



The road less traveled—Crossing gender and racial lines in comprehensive mentoring



Andrea M. Kent^{*}, Andre M. Green¹, Phillip Feldman²

University of South Alabama, UCOM 3100, Mobile, AL, 36688, USA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the induction process of two professors, with specific emphasis on mentoring, from entering assistant professors through their journey of tenure and promotion, and beyond. A Caucasian male professor with 40 years experience in higher education engaged in the induction process with a Caucasian female and an African-American male over the course of 10 years and 8 years, respectively. The participant researchers sought to determine if a longitudinal induction program that relied heavily upon mentoring yielded successful results, especially in the context of cross-cultural mentoring. The study operationalizes critical reflection centered on participants' collaborations and shared norms, values, and practices resulting in four stages of induction.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Role of mentoring within induction in higher education

The quality of an institution depends on the quality of the faculty, thereby necessitating the need to recruit and retain the highest caliber of faculty possible (Kapustin, 2008). Central to this process is the induction of the faculty into higher education. As junior faculty mature into productive members of the institution, they become the senior faculty who lead the next generation of new faculty, further necessitating the implementation of a comprehensive induction program. While the formal induction program at many universities spans a two or three day period and may present background knowledge of higher education (Saltmarsh & Swirski, 2010) it does not qualify as an induction program.³ Since higher education faculty, particularly in the realm of education, are often former practitioners (Gustafson & Thomsen, 1996) they may not fully understand the basic tenets of teaching, research, and service. This phenomenon leads to a need for a comprehensive induction effort, with emphasis on mentoring, to help young faculty members achieve tenure, promotion, and other career goals (Kent, Green, & Kochan, 2013).

Successful mentoring occurs when two or more people develop a strong, caring relationship focused upon reaching agreed outcomes (Kochan & Pascarelli, 2003). A compilation of mentoring definitions from several researchers point to a “reciprocal process” (Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennet, 2004) by which participants help “focus on their; challenges, choices, consequences, creative solutions, and conclusions,” (Griffin, 1995; Hill & Reddy, 2007) through an “exchange of wisdom,

^{*} Corresponding author. Tel.: +251 380 2657; fax: +251 380 2728.

E-mail addresses: akent@southalabama.edu (A.M. Kent), akent@southalabama.edu (A.M. Green), pfeldman@southalabama.edu (P. Feldman).

¹ Tel.: +251 380 2892; fax: +251 380 2728.

² Tel.: +251 380 2735; fax: +251 380 2728.

³ These programs are an orientation program, not an induction process.

support, learning, or guidance for the purpose of personal, spiritual, career, or life growth” (Treston, 1999). Mentoring as a concept can be viewed through different types of mentoring models. For example, the apprenticeship model emphasizes learning from observing the mentor; the competency model uses feedback from the mentor regarding the mentee’s development of skills and expertise; and the reflective model focuses on the mentor directing the professional development of the mentee (Maynard & Furlong, 1995), and there can be a compilation of various models. In an early account of mentoring in Homer’s *The Odyssey*, it is viewed as an intentional, nurturing, insightful, and supportive process (Anderson & Shannon, 1988). While many of these attributes have remained as characteristics of effective mentoring, mentors have also been described as an experienced colleague befriending a less-experience colleague (Fagan & Walter, 1982); older authority figures (Phillips-Jones, 1982); a teacher, adviser, or sponsor (Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978); or a person tasked with carrying out a formal process for career development of a protégé (Zey, 1984).

Fig. 1 presents the stages of mentoring.

The structure of the mentoring process is generally classified as formal or informal. Informal mentoring begins through natural processes such as common interests or similar attributes, while formal mentoring is generally defined by organizational and structural relationships and activities (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Participation is voluntary, and often naturally facilitates career and psychosocial mentoring (Dreher & Cox, 1996). Formal mentoring often lacks input from the mentor or mentee, is likely monitored by the organization to some extent, and can require a greater effort to build initial relationships (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). While there has been a renewed interest in mentoring in higher education, there has been little research on the *comprehensive efforts* of career development through the informal mentoring of faculty (Tareef, 2013). The overarching purposes of mentoring higher education faculty members are to facilitate the development of professional careers, help with the construction, adaptation, and socialization of professional identity, and to build competence and expertise (Toal-Sullivan, 2002).

The focus of this research is on the aspect of long-term informal mentoring as the central component of a comprehensive induction effort necessary for the success of new faculty in higher education.

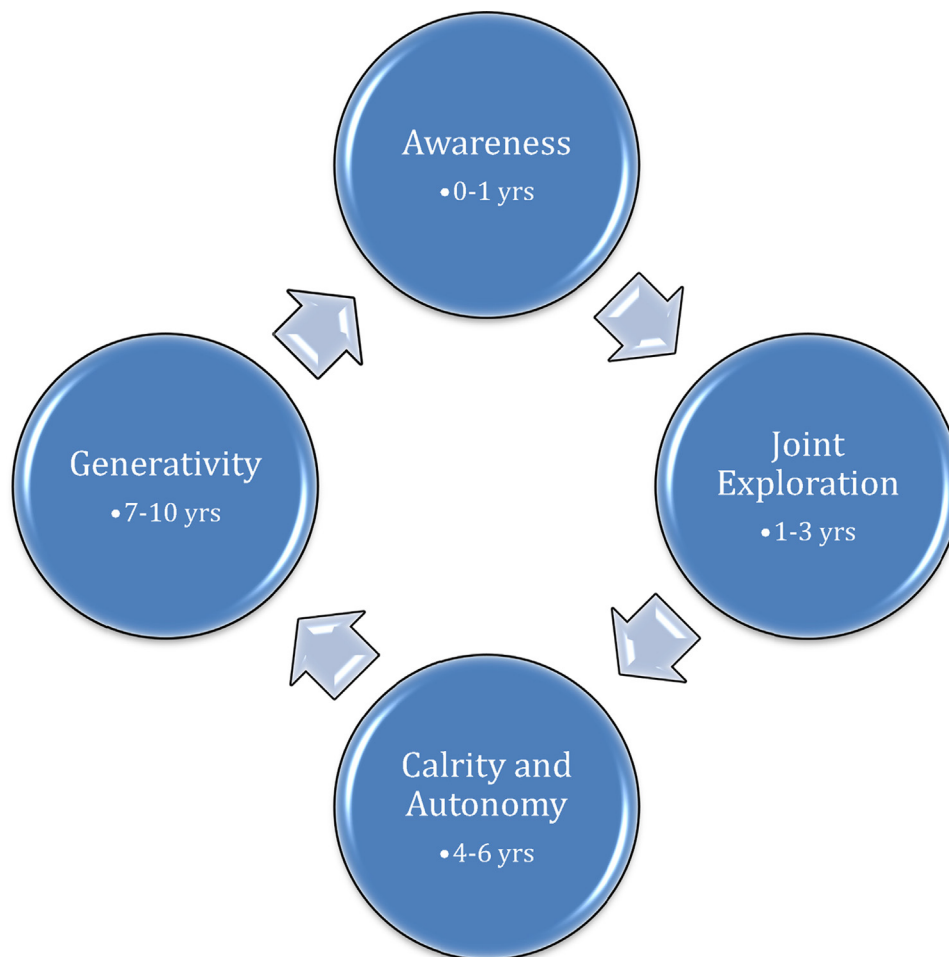


Fig. 1. The stages of induction. The illustration shows how the findings of this study yielded a chronology of four identifiable, yet overlapping developmental stages: Awareness; Joint Exploration; Clarity and Autonomy; and Generativity.

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