Mentoring New Faculty in Post-Pandemic Academia:
Applications and Strategies for Mentors, Administrators, and Faculty Developers

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Abstract. The research on mentorship in the professoriate is extensive and substantial. New faculty benefit from having sustained and focused interactions with a more knowledgeable other who is able to shepherd them through the induction phase of their academic career. Professional support, collaboration, and sponsorship have always been critical, but this need is even more pronounced in the isolating times of the pandemic. During the 2020-2022 academic years, junior faculty were asked to navigate new spaces which would be exceedingly trying under normal circumstances, but even more so while under severe restrictions. This paper will examine the usefulness of alternative ways of mentoring that can assist incoming faculty. Strategies for administrators and senior faculty responsible for facilitating these connections will be explored.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the culture of American higher education in drastically demonstrable ways. With the near-overnight emergence of a deadly and highly communicable disease, colleges and universities struggled to maintain steady enrollments and provide students with a high-quality education in the midst of exceedingly chaotic times. As administrators focused on ways to preserve students' academic progress and protect their socio-emotional wellbeing, faculty were simultaneously experiencing the stress and fatigue of pandemic life. Think pieces from academic media outlets highlighted how the quick pivot to online learning and a virtual moratorium on research endeavors that involved human subjects (Termini et al., 2021) impacted every rank of the professoriate. While all members of academia were regularly called on to "monitor and adjust," incoming junior faculty had to navigate the transition into a new position during an untethered whirlwind of flux and instability.

A typical induction phase into the professoriate brings about stress, second guessing, and shades of imposter syndrome (Dancy & Brown, 2011) under ordinary circumstances. For a newly minted professor entering the academy for the first time during a global pandemic, the already treacherous academic road can be fraught with unforeseen challenges and obstacles that their pre-pandemic tenure-track colleagues did not face. There are notable differences in the experiences of those who entered a faculty position during or prior to the 2019-2020 academic year and those who began a tenure-track experience thereafter (Henley, 2021). As a result, mentoring the latter population of faculty requires deft skill and an ability to think comprehensively about the developmental needs of this group in a way that addresses both career and socioemotional demands. In short, focused and productive mentorship becomes more critical now than ever. In this paper, definitions of mentoring will be briefly explored, strategies for mentoring in the three primary areas of faculty evaluation will be

highlighted, and, finally, practical considerations for administrators and faculty developers will be addressed to ensure those recruited into new faculty positions are also retained.

It should be emphasized that as American higher education is a microcosm of larger societal forces, those members of academia who are particularly vulnerable to the effects of racism, sexism, and classicism would be disproportionately affected by the impacts of the pandemic (Deryugina et al., 2021). While the public health crisis has upended almost every person's life in some tangible way, women and BIPOC academics have struggled to regain footing that was already on shaky ground (Gannon, 2021). Underrepresented groups face significant obstacles in faculty hiring (Clauset et al., 2015) and subsequently are retained in tenure-track and tenured positions at lower rates than majority groups. The strategies that will be discussed can apply to all new faculty members beginning a teaching or research position during the transitory nature of the pandemic, but special consideration should be paid to those for whom access to the "hidden curriculum" of academia is tenuous at best.

Mentoring Defined

A review of the literature on mentoring shows the term has evolved from simple definitions that focus on socialization to more complex ones that emphasize personal growth and transformation (Zachary, 2016). Mentorship can consist of many actions, including counseling, sponsorship, experiential learning, and collaboration. While various authors and researchers posit divergent viewpoints about the specifics of the practice, the spirit of the mentoring endeavor seems consistent throughout the literature. Mentoring, at its core, is about a relationship between one who has advanced knowledge, skill, or ability in some domain, and one who is in the process of learning and growing (Zachary, 2016, p. 34). Fundamentally, a mentoring relationship must be based in reciprocity which characterizes the collaborative interactions between a senior member of the faculty and one who is still in the probationary period while on the tenure track.

The mentoring process mimics a scaffolding one (Endo, 2020) whereby the mentor provides appropriate support and guidance to the mentee as they move through the early part of their career. The activities that characterize the mentoring relationship should be goal-directed. While the primary objective would be tenure and professional advancement, cultivating a sense of belonging to the institution and larger expert discipline is also important. Effective mentoring should have a component of socializing and transmitting the mentee into the culture of the organization (Dominguez & Hager, 2013). In this way, socializing as a broad term is multifaceted. Initially there is the action of providing in-depth knowledge about the institution and the department that is required for career ascension. This includes the sometimes nebulous expectations for tenure. A secondary type of socializing is that which is typical in everyday lexicon, simply engaging in positive and encouraging interactions. This type of socialization, quite absent in the wake of a public health crisis, could be as simple as sharing a meal, grabbing coffee between classes, or attending a game or recreative performance on campus. These are when relational bonds are formed, in the small spaces and free time of an academic career.

