

Academic Mentoring: A Prerequisite for Faculty at HBCUs

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ABSTRACT

This article provides a perspective on faculty mentoring at Historically Black Colleges/Universities (HBCU). The purpose of this effort is to: 1) establish a useful dialogue on providing academic mentoring to faculty as professionals, and 2) generate some recommendations that are effective and critical to faculty's academic mentoring, especially at HBCUs. HBCUs are important because of their unique challenges with distinct cultural contexts, and yet their faculty members are expected to produce quality professional experiences comparable to the other majority institutions.

INTRODUCTION

In general, mentoring at academic settings has not always had significance, especially in higher education. The culture of higher education tends to be guided by an individualized interactive process that is not only competitive but lonely. Not only has the culture changed in higher education, but the existence of the HBCU has been challenged by some legislators on the state and national levels, resulting in some HBCUs being closed over the last ten years or suffering greatly due to a relatively lower allocation of funds compared to other institutions of higher education. Many years ago, HBCUs were established to open the doors to a quality education for individuals who otherwise would not receive one. With the changes in higher education and some HBCUs going through financial exigency and other challenges due to a lack of funding on the state and private level, the plight of the faculty member has become a path in which some faculty have to be creative in obtaining the necessary professional development opportunities due to scant funding. Therefore, there may be more faculty at HBCUs who cannot attend state, national, and international conferences that provide the opportunities to present research papers, submit refereed journal articles or book chapters, and network with peers. Without a certain number of experiences that can give the faculty member more visibility, the faculty members at certain HBCUs may have a sense of loneliness or may feel that their professional lives have been stunted. It seems to be the expectation of some that faculty at HBCUs may need creativity to open doors to opportunities. Yes, creativity can open some doors to opportunities, but financial support is still a needed resource. In the latest book published entitled, *Faculty Mentorship at Historically Black Colleges and Universities*, Sligh Conway (2018) noted that the HBCU has been the beacon of light in serving the faculty who teach there. Likewise, this author noted that as researchers, professors, and administrators, there has to be a collaborative effort to continually provide faculty with quality academic mentoring.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this article is to draw a distinction between general mentoring and academic mentoring. The intended outcome of the discussion in the chapter is to establish a conceptual view that can be useful in inducting faculty as professionals in their careers as academics in HBCU settings. The framing of the discussion is aimed at developing a conceptual dialogue that can aid in developing effective faculty professionally that can empower new and seasoned faculty in developing a culture of nurturing collegial academic learning. This, in turn, can aid in the academic mentoring of faculty at HBCUs.

BACKGROUND

Mentoring in most higher education academic institutions, especially predominantly white institutions (PWIs), tend to be for students involving academic advising. Therefore, academic mentoring in this respect focuses more on mentor- protégé, thus, the outcome is more on role-modeling rather than peer mentoring. This works well for mentor- student or mentor-protégé relationship, but not for faculty to faculty interacting in a peer-to-peer mentoring process. Thus, mentoring in general has been viewed in various ways depending on the culture of the organization. This depends on whether it is part of cultural induction through rites of passage in most traditional cultural groups or religious practice. Mentoring is defined by some authors as

...continuous, rather than a one –time event. The roles of the mentor are directed toward the improvement of three functions: skills, performance, and development. The goals of peer mentoring are to: provide an open atmosphere for dialogue; enhance and improve motivation for job performance; provide assistance with process skills and direction toward available resources, and develop potential for professional development; provide a practical view and assist in focusing more sharply on particular roles and responsibilities, along with updated approaches in carrying out responsibilities...” (Kutliek, Earnest, & Ernest, 2001, p. 1).

Other authors tend to focus on the outcomes involved in mentoring. (Apple, Ellis, & Hintze, 2016; Holliday, 2001).

Furthermore, Clutterbuck (2004) conducted extensive research that included different models of mentoring published in the book, “Everyone Needs a Mentor”. Decades of research and a case study of his experiences were documented. Clutterbuck (2004) defined two models of mentoring with unique emphases on career and professional development. Years of mentoring and positive suggestions related to using mentoring have been documented relentlessly in the literature (Clutterbuck, 1991). However, academic mentoring has yet to emerge fully. Academic mentoring would be a viable approach in engaging faculty in professional development that would lead to shared governance and effective collaboration. Most faculty hired after finishing the terminal degree tend to teach the way they were taught which makes it challenging for a new faculty in any discipline. An observation for over 14-30 years by the authors of this chapter shows that professional development of faculty at HBCUs lack effectiveness because the approach is usually pedagogy centered and not andragogy centered. This

approach fails because the faculty do not feel engaged in activities designed to meet their needs. Most adults learn well when the engagement is based on andragogy, which is adult-to-adult or peer-to-peer (Chandler & Ginsberg, 2011; Chan, 2010; Kram, 2005; Mutisya & Rotich, 2014; McCauley, Hammer, & Hinojosa, 2017). Kapoor (2018) noted that in order to succeed, most individuals will need "...to integrate a multigenerational workforce approach through reciprocal mentoring" (p. 1).

