# Mentoring in the Community College

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*Community colleges are crucial to American economic progress and are the gateways for students of color to enter higher education. The enrollment of students of color has soared in the last three decades, increasing 61.3% since 1986. However, the majority of community college faculty and administrators remains predominantly White. A more diverse faculty must be recruited and retained in community colleges to meet the needs of this diverse student population.*

This article is a literature review of mentoring of community college faculty, particularly faculty of color. It asks the question: Is there a connection between mentoring, faculty development, and recruiting/retaining faculty of color? Results indicate formal faculty mentoring programs are considered valuable in recruiting and retaining faculty, particularly faculty of color.

## Background

"Community colleges have become the number one provider of education and training for people entering the workforce, or advancing their careers" (Bramucci, 1999, p. 41). A study reported in Phi Delta Kappa (2002) found that

> *Community colleges are crucial to American economic progress. They provide access to higher education for millions who cannot afford the traditional university. They serve the non-traditional learner who must have educational*

*opportunities provided at convenient times, and they deliver local workforce training* (p.17).

As community college popularity and enrollment have increased, there has been a concomitant increase in the numbers of students of color. African Americans, Hispanics, and American Indians have disproportionately, chosen community colleges as their point of entry into higher education (Phi Delta Kappa, 2002), and the enrollment of students of color has increased 61.3% since 1986 (Wilds & Wilson, 1998). Evelyn (2000) reported that 45% of African American students and 55% of Hispanic and American Indian students are enrolled in community colleges and that retention for this group is increasingly a challenge.

As it applies to recruiting and retaining underrepresented faculty, one of the most serious problems facing the community college today, is the shortage of faculty and administrators of color (Phi Delta Kappa, 2002). Vaughn (1996) reported that 89% of community college presidents, and 90% of community college faculty were Caucasian. The distribution of faculty of color employed full-time is 6.4% African American, 4.3% Hispanic, 3.3% Asian, and 1% Native American. These numbers strongly suggest that community college leadership does not reflect the "new" student body (Phi Delta Kappa, 2002). A more diverse faculty must be recruited to best serve the ever-growing multicultural student population.

This is a literature review of selected studies conducted in the last decade on community college faculty recruitment and retention, especially with faculty members of color, through the use of professional development offerings and faculty mentoring. The research question grounding this literature review is: Is there a connection between mentoring, faculty development, and recruitment and retention of faculty of color? If there is, why is this connection important

for community colleges? To answer these questions, research studies from the last decade were reviewed on community colleges, faculty development, and faculty mentoring.

## Need for Qualified Community College Faculty

Howe (2000) suggests that exceptionally large numbers of faculty retirements will occur in the first decade of the 2000s and that faculty turnover in community colleges will be unprecedented. During this same time period, undergraduate enrollment will grow as much as 20%. Miller (1997) argued, "the juxtaposition of these two events presents a serious challenge to community college leaders, who may find themselves hard-pressed to identify talented community college faculty who are adequately prepared to address the needs of an increasingly diverse student population" (p. 85).

Where will community colleges find these community college faculty members? Cohen and Brawer (1996) stated, "Few community college instructors are prepared in programs especially designed for community college teachers"(p. 78). Grubb (1999) found that experts agree that graduate institutions have failed to prepare future faculty for community colleges. Evelyn (2001) reported, "Graduate schools generally don't supply teachers-in-training with the tools they'll need to succeed in two-year colleges, and they don't show any signs of doing so in the near future" (p. 26). Finally, Gappa and Leslie (1997) called for administrators to "embrace the idea of one faculty, providing professional development programs involve full and part-time faculty in collaborative efforts, often through mentoring programs that pair more experienced full-time faculty with less experienced instructors" (p.1).

Gibson-Harman, Rodriguez, and Haworth (2002) suggest that identifying, preparing, and attracting qualified faculty are essential challenges for community colleges. They argue, "Conceptions of community college quality

should be gauged not only by student learning outcomes, but also by employee's professional growth and their sense of being valued" (p. 77).

## Lack of Community College Faculty of Color

Several studies of community colleges found small percentages of faculty of color, especially when compared to the burgeoning student enrollment. Foote (1996) found that "one of the most serious problems facing many of the nation's community colleges is the shortage of minority faculty" (p. 1). The American Association of Community Colleges has recommended that community colleges undertake serious efforts to hire more minority faculty (American Association of Community Colleges, 1998). According to Bowen and Muller (1996), "Community colleges will not reach their full potential as a catalyst for educational and social programs, without increasing their commitment to minority leadership" (p 58). Piercynski, Matraya, and Peltier (1997) state, "it is essential to create a profession that is representative of society to avoid having a teaching force composed primarily of people from majority backgrounds teaching students from predominately minority groups" (p. 205).

There are three major reasons for the importance of having faculty of color (Phi Delta Kappa, 2002): They (a) serve as natural role models for students of color; (b) are better able to meet the learning needs of students of color; and (c) are often bilingual which helps students transcend language barriers.

