

PROFESSOR EMERITUS¹: A “NEGLECTED” MENTOR ON UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES

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Professor Emeritus is an honorary title recognising distinguished academic service. It is conferred to selected faculty members of a university upon their retirement. This exploration of the role of professor emeritus on campuses aims to stimulate debate about how universities could use their knowledge and skills as mentors for students, faculty, and campus wide initiatives.

Both retirement and the decision by individual university faculty members to retire are uniquely personal experiences. They are influenced by the type of institution, biographical factors including race/ethnicity, social class, gender, personal relationships, as well as the quality of work and workplace conditions. However, in recent years, there has been increased attention to "re-creating retirement" by establishing a range of post-retirement opportunities, including "involvement with both university-based and community-support activity" (Craig, 2019, p. 1).

Studies have also found that retired faculty are still interested in developing professionally and, for example, avail themselves of professional development opportunities in teaching (Kezar, 2018). While many faculty members are interested in activities tied to teaching and learning after retirement, some are also willing to chair or serve on committees in which they have an interest (Ehrenberg, 2001). Berberet et al. (2005) found that two-thirds of faculty retirees would like opportunities to assist their institutions in recruiting and retaining the next generation of faculty. This early research has been supported in later studies. Feldman and Beehr (2011) wrote about the importance of "bridge employment," a retired individual's decision to continue the teaching or writing that they enjoyed during their employment years.

As faculty members contemplate retirement, some would like to continue to teach part-time after they formally step down. Yakoboski's (2015) more recent study identified that 89% of faculty enjoy working with students and teaching and would like to continue teaching in retirement. Continuing to work in aspects of their role post-retirement was also expressed by Cahill et al. (2019). Qualitative and statistical research tools were used by Davidovitch and Eckhaus (2020) with the objective to create a model that expressed faculty members' perception of work after reaching retirement age. Their research finding identified that even lecturers who favoured retirement age restrictions understand the value of emeritus experience and support their continued academic activity in research, guidance and, partially, in teaching. The caveat was that the continued academic activity of emeriti should not block the employment of young faculty members at academic institutions.

¹ The term “emeritus” was selected based upon consideration of University of British Columbia’s perspective, see <https://emerituscollege.ubc.ca/about-ubc-emeritus-college/emeritus-vs-emeriti>

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One subpopulation of retired faculty are those who are granted emeritus status. Professor Emeritus is an honorary title, recognizing distinguished academic service. It is conferred to selected faculty members of a university upon their retirement. Thody's (2011) study of professor emeritus at an English university identified that about half remained happily active in teaching and research, though not always remunerated for it or recognized by their universities for their contributions. Bean et al. (2014) reported similar findings. In this paper, we argue for the active integration of emeritus faculty into a mentoring role in campus life. Accepting these findings, the question emerges as to how to use professor emeritus as mentors.

Evidence suggests that retired faculty members have a diversity of learned wisdom from their numerous years on academic campuses (Giddens & Morton, 2018; Hall, 2021). They have each made numerous contributions, such as serving on committees and faculty councils, teaching undergraduate and graduate students, supervising graduate students, and pursuing their own academic interests through research, peer-reviewed publications, contributions to professional associations, and other scholarly activities. Freedman (2013) suggested one reason for continued involvement with one's previous work environment. He described the emergence of a "third age" within society, described as the time between midlife and old age. Its emergence is due to an increasing lifespan. He explained that this is "a time of continued productivity and learning, with a particular responsibility for the well-being of future generations" (p. 40). In this phase of life, individuals experience "renewed zeal for meaning and generativity". . . [along with] "an eagerness to stay in— or return to—the workforce" (p. 40). Welton et al. (2015) reported that all participants, in their study agreed that mentorship should include guidance in professionalization, writing, publishing, networking, career support, and leadership development. Skills that many professor emeritus have demonstrated in their careers.

As Johnson (2016) explained, mentorships are complex, interactive, and mutually beneficial; both mentee and mentor reap the rewards from the relationship. As the relationship progresses, it becomes increasingly mutual and collegial' (p. 24). Specific to mentoring in post-secondary education, a large component of the existing literature focuses primarily on the area of newly appointed faculty members and their career development. In mentoring, these faculty expressed that their early-career counterparts considered them to be valuable resources as they navigated the tenure and promotion process. Welton et al. (2015) reported that all mentors, in their study, experienced personal satisfaction in supporting early-career faculty in developing their career goals and spoke with pride when discussing mentees' success in furthering their research agenda and in publishing. Shieh and Cullen (2020) reported that mentoring can increase clinical track faculty's knowledge of both scholarship production and academic promotion processes. Researchers' interests have only relatively recently expanded to include mentors and their interactions with educational organizations. This is illustrated, for example in the work of List and Sorcinelli (2018). Their study emphasized the importance and significant benefits of mentoring for senior women in leadership positions.