In traditional, pre-pandemic times, mentoring relationships between junior and senior faculty would assume a proscribed path; wherein, the newly hired faculty member would join the institutional ranks and be paired with a tenured member of the department with whom their research or teaching interests aligned. This is considered the induction phase to the professoriate, which can and should be continued from the doctoral program. The senior faculty member is expected to impart knowledge about the institution, department, and larger professional discipline. It is assumed the mentor has the ability, and desire, to guide the novice professor through the path of tenure and promotion. While evidence suggests that this hierarchical approach to mentorship can work (Curtin et al., 2016), in some cases, the mentoring relationship may be ill-fated from the beginning because of a mismatch due to cross-cultural misunderstandings, professional expectations that have shifted over time, or simple personality clashes.

Traditional mentors are characterized by having knowledge and information that are specific to the selected career path. As aforementioned, despite inroads made over the years, the professoriate is still quite homogeneous in nature. Academia remains largely white, middle to upper-middle class, and male; as a result, there could be incongruence in backgrounds between a mentor and mentee. Cross-cultural mentoring may be effective when both participants are open to different viewpoints, willing to be vulnerable, and prepared to be honest about the challenges of academia (Kochan & Freeman, 2020), but the research is decidedly mixed. If a junior faculty member is paired with a mentor with whom they have little in common in terms of background, worldview, or value system, it can make it harder to find shared ground. Since mentorship is predicated on relational bonds, if there is no rapport upon which to build, the mentoring interactions may feel hollow and unsatisfying. Without an assurance of a "safe space," mentees could also feel uncomfortable advocating for themselves or asking their mentor to do so if discriminatory or inequitable actions occur.

The seemingly overnight shift to virtual teaching and finding ways to keep research viable meant that many incoming faculty were being expected to do more with far less. Mentorship for this group would require a commitment on the part of the senior faculty member to think innovatively to guide the recently minted professor through the transition into a new institution. As colleges and universities grapple with how to evaluate pre-tenured faculty during the upheaval of the pandemic, productivity remains a key component of how faculty are assessed. When high-quality publications, superior teaching, and dedicated service to the profession are the currency in academia, having a mentor who is knowledgeable and willing to be an active guide is immeasurable.

Mentoring Differently

In the extant research, the case has been made for hierarchical mentoring whereby a senior departmental colleague takes a junior faculty member under their tutelage. While it is not necessary to disavow those approaches outright, research shows that other methods for making a mentoring match can be just as fruitful, if not more so. Informal peer mentoring (Kensington-Miller, 2018) holds promise for faculty who are entering the professoriate during the isolating times of COVID-19. Peer mentorship is a useful tool to employ because oftentimes the relationships grow

organically due to common interests, backgrounds, or other bonding characteristics. Furthermore, peers can be in the junior faculty member's home department, across campus, or at another institution altogether. These types of natural connections can augment the traditional senior/junior faculty relationship across all three primary areas of professional activity.

In the same vein, another option, mentoring circles (Thomas et al., 2015), allows the faculty member to seek out a group of pre-tenured and/or tenured colleagues to support their growth and development. Oftentimes, these factions are interdisciplinary due to the stratification of its membership. Mentoring circles can be formal, informal, groups with a static focus, or one that ebbs and flows with the needs of its participants. In many respects, every person in a mentoring circle is simultaneously a mentee and mentor, seeking to gain and spread knowledge within the group. As the pandemic required faculty to reconceptualize their teaching and research approaches, looking for other faculty to share ideas with was a critical part of the socialization process. Because the inherent power differential is removed, faculty report finding it more comfortable to work within these mentoring coalitions than in those that are "assigned" at will.

With COVID-19 restrictions affecting customary new faculty orientations and other start-of-practice faculty induction activities, one's transition into the professoriate was unlike those in years past. A significant number of incoming faculty members during the 2020-2022 academic years may not have experienced the same fanfare and targeted welcomes as their advanced assistant colleagues. This lack of interaction and community-building could result in faculty who feel disconnected before they even step foot into a classroom or lab. As one new faculty member confided to his mentor, who happened to be the chair of the search committee who successfully recruited him, "It's a strange feeling. I haven't met anyone else in the department who wasn't at my job talk."