## Faculty Development

Faculty development has been an issue in higher education for at least 30 years Schuster & Wheeler, 1990). Murray (1999) suggests specific components as crucial to the effectiveness of any faculty development program: (a)

institutional support; (b) goal-oriented connections; (c) faculty ownership; (d) collegial support; and (e) the belief that good teaching is valued by administrators.

O'Banion (1994) states that "professional development began to grow in response to the realization that there was a rapid growth of new community colleges (p. 2). Hammons, et. al. (2002) further identified an increased need for effectiveness of the teaching faculty for the following reasons: (a) competition for limited tax dollars; (b) future success dependent on ability of personnel to adapt to a changing environment advent of technological instruction; (c) faculty awareness that they were unable to cope with the needs of increasing numbers of "high risk" students; and (d) recognition by leadership that they needed to become skilled in planning, implementing, and evaluating change. These studies confirm that the success of community college constituents is predicated on how effectively the organization can change.

The existence of a formal, structured, and goal oriented faculty development program requires that the activities must be connected to the individual's personal and professional goals, as well as the institution's mission. Faculty "buy-in" tends to support formal programs because "faculty members need to be actively involved in designing and implementing any faculty development plan. Faculty members will resist any development plan imposed upon them (Maxwell & Kazlauskas, 1992, p. 352). In a national survey of 137 two-year colleges, Murray (1999) evaluated how well community colleges were meeting faculty development challenges.

He found that the colleges used different activities to assist their faculty in staying current in their teaching pedagogy and that there was a "glaring lack of commitment on the part of the leadership for faculty development" (p. 57) at 130 of the participating colleges. For example, 93.1% provided limited financial support for conference attendance. Only 16.2% provided incentives to faculty who presented or published. Expert workshops were held on 87.7% of the

campuses, and 39.2% provided resource centers to increase teaching effectiveness. At 68.5% of the institutions, faculty development was designated as low on the responsibility list. Murray concluded that ad hoc programs do not cause substantial long-lasting change in the classroom.

Murray (1999) suggests that faculty development programs have had very little impact on higher education because efforts have been limited to short-term, "one shot deals." According to Bland and Schmitz (1990), "Whether faculty activities are considered productive or not depends on whether they relate to the faculty member's personal and professional goals and to the institution's mission" (p. 45). Faculty development programs that are a loosely related set of disparate activities are unlikely to produce any real institutional change" (Murray, p. 52). Recently, faculty development has focused on activities to recruit, mentor, and retain a diverse faculty. The results of such a focus, however, are barely visible in college classrooms (Murray, 1999). According to Schuster, Wheeler, and Associates (1990),

> *Colleges and universities, for whatever reasons, have been neither sufficiently alert to the ever-changing circumstances of their instructional staffs nor adequately resourceful in meeting their changing needs for professional development. It is indeed striking how much has been written about faculty growth and renewal and how few campuses have seen fit to develop comprehensive, systematic programs. Splendid conceptual models are available; adequate programs have not taken seed* (pp. 3-4).

Bellanca (2002) states,

> *More than at any other time in their history, community colleges need to plan and provide comprehensive ongoing professional development*

*programs for their faculty and staff. Faced with an increasingly diverse student body with varying expectations, learning styles, service preferences, and societal demands, community colleges can no longer respond in traditional ways* (p. 5).

## Mentoring Community College Faculty

The concept of mentoring has existed for years. Most explanations describe the task as significant counsel between a novice and a wiser, more experienced individual. Mentoring also has been defined in terms of the character of the relationship. Prieur (1994) defines mentoring as "the process by which more experienced and knowledgeable individuals assist less experienced individuals become more proficient in their activities" (Prieur, 1994, p.42). In an ideal educational setting, older, more experienced faculty members spend time providing advice to less experienced faculty members as a means to enhance professional development. The mentor serves the mentee in the following roles: (a) a teacher (b) a sponsor (c) a host , and (d) an exemplar (Engstrom, 1989).

Mentoring plays an important role in every aspect of vocational endeavor. Numerous institutions use mentoring as a strategy to help “perfect” their participants. Engstrom (1989) reported that studies show that mentoring, both formal and informal, can "increase job satisfaction, job performance, employee loyalty, and decrease turnover" (p. 7).

This article defines mentoring in academia as a situation in which a senior faculty member teaches a junior faculty member about the resources, customs, and values of an institution. The senior professor acts as a role model, who serves to guide, assist, teach, and inspire the junior professor. The senior faculty member provides support for scholarly activities and helps the mentee to understand and navigate

political/social barriers within the department and the institution.

The important contribution mentoring provides for junior faculty cannot be overestimated. For institutions that seek to promote the success and retention of their faculty of color, mentoring faculty relationships is a vital, necessary part of community college life. Over the last 20 years, there has been a consistent increase in minority student enrollment and during this period, African Americans, Native American, and Hispanic students have disproportionately chosen community colleges as their entry into higher education. As the number of minority students rapidly increases, similar levels of diversity have not been achieved in faculty hiring. Retention of these students to program completion is an increasingly crucial challenge, and research indicates that students benefit when they have more faculty members with whom they can identify (Bowen & Muller, 1996).

