association's (SELA) Mentoring Program

The SELA Mentoring program was developed to offer SELA members the opportunity to improve their professional library skills and gain knowledge about a library organization by working with a library professional. Through a career mentoring program, such as SELA, a mentor is able to give back to the profession and an organization, teach skills on how to perform different library responsibilities, and explain how a library organization like SELA functions. The mentee is the recipient of professional knowledge that his/her mentors possess, and learns how to use that information to succeed in the library profession and a library organization.

American Library Association's NMRT Career Mentoring Program: Perspective of a mentee.

The American Library Association (ALA) New Members Round Table (NMRT) Career Mentoring Program matches an experienced library professional (mentor) with a less experienced mentee. To participate in this career mentoring program, mentors and mentees must be members of ALA and NMRT.

It is important to become involved with a career mentoring program affiliated with a national/regional or state organization to help you get involved and progress in your career by expanding your professional network. Becoming involved in a career mentoring program can help you understand what opportunities a particular organization like ALA can offer you. Participating in the program also provides an outlet to help you grow in your career by discussing issues such as professional goals, staying updated in the profession, learning organizational culture, planning for promotions/tenure, dealing with difficult situations at work and becoming a leader. Having a mentor who is outside your library can give you a different perspective and can co-exist and complement other formal or informal mentoring programs within your workplace.

Both Sides of the Fence: Benefits of a Formal Mentoring Program for Both Mentee and Mentors

The benefits of a structured or formal mentoring program in a university library are numerous. These benefits are particularly useful if librarians within an organization have faculty rank and/or status and have specific tenure and promotion criteria.

Librarians at Jacksonville State University's Houston Cole Library (HCL) have faculty rank and status. Additionally, they are on a five year tenure track. The HCL administration assigns new faculty members a mentor from the senior faculty ranks upon their appointment as assistant professors and librarians. The new librarians are paired with librarians that have achieved tenure and have been promoted to the rank of associate professor or higher. Ideally this professional relationship lasts throughout the new librarians' career and in particular during the first five years as they build their faculty portfolio to submit for tenure and promotion.

Perhaps most productively (to the library or college/university), benefits are shared across the organization by junior faculty, senior faculty, and administrators alike.

For senior faculty members, benefits include:

- All about the portfolio. Senior faculty members are allowed to "count" their responsibilities as a mentor as service to the university and library.
- Keeping up and Keeping informed. The program allows senior faculty to share their knowledge but it also provides them with a way of keeping up with new and emerging trends in the profession.
- Networking – my friends are your friends

For Junior Faculty Members benefits include:

- This goes where? Again it is all about building the portfolio and the senior faculty member's first responsibility to their mentees is to guide them through the tenure and promotion process and to build the junior faculty's portfolio.
- Sharing/Reverse keeping up. New faculty can often share their knowledge of technology and trends with senior faculty and likewise, senior faculty can show junior faculty how librarianship was once/still done.
- Networking – your friends are my friends

For Library Administration and Management benefits include:

- Proud/Productive/Connected faculty. Strong relationships are formed and faculty are “in it together” to produce and make ready outstanding library faculty for tenure and promotion.
- Torch passed, institutional history preserved. The library's legacy and institutional history is passed on.
- Help herding the cats. Senior faculty take an extended role in teaching new faculty the ins and outs of the operation, management of new faculty, and other administrative.

Mentoring 2.0

Mentoring 2.0 is a trendy term for a very simple concept—taking the traditional mentoring relationship to an online format, using the many web tools available at our disposal. We can now use technology instead of or in conjunction with face-to-face time for all aspects of mentoring. Online tools can now help us create a mentoring program, find a mentor, and provide a mentoring time & space.

With free blogs (Wordpress, Blogger), you can create a simple website for a mentoring program that can feature contact information, times and places for events, pictures of events, a manual, and anything else you can dream up to help your mentors and mentees. You can also use SurveyMonkey or other survey software to easily create an online application process.

If you are not eligible for a structured mentoring program you can find mentors through social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn. Also, check out Ning.com to search user-created social networks—there are several specific library networks for you to explore.

Where new(er) social technology really shines is in its ability to create online spaces where mentoring can take place, freed of physical restraints. From good ole' fashioned email to Second Life, there are lots of ways that mentoring can be accomplished from a distance, but also for busy people who need to fit mentoring into a hectic worklife. Email can be used to send discussion-worthy articles and basic keeping-in-touch. Instant messaging is a great way to have one-on-one real-time discussions that can be less formal than a telephone conversation.

Social networking sites also have built-in spaces for conversations that can be used for formal and informal mentoring. For instance, Facebook provides email, chat, message boards, group discussions, and other communication tools. iMantri is an “online exchange and a social network for mentors and mentees” with resources to help guide the goals of both sides of the relationship. Second Life is also a unique space that can be used to meet online. In Second Life, you can create an avatar and “meet” to text chat or actually talk via microphones in online spaces

Organizational Benefits of Mentoring Programs

Whether you are the mentor or the one being mentored, whether your organization sponsors a formal program, or just supports an informal program, or whether the program is totally outside of your organization, there are huge benefits to your organizations, to your libraries. We all want to feel that we have the power to improve our communities, to improve our users' lives, to improve our own professional competencies. The benefits to our organizations from mentoring programs mean power to our organizations as well.

These benefits can include:

- As the mentor coaches and guides the protégé, he or she stays focused on the skills, characteristics, and styles valued by the organization
- Promotes a clear understanding of our professional responsibilities and expectations within a particular workplace
- Mentoring is an effective succession planning strategy
- Mentoring is a valuable tool for recruitment and retention
- May increase a new employees satisfaction and reduce a new employees sense of isolation
- Contributes to a positive organizational climates and impacts positively on the organizational culture
- Reflects an organizations commitment to and investment in, their employees
- Can be an effective tool for building diversity
- Mentoring programs are low cost opportunities to meet the training needs and workforce development needs of less experienced employees
- Contributes to the development of partnerships or allies that may later be useful to the organization