Having faculty who are in the same cohort of entering colleagues meet, exchange, and interact is key to helping new professors become acclimated to the institution. Peer mentoring approaches and mentoring circles are unique in that the expectation is the relationship is more reciprocal and mutual than in a traditional top-down method. Because peer mentors can be tenured or untenured, in the same discipline or transdisciplinary, the mentee feels on a more even playing field. Research supports that junior faculty who participate in peer mentorship report experiencing a greater sense of accountability and camaraderie (Kensington-Miller, 2018; Moss et al., 2008) because the emphasis shifts from a unidirectional transmission of knowledge to a communal and shared activity. Since COVID-19 policies on many campuses required changes in how and where faculty gathered, maximizing virtual spaces and leveraging basic telecommunication must be a necessary part of mentorship moving forward. Online chatting, social media platforms, and simple phone calls become the catalyzing pathways for sustained interaction and guidance.

Mentoring: Research and Scholarship

The lion's share of literature on mentorship in the academy focuses on the impact of mentoring on research productivity and its effect on the junior faculty

member's path to tenure (Zacher et al., 2019). The pandemic vaulted research plans into a tailspin, as funding freezes and a lack of access to research sites were the result of the academic world (and beyond) being effectively shut down for over a year. As the time from research activity to publication is protracted with many fits and starts (Powell, 2016), the effect of lost research time meant that faculty entering a new institution without support to begin a research agenda, or the local connections to engage in community-based research, were already starting at a disadvantage.

One's identity as a scholar is shaped by successful research productivity, and the challenges of research engagement during the pandemic were felt by many. As previously stated, mentoring circles (Darwin & Palmer, 2009) and informal peer mentorship practices can provide a new faculty member with a sense of accountability that goal-setting with others dedicated to the same task can engender (Cassese & Holman, 2018). Writing groups, with a focus on deadlines and actionable feedback, spur the novice professor to keep treading through the research process despite delays and hiccups. Academic and professional conferences, now largely virtual and more accessible than before, remain essential venues to hear about innovative research and engage with others in the same field of interest. Mentors who are active in their discipline could share networking information about upcoming professional meetings, ask their mentees to co-author a paper, or sponsor their protégé's attendance. The benefit of unconventional mentoring relationships occurs in the professional advice that can be passed amongst the members of mentoring circles or informal peer pairings. The road to tenure is difficult to navigate. Having others in the proverbial "same boat" give sage advice and counsel allows the tenure-track professor a chance to evaluate and reflect on their progress. Peer mentoring and mentoring circles permit the exchange of ideas and perspectives that could be shrouded in more traditional mentoring approaches.

Mentors must be proactive in keeping their mentees moving forward in a productive manner. This requires planned and sustained interactions with the junior faculty member. Regular and consistent contact should be the focus. One could ask to read a draft of a manuscript or grant application. A mentor could demonstrate support by offering to write letters of endorsement for fellowships and other early career awards. While some of these practices are assumed to be a part of one's doctoral training, with the pandemic's protracted length and wide range, it is quite possible that a recent graduate did not get a full mentorship experience in their program. Also, a member of the tenure track is expected to begin asserting their own professional identity away from their former advisor or research team. Helping them successfully make this transition at a new institution is essential to their growth and maturation in the field.

Unlike teaching that requires faculty to be at a particular place at a specified time, research undertakings can be insulating. The need to write and produce work at a high level and during one's non-instructional time can cause tension between a junior faculty member's home life and their work expectations. The mentor should make every effort to show moral support of their mentee and bring relevant vulnerability into their interactions. Sharing failures, extolling triumphs, and imparting wisdom are a necessary part of building the relationship. Again, this is where the ability to establish rapport and show empathy come into play.

Mentoring: Teaching and Instruction

The mentorship of newly appointed faculty members into the culture of teaching at a specific institution is an integral part of the induction process. Every college and university has expectations for teaching excellence and established resources for maintaining a high level of rigor and reflection in one's instruction. At a minimum, mentors can provide support for teaching and learning activities by encouraging a shared peer review process. Many times, mentees are expected to allow mentors and other senior faculty members to observe their work and give feedback. While this is a useful practice and can help the faculty member pinpoint strengths and areas for improvement, the mentor could also offer their mentee the chance to observe them in action. Some professors complete their doctoral programs without any formal training in teaching. Observing their mentor engage in the art and science of teaching would be beneficial in supporting their development as a novice instructor.

The mentorship of teaching must also consider the current context within which junior faculty are now operating. As student evaluations are still considered a significant metric for faculty evaluations (Chávez & Mitchell, 2020), mentors should help new faculty build rigorous courses with a keen eye to issues of culturally relevant pedagogy, universal design for learning, and responsive teaching. The pandemic has exacerbated the mental health crisis on college campuses (Son et al., 2020). New faculty may themselves be feeling the constraints of the shifting times and need a mentor who could direct them to institutional resources related to student welfare.