## Formal Faculty Mentoring Programs

There are many approaches to mentoring, both formal and informal. An example of formal mentoring occurs when senior and junior colleagues are assigned to work with each other, specifically for the development of the latter. An informal mentoring situation may occur when two colleagues bond and form a relationship of encouragement and learning for the less experienced of the two. Luna and Cullen (1998) contend that there is no single best type of mentoring, but that a formalized system provides some assurance that advice and suggestions are conveyed. They believe that academia should be concerned with mentoring because "not only does mentoring develop the profession; by not mentoring, we are wasting talent. We educate, and train, but don't nurture" (Luna & Cullen, p. 1)

Haring (2002) suggested that mentoring serves psychosocial and vocational functions as well, and that psychosocial functions are more important. The importance

of psychosocial functions is supported by the work of psychologist Erik Erikson. His work relates to life stages and he postulated that, as individual's journey through these stages, their "human personality matures as a new ego quality unfolds through the acquisition of a new strength. Each stage has a special relationship to a basic societal element" (Lahey, 2002, p.332). Erikson posits that the stage of generativity versus stagnation is most closely associated with mentoring. According to Erikson, "Mature man needs to be needed, and maturity needs guidance as well as encouragement from what has been produced and must be taken care of" (Lahey, 2002, p. 332). Nurturing and guiding the next generation is the main principle of generativity and the basic building block of mentoring.

The essential components in successful faculty mentoring programs include: a) a belief in the necessity of a mentoring program, b) a sound curriculum, c) a commitment to diversifying faculty, and d) authentic support from the institution. Through mentoring programs, new faculty hires are acquainted with the culture of the school, classroom concerns, and career issues.

In a national survey of 137 two-year colleges, Murray (1999) found that peer mentoring was provided for new faculty at 34.6% of the institutions, 7.7% paid the peer mentors, and 3.9% provided the mentor with release time.

## Mentoring Faculty of Color

As discussion about workplace diversity has increased, the literature has begun to speak to the dilemmas of multicultural mentoring. The issues of race and ethnicity are becoming increasingly important in academia, and the core issues are about trust, comfort, and rapport. Senior people might only act as instrumental sponsors with those different from them. Similarly, junior people may feel more suspicious of senior people who differ from them. Because most senior people in organizations today are still white

men, insisting on the close emotional bond between a mentor and a protégé as the only vehicle for career advancement may unwittingly serve to reinforce the old (white) boys network" (Murrell et al., 1999, p. 32). The question is "when a new recruit to an organization is part of a visible minority, might she or he seek instrumental connection with mainstream senior people and psychosocial support from other minority individuals who may be somewhat marginalized?" (Murrell et al., 1999, p. 32).

In education, many faculty of color find it difficult to form and sustain relationships with Caucasian male faculty mentors (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001). To be an effective mentor, one must cultivate understanding of the experiences of various cultural backgrounds. This task may be challenging for Caucasian faculty members because of societal dynamics involving race and ethnicity (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001).

A scarcity of faculty members of color above junior rank weighs against minority graduate students' access to mentoring by colleagues of color. Further, faculty members of color at the junior level face time constraints and publishing pressures that inhibit their ability to mentor graduate students. Other stressors may include worrying about succeeding and progressing toward tenure, coping with ambiguity, lack of mentoring by senior faculty, loneliness and intellectual isolation, and limited time to meet professional demands (Cockrell, Mitchell, Middleton, & Campbell, 1999). "Weak mentoring relationships, fewer networking opportunities, and limited access to both informal networks and key departmental information may also affect the professional growth and development of minority scholars" (Cockrell, et. al., 1999, p. 11).

According to the ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report (1995),

> *Mentoring within an institution provides an avenue for empowering educators. Mentoring promotes*

> *faculty productivity, advocates collegiality, and encourages a broader goal of attracting, retaining, and advancing faculty members. Mentoring supports professional growth and renewal, which in turn empowers faculty as individuals and colleagues* (p. 5).

Several researchers champion the benefits of mentoring for both mentor and mentee. Luna et al. (1998) state, "Teaching and research improve when junior faculty are paired with mentors. Proteges become empowered with a mentor, and mentors themselves feel renewed through the sharing of power and collegiality" (p. 3). Another study of 235 associate and full professors of education found that those who were mentored were more likely to mentor others (ASHE-ERIC, 1995).

## Conclusion

Faculty mentoring is an effective strategy to effectively recruit and retain junior faculty members and is beneficial for both mentor and mentee. Current research suggests that mentoring is vital to the psychosocial and career development of new faculty, and that faculty development programs should focus on providing ongoing, substantial curriculum to foster new hires. In higher education, it is especially crucial that faculty of color be nurtured and empowered so that they develop a strong sense of collegiality, a deep understanding of their role at the community college, and recognition of the positive impact that they can have on the students whom they serve.

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