Most effective learning occurs between peer-to-peer and in a group setting. Another observation that is usually what is known as the hidden curriculum in HBCU institutional academic settings is that leadership is based on symbolism. In symbolic leadership the style of leadership is usually top-down (Boss and Manager) relationship. Such type of leadership fosters dependency mindset and not growth mindset, whereby everyone takes responsibility for their performance and their role autonomously. Thus, when it comes to making decisions a faculty member feels less responsible because the leadership does not approve or affirm the decision. However, if the leadership style of the institution is bottom-up, the faculty feel empowered and autonomous in making decisions that are effective in solving problems that are in their control because they take ownership and feel free or at liberty to perform at their best (Mutisya & Rotich, 2014; Sligh Conway, 2018).

ACADEMIC MENTORING

The most effective approach in engaging faculty in academic mentoring requires training by engaging faculty in a peer to peer as colleagues and develop relationships that lead to developing collegiality. Faculty leadership training designed with academic mentoring in mind fosters an intellectual climate that motivates the communities in the institution to work collaborative. Today's challenge in higher education institutions is to retain and graduate students which requires recruiting and retaining highly effective faculty who are continuously empowered by an intellectual climate that provides opportunity to grow. However, this type of leadership has to be developed through academic mentoring training that fosters a growth mindset (Chandler & Kram, 2005; Mutisya & Rotich, 2014).

Academic mentoring can give faculty opportunities to work alongside another faculty with the same level of experiences or less. It opens doors to intellectual discourse that can further faculty members' professional development which can yield positive outcomes during the tenure and promotion processes on the academic level. For the authors, academic mentoring over the years has proven effective as both authors have assisted one another by being available to assist in joining grant, research, and publication endeavors. One of the authors, Sligh Conway, began a faculty tenure and promotion committee as a personal gesture to assist faculty at one HBCU. Over the last 5 years, this committee has been successful as the faculty who are a part of this group, five total, have published more than six refereed publications collaboratively. In the last year, some of the committee members have been able to move on from this committee to find other opportunities. Mentoring does not mean that the faculty remains as a part of the committee; it suggests that the mentor-mentee partnership is one that is reciprocal and the mentoring may occur at different times or at certain times when needed. Academic mentoring is not a static form of mentoring. It does what the purpose is and continues to foster the overall idea of moving the faculty member in a direction that assists in professional development.

TESTIMONIALS/ACADEMIC MENTORING/HBCUS

The authors share academic mentoring experiences that have yielded the HBCU as a beacon of light in achieving professional goals. One author, Dr. Sligh Conway, noted:

Academic mentoring has been a changing aspect of my life. The HBCU experience has been a beacon of light, in spite of some of the times where financial resources were scant; the opportunities extended at an HBCU have been wonderful and I treasure the interactions with faculty members who have opened doors at HBCUs and Predominantly White Institutions. I think it's not whether the institution is an HBCU or a PWI, it is what you do with the experience and how open are you to work hard to achieve the professional development opportunities. It has not always been easy to find people to provide academic mentoring. When the opportunities were provided; however, I took the experiences and made more from those experiences. A small experience can lead to something big. I have been a resilient person in all levels of personal and professional tasks so not achieving certain things in life was never a question. My task was to succeed in life despite some of the obstacles. Another aspect of academic mentoring is that it does not always occur at the institution where one works. Most of my academic mentoring came from many levels: the university, international, national, and state organizations and associations. Academic mentoring is a viable support measure and it should be at every institution of higher learning for women and men of all ethnic and cultural groups. Mentoring should be seen on an interdisciplinary level as both an enhancement to understanding cultures and as a unique way to bring faculty together to promote excellence. Without academic mentoring, I would not have published successfully, obtained grants, nor would I be the person I am today (Sligh Conway, 2018, Personal Communication on Academic Mentoring).

Dr. Phillip Mutisya noted:

Academic mentoring, for the most part, started when I was in my undergraduate studies and continued throughout my career. In meeting others at the university level and through international, state, and national associations, academic mentoring has proven to have excellent outcomes. From the beginning of my academic career until recent years, I can view academic mentoring as positive source and a definite success measure in my career development. Without this type of mentorship, my career at HBCUs would not have been successful. Through partnering with others on different publishing activities, academic mentoring has been worthwhile and a strong force. Publishing with those who care about my success has been a cathartic experience. Like Sligh Conway's testimonial, without academic mentoring at HBCUs, I would not be in the position that I am in at an HBCU as a grant writer, researcher, published in many areas, and a viable addition in the community (Mutisya, 2018, Personal Communication on Academic Mentoring).

