

From Colleagues to Coaches: Building a Faculty-Led Mentorship Model

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This case study presentation discusses the process of developing and implementing a mentoring program within a Hispanic-serving institution located along the US-Mexico border. This project began when results from an external campus climate study revealed that faculty members, within a STEM department, desired more meaningful mentorship. The existing departmental mentoring program was loosely organized for professional and part-time faculty, with new tenure-track faculty assigned a tenured faculty mentor. In response to the external survey results, a leadership-promoted, theoretically informed, faculty-driven model was enacted to ensure a transformed, effective, and sustainable mentoring program to safeguard faculty success. A literature review provided insight into the multiple mentoring definitions, frameworks, and various roles. The research scope was then narrowed to higher education faculty mentoring. A conceptual framework specific to higher education faculty mentoring and a faculty mentoring program development guide were used as foundational sources for this faculty-driven mentoring program. To gather baseline data, a 22-item faculty mentoring needs department-wide survey was deployed. Survey results were presented at department meetings for stakeholder validation. Faculty priorities included a group mentoring model, ensuring new faculty have designated contacts for questions, transparency in annual evaluation, tenure and promotion processes, and enhancing teaching, research, and writing skills. Next, with department leadership encouragement, a new mentoring program was established to serve a department of full-time (n=50) and part-time faculty (n=21) members with in-person, hybrid, and online teaching workloads. Faculty experience levels varied from new to expert teachers. Mentoring initiatives were implemented using a team structure to assist faculty with teaching in-person/hybrid, teaching online, navigating service responsibilities, and fulfilling annual evaluation/promotion goals. The program launched in the Fall with nine volunteer faculty serving as the initial mentoring team. The initial program assessment provided by the end-of-year evaluation results shows promising results.

Keywords: Hispanic-serving institution, faculty-driven mentoring program, online teaching mentoring, service mentoring, cross-disciplinary mentoring

Acknowledgements: The authors would like to acknowledge the following colleagues for their contributions to this paper and conference presentation as well as their overall support of this faculty mentoring program: Dr. Maria Castenda, Lecturer III, Ms. Kim Garcia, Senior Lecturer & Associate Department Chair; Dr. Suad Ghaddar, Associate Professor; Ms. Judith Guetzow, Lecturer III, Dr. Saraswathy Nair, Professor & Department Chair; Dr. Hugo Rodriguez, Clinical Professor, Dr. Upal Roy, Associate Professor, Dr. Shad Smith, Lecturer I, and Dr. Cristal Villarreal, Clinical Associate Professor

Introduction

Higher education faculty mentoring programs have existed for decades (Sands et al., 1991). These programs have withstood the test of time because they have been determined to be an effective, adaptable tool to support faculty success and satisfaction throughout their academic careers (Zellers et al., 2008). A well-developed and well-managed faculty mentoring program will successfully integrate all newly employed faculty

into the university community, thereby increasing faculty retention through decreased attrition (Savage et al., 2004). In addition, a defined faculty mentoring approach has been shown to enhance research productivity, teaching effectiveness, and faculty recruitment (Columbia University Office of the Provost, 2016; Kiel, 2016; Lumpkin, 2011). Another advantage is that an effective, committed mentoring program fosters an inclusive climate for all faculty members. Through meaningful mentoring, all faculty members can access needed

support, providing equitable opportunities for faculty from underrepresented groups (Misra, 2021). This paper discusses the process of developing and implementing a leadership-supported, faculty-driven, mentoring program for a STEM department within a Hispanic-serving institution located along the US-Mexico border.

Literature Review

Faculty mentoring is an investment in the future success of both the educational institution and the students it serves. Providing the academic excellence all students deserve depends on the ability of faculty members to do their absolute best work throughout their academic careers. A customized strategy should ensure that a faculty mentoring program can transcend gender, race, culture, and generational differences. A generally accepted effective approach to faculty mentoring involves creating programs specifically designed to align with the traditions and values of each department, school, college, and institution.

