



Types of Mentoring: Advantages and Disadvantages

Formal or Classic Mentoring

This type of one-on-one mentoring pairs a senior faculty member with a junior faculty mentor, usually from the same department, for a specified time period (Reimers 2014). This approach assumes mentors accept responsibility for helping mentees grow and develop (Lumpkin 2011).

Advantages:

- Formal mentoring increases job performance, enhances confidence, facilitates networking, and decreases turnover, thus positively impacting the entire department (Lumpkin 2011).
- It guarantees that every junior faculty member has a mentor if paired formally (Reimers 2014).
- Mentees can receive useful discipline-specific information (e.g., departmental expectations for tenure, feedback on proposals or manuscripts, etc.) (Reimers 2014).

Disadvantages:

- The assigned mentor and mentee may not be a good fit for any number of reasons, such as personalities (Reimers 2014). To reduce this likelihood, both the mentor and mentee should have input on who is assigned to them (Allen et al. 2006a; 2006b).
- Being from the same department, mentees may be reluctant to admit struggles candidly and thus not get the mentoring they need. To address this, expectations for confidentiality should be specified. Additionally, mentees should build a network of mentors – including those from outside the department – so they have support to address their full range of needs (Reimers 2014).
- A department may not have enough mentors depending on the ratio of junior faculty to senior faculty. One way to address this is to engage mentors from a related department (Reimers 2014). Alternatively, mentoring programs can be configured in one of the alternative ways described below, such as peer mentoring or group mentoring.



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Informal Mentoring

Voluntary mentoring relationships that are not assigned and lack structure about how mentors work with mentees constitute informal mentoring (Lumpkin 2011).

Advantages:

- Informal mentoring tends to be more egalitarian, longer lasting, and occur with greater frequency than formal mentoring (Ragins and Cotton 1999).
- Mentees tend to have stronger connections and broader interactions with informal mentors (Sands et al. 1991). In one study, mentees with informal mentors reported higher satisfaction and received greater benefits in most mentoring roles than those with formal mentors (Ragins and Cotton 1999; Lumpkin 2011).
- The voluntary nature allows for greater flexibility.
- Informal mentoring activities are a sign of a healthy organizational culture (Reimers 2014).

Disadvantages:

- Many departments do not have strong mentoring cultures that naturally lead to informal mentoring. To address this, heads and deans can intentionally set up structures and events to nurture informal mentoring relationships (Reimers 2014), such as workshops and presentations.
- Having a faculty mentor is not guaranteed, and faculty most in need of mentoring may be the least likely to find an informal mentor. Furthermore, because mentors tend to gravitate toward younger versions of themselves, groups historically underrepresented in academia – women and minorities – may be informally mentored less frequently, thereby perpetuating inequities (Bova 2000). As such, informal mentoring is likely best paired with formal mentoring programs.



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Peer Mentoring

Faculty members with equal ranks from either the same or different departments develop supportive networks. They meet regularly to discuss issues and challenges they're facing, as well as share advice, information, and strategies (Angelique et al. 2002; Lumpkin 2011; Reimers 2014). It can also effectively address psychosocial needs, increase collegiality, normalize challenges, and reduce isolation (Smith et al. 2001).

Advantages:

- Peer mentoring has shown to be an effective form of mentoring, with positive evaluations of peer mentoring programs by faculty participants (Rees and Shaw 2014; Smith et al. 2001; Wasburn 2007).
- It ensures mentoring occurs even with unbalanced numbers of junior and senior faculty.
- Participants are exposed to a *range* of opinions, advice, and diverse perspectives rather than relying on the sole opinion of one mentor (Mitchell 1999).
- Peers confronting similar challenges/issues may be better suited to give practical advice since they likely have the most recent experience with similar issues (Reimers 2014).
- Since peer mentoring doesn't rely on being chosen as a mentee, it offers some balance for minorities and women and ensures equal access to mentoring (Wasburn 2007).

Disadvantages:

- Since peers have not experienced all levels of the university, this type of mentoring cannot address all aspects of a faculty career (Reimers 2014).
- If cross-disciplinary, peer networks may not be able to address in-depth discipline-specific information, such as specific expectations for tenure (Reimers 2014).
- Junior faculty may not feel the need to participate in a peer network (Reimers 2014).



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Group or Team Mentoring

In group mentoring, senior faculty members serve as mentors for a group of junior mentees who meet regularly as a team (Reimers 2014). For example, a senior faculty member may meet with a group of junior faculty on a monthly basis. Monthly meetings are most effective when given a discussion topic or a speaker/panel is arranged to address a topic. Meetings should include both structured discussions and time for informal discussion (Reimers 2014).

Advantages:

- It has many of the same advantages of peer mentoring, but with the added bonus of a senior mentor who can provide advice on topics beyond what could be gleaned from peers (Reimers 2014).
- A few mentors can serve many mentees, which can help address unbalanced numbers of junior and senior faculty. It can also maximize the impact of excellent mentors (Reimers 2014).
- Mentees can learn from each other, and junior faculty may learn things that they didn't even think to ask about.
- This format allows for choice of participation and does not force faculty into a mentoring relationship (Reimers 2014).

Disadvantages:

- Confidentiality and trust issues may arise. Faculty must be assured that nothing that is said during the mentoring process can be used against them by other members of the group – including senior faculty (Hunt and Weintraub 2002).
- Because of group size, scheduling and having everyone attend all meetings may be difficult, which may cause some mentees to not have the regular contact with mentors and peers that is necessary for effective mentoring (Reimers 2014). Like other forms of mentoring, this is best paired with different types of mentoring to address the shortcomings of this approach.



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Writing Accountability Groups

Writing support groups improve publication rates (Dankoski et al. 2012), promote work-life balance, retention, and promotion (Davis et al. 2011), and can be broadly considered a form of peer mentoring. They can be interdisciplinary or discipline-specific. *Traditional writing groups* meet monthly to read, critique, and provide feedback to scholarly writing. These offer substantive feedback, but risk being time-consuming (Rockquemore 2010). *Writing accountability groups* meet briefly weekly wherein each member sets and shares short-term goals for the next week for their research and writing and shares progress on meeting their previous week's goals. This promotes continual progress on scholarly writing (Sylvia 2007), but offers little substantive feedback (Rockquemore 2010). In *write-on-site groups*, people meet to write independently in the same location (e.g., an office) to force accountability (Rockquemore 2010). This type of group may be most effective for people really struggling to sit down and write.

Workshops & Colloquia

Workshops and colloquia can be an effective supplement or complement to traditional mentoring as these offer another way to support faculty development and transfer knowledge. The Campus Connections program in the Office of the Provost offers workshops on various aspects of faculty life, and mentors should consider attending these with their mentees to strengthen their relationship. The Office of Research and Discovery and the Office of Instruction and Assessment also offer project-based workshops aimed at making progress on a specific project (e.g., submitting a grant) or goal (e.g., improving problem-based learning). All of these campus-wide workshops offer the opportunities for faculty to meet and network with other faculty from around campus, and may help mentees find new mentoring relationships, including peer mentoring networks. Deans and heads may want to organize their own departmental or college-level workshops as a way to mentor their faculty, as well as to facilitate the formation of informal mentoring relationships.