Evaluating the effectiveness of mentoring is difficult due primarily to the diversity of factors involved, such as the implementation framework, outcome clarity, setting, and personal expectations of both the mentor and mentee. Nevertheless, the findings of numerous studies provide empirical evidence on the benefits of mentoring for all parties involved - mentor, mentee, and educational organization (Tinoco-Giraldo et al., 2020). However, evidence of the role and effectiveness of professor emeritus as mentors is sparse but has been identified in the literature. Mendez et al.'s (2019) single-case study described the benefits mentors derived from participating in a mentoring program. In this program, emeritus faculty were matched with

underrepresented minority faculty in the engineering professoriate for career-focused mentorship.

Koutsoukos and Sipitanou (2020) studied adult education programs for the mentor, the mentee, and the educational institution. Using a quantitative research method, a sample of 337 adult educators was examined. Their findings indicated that mentoring could be a useful tool in adult education, having significant benefits for all parties participating in the learning process. More specifically, the study participants claimed specific benefits for each group. For mentees, the benefits were communication skills development, critical thinking enhancement, teaching methodology improvement, and a boost in self-confidence. For mentors, the primary benefits included professional development, improved communication skills, and continuous self-improvement, as well as professional networking and socializing. Whereas for the educational organizations the benefits included the development of cooperation culture, the establishment of a learning community and the promotion of innovative educational practices. In addition, empirical research has found evidence that intergenerational exchange in the post-secondary context can yield more positive age attitudes in younger students (Andreoletti & Howard, 2018), contributing to reducing ageism.

Situating Emeriti Faculty on University Campuses

The university is the most important institution in the complex process of knowledge creation, translation, and dissemination. It is home for many of the natural sciences but also for the human sciences through the education of such professionals as lawyers, registered nurses, and social workers. Universities also house the complex system of books, journals, and databases that accompany knowledge and skill acquisition. Yet, at the same time, they are faced with enormous challenges, arising to a large degree from a decline in economic resources. Currently, many Canadian universities are being forced to reduce expenditures and, in some cases, to discontinue programs (Ansari, 2020; Mintz, 2021). The relationship between society and post-secondary education that provided expanding resources in return for greater access for students in addition to research and service to society has broken down, with significant implications for post-secondary institutions.

The university must change and adapt to new circumstances. One key strategy to address decreasing resources is the use of professor emeritus on campuses. Ehrenberg (2001) found that many institutions have provisions for retiring faculty to teach once retired, but few have provisions for them to work on committees or have access to a laboratory or research facilities. For example, only 11% of the surveyed institutions assigned laboratory space to retired professors using the same criteria they relied on for tenured faculty members.

The idea of finding new ways to utilize the human capital of faculty emeritus individuals as they live longer and stay healthy is a no-brainer (Hall, 2016; Nowell et al., 2017). These are individuals with enormous experience, often with wisdom and practical knowledge. Baker's (2018) commentary on the contribution of retired surgeons to the education of medical students and residents holds truths for professor emeritus. Among its rewards, Baker wrote that involvement in teaching allows retired surgeons to interact with learners at all levels of experience. Retired surgeons can act as valuable educational resources, sharing skills acquired through years of active clinical practice. Many retirees have developed networks at the regional and national levels that allow them to assist residents as they pursue fellowships and career opportunities.

While there is limited evidence as to how to incorporate retired faculty members, including emeritus, into mentoring roles on university campuses, there are numerous lessons that can be learnt from mentoring experiences in the relevant literature. Partnerships for education enhancement bring together a set of actors for the common goal of improving the experiences of students and other members of the university community, based on mutually agreed roles and principles. Perhaps more important than exact definitions is the agreement on the key principles in partnership building. Partnerships imply that a balance of power and influence is maintained between the partners and that each partner can retain its core values and identity. Successful partnerships are built on mutual respect and trust, transparency, and mutual benefit. The process of partnership building is key: roles need to be clarified, boundaries need to be drawn, added value needs to be defined. Ideally, the partnership creates synergy as each partner contributes "what it does best".

What Universities Need to Do to Promote Mentoring by Emeritus Faculty

Miller and Grover (2021) spoke of the value universities saw in the partnership with emeritus faculty. An institutional commitment to mentoring is needed if professor emeriti are to be embedded into university campuses as mentors. A fully-fledged mentoring system ought not to be exclusively concerned with the needs of new entrants to teaching, including those who seek full-time tenure track or sessional positions. Mentors may also be part of a departmental or institutional strategy to support under-performing teaching faculty members. The range of possible mentoring scenarios is an extensive and challenging one. There needs to be a developed institutional framework for mentoring, in particular subject-specific mentoring. No teaching load leaves the experienced professor emeritus with the energy and time to engage in mentoring responsibilities.