Mentoring Overview

Each faculty member plays a crucial role in fostering successful mentoring programs that cultivate caring academic environments, and all faculty members should receive service credit for their mentoring contributions (Berkeley Vice Provost for the Faculty, 2022a). Faculty mentoring programs can be formal and informal and should extend beyond the minimum efforts of helping junior faculty achieve tenure requirements (Dominguez & Hager, 2013). Faculty mentoring should encompass all aspects of academia and work-life balance while striving to meet the needs of all academic ranks: assistant, associate, and full professors (Berkeley Vice Provost for the Faculty, 2022b). Once core purpose and goals are established, departments must determine program beneficiaries, select mentees, choose mentors, plan activities, and decide on a programming format (Kiel, 2019).

The literature reveals different types of mentoring programs, generally categorized as traditional, group, or peer-to-peer. Traditional mentoring typically consists of seasoned, senior faculty mentoring junior faculty, most often seen with tenure track faculty advised by senior, tenured faculty members. While this senior/junior model is the gold standard for providing tenure feedback, it may not address all departmental faculty needs or be practical for departments with imbalanced senior-to-junior faculty ratios (Kiel, 2019). Group mentoring models have proven successful when correctly implemented, with documented positive outcomes including increased confidence, expanded organizational understanding, and increased commitment and connectedness. Group mentoring provides immense value when departments struggle to initiate or expand mentoring programs due to senior-to-junior faculty imbalances (Kiel, 2019). The peer-to-peer

mentoring model resembles traditional mentoring with one-to-one relationships, but mentors are experienced faculty members who agree to assist when contacted rather than serving on formal committees (Columbia University Office of the Provost, 2016; Kiel, 2019).

Key Characteristics of Successful Mentoring Programs

Successful mentoring programs share several characteristics most frequently identified in literature: clear purpose, defined goals, appropriate approach, suitable training, careful mentor-mentee matching, regular meetings, and both formative and summative evaluation (Kiel, 2016; Lumpkin, 2011; Savage et al., 2008; Zellers et al., 2008). Program evaluation requires all stakeholder participation, with valid, reliable, psychometrically sound questionnaires providing one method to gauge success (Berk et al., 2005). Defined purpose and processes to evaluate milestone achievement are particularly important for mentoring program success.

Project Development

The program as it exists today was initiated in Fall 2021, following external survey results that indicated a collective desire among department faculty for a more structured mentoring program. Departmental leadership observed this trend in two separate external surveys: a campus climate survey and college-wide faculty research needs survey. These findings were thoroughly discussed with faculty during the Spring 2022 meeting led by the departmental leadership. After confirming the survey results with faculty members, a faculty volunteer was recruited to lead the effort to gather additional data and make recommendations for enhancing and improving the existing informal mentoring program to better address faculty needs.

Background Data

To begin, a faculty volunteer completed a literature review on higher education faculty mentoring and submitted a summary whitepaper to department leadership for review in Fall 2022. After vetting the whitepaper, the Department Chair and Associate Chair collaborated with the faculty volunteer to create a 22-item department-specific mentoring needs survey, guided by Lottero-Perdue and Fifield's (2010) Conceptual Framework of Higher Education Mentoring. This framework was selected for its five dimensions: intended beneficiaries, locus of control, relationship characteristics, topics, and actions, with additional guidance from Kiel's (2019) work on developing faculty mentoring programs.

The survey questions were carefully curated using the chosen theoretical framework, with detailed attention to the department's imbalanced ratio of tenure/tenure track, professional (non-

tenure track), and part-time faculty (Ponto, 2015). Professional faculty comprised almost half of the department's faculty, and the large number of part-time faculty members, mostly employed full-time elsewhere, was essential to consider since they would be unable to participate in regular business hours training or mentoring activities. The survey's purpose was to gather faculty input regarding goals, approach, format, and topics most suitable for the soon-to-be established department mentoring program.

After Institutional Review Board approval, the survey was deployed to all department faculty members (n = 71) in Spring 2023 using an anonymized Qualtrics platform. Tenured/tenure-track, professional, and part-time faculty all provided feedback on what a meaningful mentoring program looked like to them. These results were shared with the faculty at the end-of-year Spring 2023 meetings. Since survey results identified that the most important aspect of the new faculty mentoring program should be to ensure each new faculty member had a point person for questions, the first step in developing the new faculty mentoring program was to create a New Faculty Orientation site. This was done during the Summer of 2023 by two volunteer faculty members and the Associate Chair. Information was organized into three sections: Getting Started, Managing the Course, and Wrapping Up. The site launched in Fall 2023 with 13 new full-time and part-time faculty enrolled.