MENTORING/CULTURAL CONTEXT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

The cultural context becomes relevant given the cultural environment because diverse cultural environments create complexity in regards to the differences in views of what mentoring means. Peer mentoring given the social and cultural experience and intellectual climate works well in HBCU, however not based on group but two individuals and not many. It is important to be mindful of the internalized negative experiences that some African Americans or the minority cultures have experienced overtime. Having

protracted discussion to address how the mentee and the mentor see their experience in their life tends to create closeness and more trust and less suspicion as they cope with the societal life experiences (Mutisya & Rotich, 2014).

One should note that a “Mentor” is generally viewed as an experienced individual providing support and encouragement to assist others in managing and maximizing their potential and certain skills. However, academic mentoring is a collaborative and reciprocal interaction of two individuals helping each other to progress and succeed in their careers, education, personal development and other interests as peer to peer and not a dominant–subordinate relationship. Although the term mentor is used very often in business and higher education and in youth programs, it is becoming more useful in faculty professional training to improve academic leadership and learning process. However it is important to understand that the mentor normally has more influence to a mentee and plays a wider role than that of supervisor, chair, dean or an administrator in academic settings (Jacobi, 1991; Sligh Conway, 2018).

Academic mentors are usually involved in a one-on-one relationship with a peer to peer as opposed to mentor-protégé (Daloz, 1986). It is usually a partnership between two people (mentor – mentee, and not mentor-protégé), and they may be working in a similar or different field or share similar experiences. It is a helpful in building relationships based upon mutual trust and respect. Mentoring is associated with positive personal and career outcomes. Academic mentoring has consistently contributed to encouraging faculty to collaborate together and in developing collegiality (Johnson & Ridley, 2004). In general, in academic settings, especially at HBCUs, the leaders who view their role as managers, supervisors or boss face resistance from their peers who are supposed to work collaboratively. This conflict is overlooked because it is the awareness of the fact that, if two individuals have the same amount and capacity of education and experience, the only way one can accept guidance is from the other being humble. The humbleness turns into a mentoring experience whereby both mutually accept each other’s role and share power respectfully.

There is an abundance of literature on mentoring, mentoring functions, types of mentoring and mentoring programs. For the most part, mentoring has been identified as a crucial element that can determine the failure or success in a person’s professional or personal life. However, little has been written or said about mentoring at various stages of personal/ professional development. There are other models of mentoring that have shown that self-concept changes over time and develops as a result of experience. Like career development, mentoring can be a lifelong phenomenon (Apple & Hintz, 2016; Jacobi 1991; Levinson, 1978; Sligh Conway, 2018).

The mentor-mentee relationship is meaningful and valuable to both parties for attaining immediate goals and for deepening insights about performance and growth processes. Mentoring is important because any person who is motivated and concerned about achieving personal or professional growth faces the challenge of articulating a substantive direction. Effective academic mentoring facilitates the movement of a mentee from unclear development goals to independence in self-growth; a practical goal should be the mentee’s future success (Apple & Hintze, 2016; Leise, n.d.; Sligh Conway, 2018).

RECOMMENDATIONS/FUTURE DIRECTIONS

There are unique challenges that the authors discovered while interacting and working with faculty at HBCUs that are faced by most faculty who choose to work at such institutions. One of the unique challenges is the absence of a faculty orientation that prepares the faculty after getting hired. Usually, the assumptions of the culture of the institution tend to assume there is no need to provide training on how to teach because your academic credentials are enough. However, when a faculty joins the institution, the faculty quickly finds moments of loneliness and no one to support him or her on how to deal with the unwritten political climate or how to cultivate collegiality. Such experiences also tend to draw one into cliques and silos that thrive on gossip and suspicion. The suspicions may come from experiences in the larger society which the faculty should have dealt with before coming to the institution and thus, preparing the faculty for the unknown. Hence, while there is a lack of training or an orientation on how to deal with such institution experiences, the expectation is that as a qualified professional you should be able to be successful. The HBCU is a beacon of light and the administrators must continue to foster the development of faculty who can be trained, retained, and matriculated successfully through the stages of professional development. This should be a required assurance extended to faculty who choose to teach at HBCUs as the faculty are an essential part of the institutional environment. Funding should be set aside to provide academic mentoring at HCBUs. Faculty is a part of the strategic plan and investing in the faculty is as important as investing in the students. Both should be seen on the same level with positive gains as the essential goals.

CONCLUSION

Quality academic mentoring is a viable solution to working with faculty at any university or college. Like Sligh Conway (2018) noted in the book, *Faculty Mentorship at HBCUs*, more case scenarios, testimonials, or interviews of faculty should be conducted to note faculty members' perceptions of academic mentoring at HBCUs. There are many articles and books on mentoring; however, there are fewer attempts to include faculty perceptions of academic mentoring, strategies to use academic mentoring to assist faculty in ascertaining tenure and promotion, and career professional development at HBCUs. More empirical and qualitative studies should be conducted on topics related to faculty academic mentoring. Once the information is gained, the next steps are to apply what is gathered and use the information to grow, retain, and matriculate faculty through the HBCU experience.

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