Where there is curricular need and professional interest, co-teaching is another opportunity for mentors to demonstrate support and encouragement of their mentee's instructional skill. Once again, informal peer mentoring and mentoring circles allow engagement from a breadth of many participants. Differing viewpoints and teaching methodologies within the same course can offer students a unique perspective on the discipline while allowing the mentee to learn instructional strategies and tools from a more knowledgeable colleague. Providing time for reflection as a teacher is essential to professional growth and development (Anderson, 2020). Co-teaching within a singular course or across the department's curriculum will hone the novice professor's skill base and can provide a comprehensive view of their teaching ability during the annual evaluation period.

A number of institutions have dedicated teaching and learning centers that hold workshops and webinars for faculty to hone their skills and pursue innovative, high-impact practices. These resources often include ways to prepare new and veteran faculty for the use of online and hybrid teaching modalities that appear to be a permanent outgrowth of the pandemic. At our institution, trained faculty development specialists will attend faculty's classes, whether seated or virtual, and draft a detailed summary of activities. This is a useful exercise because it is a formative and nonjudgmental recounting of the activity of the class. No information from the report goes on the record as is the case of a summative evaluation for a tenure review. Mentors and mentees review the report of the faculty development specialist and brainstorm ways to capitalize on strengths and shore up areas of improvement.

Mentoring: Service

Service pursuits offer the junior faculty member a chance to participate in the campus community through departmental and institution-wide engagement. Oftentimes, entering faculty on the tenure track are shielded from heavy service obligations to prioritize research and teaching activities. While, eventually, junior faculty will be expected to take on leadership roles as they ascend the academic career ladder, it is critical that mentors help mentees protect their time from demanding service pursuits. As tenure and promotion panels often wish to see an integration of work across all three areas of evaluation, the mentor can urge the new faculty member to connect service activities to their teaching and research endeavors. Peer mentors and those who are involved in mentoring circles may provide advice on how to balance service work with the time needed to maintain research productivity and garner strong course evaluations.

Faculty mentors can also help junior faculty build their service portfolio by identifying critical issues affecting the larger campus community. An unfortunate result of the pandemic has been food and housing insecurity for students who were displaced. There has also been a clear need for increased tutoring and supplemental services for first-year students who spent the final year of their secondary career online and in hybrid learning environments. Incoming faculty can collaborate with their mentoring circles and senior faculty to host tutoring groups, create "near-peer" mentorships between first-year and more advanced students, and provide other forms of outreach to students and community members. These kinds of service activities have a dual function of giving inducted faculty members a sense of belonging within their new community while also building their record of institutional service.

Considerations for Administrators and Senior Staff

In discussions about mentoring, the focus solely tends to be on the relationships between mentors and mentees. In order to create an environment of support and advocacy for junior faculty, administrators must be willing to put monetary and human resources behind these initiatives. At a minimum, training should be provided for those who will formally engage in mentoring activities with an incoming faculty member. Having a common language and expectation for the process is key (Mazerolle et al., 2018). In my role as chair of our department's recruitment and retention committee, we developed a mentoring website that mentors and mentees could explore together. With many resources in one place, mentors could walk through questions with their mentees while acculturating them to the institution.

Department chairs and deans can also set aside funds to augment mentoring activities housed within their programs. If funding for mentoring resources is unavailable, senior staff can show their support of mentorship by providing dedicated meeting spaces for mentoring groups, communicating with other institutional leaders to connect faculty with mutual interests, and rewarding exceptional mentoring with public recognition, especially for those who take on leadership roles within the organization (e.g., developing mentoring workshops and trainings). In the annual evaluation process, considerable weight should be given to faculty who provide

constructive mentoring for junior faculty and those who take on facilitating mentoring groups or provide copious amounts of feedback to novice professors.

Conclusion

Mentors have a critically important role in the recruitment and retention of new faculty members. These guides socialize junior faculty members into the culture of the professoriate through collaboration, sponsorship, and morale building. The pandemic disrupted academic life across the globe, and incoming tenure-track faculty were not immune from its effects. As the academy changes to accommodate novel

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modes of teaching, research, and service, so do conventional methods of mentoring need to undergo a transformation. Mentoring now requires a faculty member to possess a more intentional touch by demonstrating the essential skills and aptitudes that can support the needs of a professor in the inductive phase. Having a professional and personal support system while untenured, irrespective of a public health catastrophe, is a key element in charting a successful path to tenure. In the face of uncertain research funding, declining enrollments, and student mental health concerns, junior faculty need mentors who can meet them where they are while sharing the requisite tools to fully grow into their role within the institution and larger academic community.

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