Additionally, one orientation site developer met regularly with these new faculty members and acted as a peer-to-peer mentor throughout 2023-2024. An evaluation conducted in December 2023 found that all six respondents found the orientation site helpful, five of the six felt the Microsoft Teams platform was effective for providing the needed information, and all six found the Getting Started module to be the most helpful. The top three most beneficial topics within that module were managing class rosters, developing course syllabi, and setting up university email accounts. Modifications were made to the New Faculty Orientation Site as needed.

Mentor Recruitment

During the 2023-2024 academic year, in conjunction with ongoing new faculty orientation activities, other mentoring program development activities included establishing a group faculty mentoring implementation plan and recruiting volunteer faculty mentors. This work was conducted in collaboration with the Department Chair and Associate Chair, involving discussions on deliverables and negotiated workloads for the volunteer faculty mentors. Once all the mentors were in place, the current mentoring program launched in Fall 2024.

Procedures

The faculty mentoring program consists of

five mentoring teams: face-to-face (F2F)/hybrid teaching, online teaching, professional (non-tenure track) annual evaluation and promotion, service, and tenure and promotion. Each faculty mentoring team employed a slightly different approach tailored to their assigned mentees. However, all teams reached out to faculty via email and voluntarily offered to provide mentorship.

Face-to-Face/Hybrid Teaching Mentoring Team

The face-to-face/hybrid teaching mentoring team collaborated with a new full-time faculty member throughout the academic year. They provided support both in person and online, with a particular emphasis on teaching modalities due to the faculty member's limited experience in this area. This faculty member was recruited for their expertise in STEM content to benefit students, and the mentoring team focused on guiding them in teaching-specific duties, such as classroom management, grading, evaluation, and other related duties.

Online Mentoring Team

For the online teaching track, faculty in the department received an email invitation to participate in the mentoring program. The email included a mentor request form, which interested faculty were asked to complete. Once the request forms were received, mentors used Doodle polls to schedule initial meetings. These meetings were conducted individually to ensure confidentiality and to encourage open dialogue. During the initial meeting, mentors and mentees completed a Mentor Agreement Form adapted from Kiel (2019). This form outlined several key components of the mentoring relationship:

- Focus: Online Teaching, F2F/Hybrid Teaching, Tenure & Promotion, NTT Annual Evaluation & Promotion, or Service.
- Goals: For example, integrate a new teaching strategy into a course, submit a manuscript for publication, or complete a promotion application.
- Duration: One semester or one academic year.
- Mentor responsibilities: To serve as a listener, advisor, and guide.
- Mentee responsibilities: To maintain communication, implement plans, attend scheduled meetings, and meet deadlines.
- Confidentiality agreement: To keep shared information private, unless disclosure is required for departmental oversight.
- Meeting frequency and format: Weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly; held virtually, in person, or in a hybrid format.

In addition to completing the agreement form, mentors asked several questions to assess each mentee's background and needs in online teaching. These included inquiries about prior teaching experience, willingness to share their course to support development, completion of

Quality Matters training and course alignment with Quality Matters rubric standards, and openness to participating in group sessions or presentations.

Mentees in the online teaching track, during the Fall 2024 through Spring 2025 academic year participated for two semesters, meeting with mentors monthly. Each presented unique goals and levels of experience. Mentors began by addressing mentees' initial questions, reviewing their course materials, and providing constructive feedback. Mentees were expected to implement this feedback before the next meeting, during which progress was reviewed, and new objectives were discussed. This monthly cycle continued throughout the academic year, allowing for iterative development and ongoing support.

Professional Faculty Annual Evaluation Mentoring Team

The Professional Faculty Evaluation Mentoring Track was designed to support new faculty in completing their first-year annual evaluation by aligning their narratives with departmental guidelines and workload assignments. Mentors invited new faculty to an orientation session introducing the Faculty Portfolio Tool (FPT), outlining required components, and emphasizing the importance of evidence-based narratives. Faculty were guided to match narrative content to their assigned workload and use clear, QIS-aligned reflections (Quality, Impact, and Significance).