Universities have available to them varied opportunities, e.g., in recruitment literature and retirement documentation handbooks, to make explicit any of the ways in which they are seeking to develop staff through mentoring by retiring and retired faculty members. They also need to provide some basic physical requirements in which mentor and mentee could converse. This might include the availability of a dedicated meeting room in which such confidential activities as post-observation debriefings can take place. Mentors might also use this room as a venue for periodic or "update" conversations. Institutions' financial resources might allow for the purchase of a small collection of relevant texts which mentors could borrow and/or subscriptions to appropriate professional journals. Other resources which hold potential value in supporting professor emeritus as mentors include the necessary hardware for the video or audio recording of mentees' lessons if so desired.

One key challenge for universities lies in portraying mentoring as a desirable, worthwhile activity with personal rewards associated with it. Their activities in this regard should start prior to faculty members' retirement. It may help ease the transition to retirement that some faculty members experience. Constructing a positive, attractive profile for the mentoring role for professor emeritus should commence with the development of appropriate selection criteria. Not all retired faculty members have the knowledge, skills, or even the desire to take on the mentoring role. It is recognized that interest in accepting the role is probably a continuation of their pre-retirement contributions on university campuses. If token remuneration is available, it may take the form of providing meeting space, free parking, or even access to faculty lounges for coffee. Universities may also need to seek arrangements with mentor training providers as rarely

are such opportunities offered on campuses. Tasnim (2020) wrote that mentoring is an effective means to facilitate the professional growth of educators. Training could be open to all employers of universities since turnover is experienced in workforces. Recognizing the fluid nature of emeritus involvement, universities may be required to update the list of available mentors on an annual basis.

University administrators will also need to explore different implementation models to select the one most appropriate for their university. This approach to mentoring on campus is not for everyone; however, universities need new avenues for utilizing the accumulated skills, wisdom, and abilities gained over a lifetime rather than taking or keeping the jobs better suited to the young and emerging. Colleges and universities historically have had faculty orientation programs and methods to support new faculty matriculation. Mentorship programs, if well developed, can integrate emeritus faculty into the university community and are characteristic of good educational practice. Stuckey et al. (2019) reported on the benefits of formal mentoring programs for women and under-represented minority faculty members. One model which can be adapted for professor emeritus members of the university community is multiple mentoring. A seasoned single mentor may no longer be possible in the rich diversity of post retirement life. One illustrative publication that could be used as a basis for a re-examination of mentoring relationships is Barrette-Ng et al. (2019) work, *The Mentorship Guide for Teaching and Learning* (<https://taylorinstitute.ucalgary.ca/mentorship-guide-teaching-learning>).

Glaser et al. (2005) described emeritus/retiree centers at two major research institutions that serve retired faculty, retired staff, and their spouse beneficiaries. These on-campus centers provide opportunities to cultivate retirees' connections to the campus community. Another strategy may be for universities to adopt University of the Third Age (U3A) programs on their campuses. The U3A is an international movement whose aims are the education and stimulation of mainly retired members of the community (Hansen et al., 2019). The presence of such learning opportunities on campus would provide current faculty researchers with opportunities to access possible participants and to refine research skills through conversations with informed U3A faculty. These on-campus centers provide opportunities to cultivate retirees' connections to the campus community.

The degree of success or failure for emeritus faculty mentoring depends less on what is implemented than on how, by whom, and in what university context implementation occurs. There are several key components in the success of a reform environment. For example, university administrators must communicate to students and current faculty members the purpose of the professor emeritus mentoring program. This perhaps is not as easy as it seems because the reasons for change must be understood as relevant and important to future success. There may be concern from some faculty members that their own positions are at risk, being replaced by emeritus faculty. This concern must be acknowledged and addressed.

By promoting such possibilities as those described above, the benefits of mentoring for mentors personally, as well as those for the individuals they mentor, and for universities themselves, are evident. As universities demonstrate their commitment to mentoring, these kinds of initiatives depend on a desire for change, the emphasis placed on collegial support for enhanced teaching knowledge and skills, and both physical and economic resources.

What Emeritus Faculty Need to Do

To become engaged, emeritus professors must have the ability to educate themselves on the issues – political, social, educational, local, and national – that impact the members of the university community. These skills are rooted in the emeritus professors' ability to gather, synthesize, and evaluate information, skills learned and refined over their academic careers. This may mean that one of the roles of the emeritus association is to develop a data base of members skills and interests specific to mentoring roles on university campuses. The university emeritus associations may help them to identify appropriate opportunities to contribute to campus life. Several strategies that could be used by the associations to obtain this information could be a survey to their members, an open discussion on-line form, or a questionnaire sent out in their newsletters.

Conclusion

The benefits of emeritus faculty as mentors are substantial, as is the impact on individual well-being. Any academic institution can think of creative ways to enrich the retirement years of the members of its community. Professor emeritus can benefit from clearly defined yet flexible policies and programs that provide them with a path that accommodates their needs while also supporting their students, colleagues, and the institution.

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