Mentors provided strategies for writing effective teaching, service, and (if applicable) research narratives. Faculty received tips for organizing documentation such as converting emails to PDFs and maintaining consistent file naming. Sample narratives were shared and discussed to model effective reflection and evidence integration. Individual mentoring sessions were also offered for faculty needing additional support, allowing for personalized feedback on draft narratives and guidance on strengthening documentation and alignment with evaluation standards.

Service Mentoring Team

Faculty received an email introducing the service

mentoring initiative and its focus on aligning service activities with QIS criteria. Interested faculty submitted a mentoring request form and were scheduled for an initial one-on-one meeting. During this meeting, the mentor and mentee completed a Mentor Agreement Form adapted from Kiel (2019), clarified expectations, and identified service opportunities aligned with faculty rank and workload such as being part of recruitment committee or advisor to student association. The mentor reviewed past service activities and guided the faculty member on documenting contributions with appropriate evidence, such as sign-in sheets, event photos, and meeting minutes. A spring follow-up meeting assessed whether the service met the workload requirement and if supporting documentation aligned with institutional requirements. A QIS-based template was shared to support narrative development. A final meeting is planned to review the annual narrative and ensure all required supporting evidence is included.

Tenure and Promotion Mentoring Team

The tenure and promotion mentoring team assisted faculty members who needed help with preparing their annual evaluation documents. The primary focus of this team was to ensure that all faculty members understood the guidelines. It is worth noting that no faculty members submitted tenure applications during the academic year in which the mentoring program was launched.

Preliminary Findings

Evaluation of the faculty mentoring program was instituted at the end of the academic year. After institutional review board approval, anonymized Qualtrics surveys were distributed to mentors and mentees at the end of the academic year. Mentor survey results indicate a need for the program to showcase the work the faculty mentors do better. Another mentor commented that adequate resources, specifically workload allocation, were a problem in the program. Table 1 depicts mentee survey results.

Table 1*Mentee End-of-Year Evaluation Survey Preliminary Results (n = 7)*

1. Criterion	2. Results	3. Comments
Full-time versus part-time	Full-time (4; 57%) Part-time (3; 43%)	At program initiation there was an imbalance of few senior faculty to a larger number of junior less seasoned faculty. The department also had >20 part-time faculty. In January 2025, the department was divided into three separate departments, but the mentoring structure remained unchanged.
Rate the effectiveness of your introduction or orientation to the Mentoring program.	Highly effective (5; 71%) Effective (1; 14%) Just okay (1; 14%)	One part-time participant stated, "My mentoring Team was AMAZING!!! Even though I canceled and postponed several times."
Rate the overall Mentoring program.	Exceed expectations (5; 71%) Meets expectations (2, 29%)	One part-time participant described the difficulty of attending business hour mentoring sessions due to full-time position.

Discussion

This case study paper outlines the design, development, and implementation processes of the faculty mentoring program from its inception in Spring 2021 to ongoing program evaluation in May 2025. The program initially commenced with establishing a new faculty orientation and transitioned to a group approach to mentoring. Survey results determined the group mentoring model was preferred by faculty and is recognized as beneficial for departments experiencing an imbalance between senior and junior faculty (Kiel, 2019). Although this case study focuses on a single STEM department within one educational institution, its findings may prove valuable to similar departments in other Hispanic-serving higher education institutions. End-of-academic-year evaluation preliminary results indicate program approval. The program's impact on students was not evaluated during this initial year, but it will be considered.

Conclusion

The successful implementation of this faculty mentoring program demonstrates the value of systematic, data-driven program development for mentoring. By beginning with a comprehensive literature review and faculty needs assessment, the program evolved organically from initial orientation support to a comprehensive team-based mentoring model that addresses the unique challenges facing STEM faculty in this Hispanic-serving institution. The program's emphasis on group mentoring proved particularly well-suited for the department, given its imbalanced faculty ratios, offering scalable solutions that can accommodate diverse faculty needs across various academic tracks. While preliminary

feedback suggests positive reception among participants, continued comprehensive evaluation will provide critical insight into effective mentoring practices. These findings will contribute to the broader understanding of sustainable mentoring approaches in higher education.

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