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A Scoping Review of Mentoring Programs for Academic Librarians

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The purpose of this study was to comprehensively review the best practices and current trends for mentoring programs in academic libraries.

Methods: The authors conducted a scoping review of the existing literature on academic library mentoring programs. The following sources were searched to identify relevant studies: ERIC, Education Research Complete (Ebsco) LISA, Library & Information Sciences Source (Ebsco), Scopus, the TRIP database, Web of Science and the grey literature.

Results: Among 802 unique abstracts, 42 studies reporting on 40 unique programs were selected for inclusion in this review. Of these, 28 programs were specifically designed to facilitate the development of junior or untenured librarians. Common program elements included participant input into mentor/mentee selection, written guidelines, mentor training, and senior administration support. Notably, only 18 authors (42.8%) reported on program evaluation methods and outcomes.

Conclusions: Despite the prevalence of the literature that exists on this topic, mentorship programs in academic libraries have been insufficiently explored. Rigorous and ongoing evaluation is required to determine the importance of mentoring programs to the career development of academic librarians, and identify design elements critical to their success.

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INTRODUCTION

Academic faculty “represent intellectual capital, and....distinguish an institution’s uniqueness more so than any other resource” (Zellers, Howard, & Barcic, 2008, p. 553). Consequently, universities can benefit from supporting the ongoing professional development efforts of their faculty. Mentoring has long been a means of facilitating both emotional and behavioral resiliency, and academic and career advancement. It has been linked to outcomes such as tenure, career development, job satisfaction, and organizational and professional connectedness (Allen, Eby, O’Brien, & Lentz, 2008; Berk, Berg, Mortimer, Walton-Moss, & Yeo, 2005; Noonan, Ballinger, & Black, 2007; Zellers et al., 2008). A meta-analysis of mentoring programs in education, business, psychology, nursing, and law enforcement found that mentoring was positively associated ($p < .05$) with job satisfaction, self-esteem, promotion/career advancement, organizational commitment, and was instrumental in reducing “work stress, and work–family conflict” (Underhill, 2006, p. 295).

Historically, academic faculty mentoring relationships have largely been informal or naturally occurring, requiring little in the way of

institutional support. Research indicates, however, that not all faculty benefit from such relationships (Zellers et al., 2008). Prior studies reveal that finite numbers of senior mentors, in proportion to those who desire to be mentored, and the tendency of mentors to gravitate towards those who exhibit qualities similar to their own, present barriers to many who might otherwise wish to participate in informal mentoring (Gagliardi et al., 2009). In response, many academic institutions have implemented formal mentoring programs to promote faculty retention, professional growth, and research success (Zellers et al., 2008; Schonwetter & Nazarko, 2009).

The mentoring needs of academic librarians mirror those of other academic faculty. Mentoring programs have been introduced into academic libraries to facilitate the socialization of new librarians into the profession, assist them in obtaining tenure and promotion, and promote the development of teaching and research skills (Mavrinac, 2005; Nankivell & Shoolbred, 1997). In a 2013 survey of the members of the Association of Research Libraries Directors’ listserv, researchers reported that 83.3% of tenure-granting and 66.7% of non-tenure granting academic libraries provided librarians with some form of mentoring support (Smigielski, Laning, & Daniels, 2014). In contrast, a recent survey of library graduates, librarians, and library administrators in Canadian college and university libraries revealed that the majority (84.5%) of librarians do not have access to institutionally-supported mentoring programs (Harrington & Marshall, 2014). Researchers have

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speculated that the absence of mentoring programs in some institutions may reflect a lack of consensus on best practice with respect to the design and implementation of these programs (Harrington & Marshall, 2014). The purpose of this study was to explore, in the context of academic librarianship, practices and trends in library mentoring program design, implementation, and evaluation.

METHODS

The authors conducted a scoping review of the literature on academic library mentoring programs. Scoping reviews are a rigorous approach for systematically mapping “the key concepts underpinning a research area, and the main sources and types of evidence available” (Mays, Roberts, & Popay, 2001, p. 194). Whereas systematic reviews typically focus on narrowly defined questions and rigorously assess the quality of a limited number of included studies, scoping reviews address broadly defined questions and often categorize and synthesize large bodies of literature (Brien, Lorenzetti, Lewis, Kennedy, & Ghali, 2010). Scoping reviews “produce a profile of the existing literature in a topic area, creating a rich database of literature that can serve as a foundation” for further research and practice (Brien et al., 2010, p. 2). The Arksey and O'Malley methodological framework for conducting scoping reviews guided the conduct of this study (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). This framework specifies that researchers undertake the following procedural steps: 1) generate relevant research questions; 2) comprehensively identify studies; 3) screen studies for inclusion; 4) chart data; and 5) thematically analyze and synthesize data.

The research questions addressed in this scoping review were: 1) What are the goals of academic library mentoring programs?; 2) How are these programs structured and delivered?; and 3) To what extent, and in what ways, have programs been evaluated? In the context of this study, mentoring was defined as “a process for the... transmission of knowledge, social capital and psychosocial support perceived by [all participants as] relevant to work, career or professional development” (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007, p. 731).

SEARCH STRATEGY

ERIC, Education Research Complete, LISA, Library & Information Science Source, Scopus, the TRIP database, and the Web of Science were searched to identify peer reviewed literature suitable for inclusion in this review. Grey literature was identified through a structured search of Google, and a hand search of the most recent two years (2011/2012 and 2013) of proceedings from conferences of the American Library Association (ALA), Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL), Canadian Library Association (CLA) and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA).

Searches combined terms from three themes: 1) mentorship (mentors, mentoring, mentorship, mentees), 2) librarians (librarians, librarianship, libraries, information professionals, informationists), and 3) academic institutions (academic, college, faculty, universities). Terms were searched as both keywords and database-specific subject headings. No date or study design limits were applied. A copy of the completed search strategy is available, upon request, from the authors.

STUDY SELECTION

Search results were downloaded into RefWorks. Both authors independently screened all abstracts and full-text papers for inclusion. Disagreements were resolved through consensus. Studies were included if they were English language publications that reported on the implementation of mentoring programs for librarians in academic library settings. Studies were excluded if they focused on librarians mentoring library staff or students; reported on mentoring outside of structured institution-specific academic library programs (e.g.: informal mentoring or national programs), or did not provide a program

description. The authors pilot tested the inclusion/exclusion criteria on a sample of studies to ensure consistency in the interpretation and application of these criteria.

CHARTING OF STUDY DATA

A charting template was developed in Excel to capture data from each study. Data charted included: descriptive study information (author, publication date, country of origin), program details (population, program objectives, design and implementation elements), and, where appropriate, evaluation methods and program outcomes. The authors pilot tested the charting form on a sample of included studies to ensure the identification and capture of all relevant information. Charting data was extracted in duplicate and disagreements were resolved through consensus.

ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS

The authors conducted a thematic analysis and synthesis of included studies to identify key concepts, and themes in the published literature.

RESULTS

Electronic database and other searching identified 802 unique abstracts, 117 of which were selected for full text review. Of these, 42 studies, reporting on 40 academic library mentoring programs in Australia (n = 1), Canada (n = 1), South Africa (n = 1), Sweden (n = 1) and the United States (n = 36) were included in this review (Fig. 1). Studies were published between 1990 and 2013, with a total of 31 (73.8%) published in the last 10 years (Table 1).

PROGRAM DESIGN

Four basic models characterized the 40 programs included in this review (Table 1): dyads, comprised of one senior and one junior or two peer librarians (n = 21); peer mentoring, where peers meet in a group setting to exchange ideas, provide feedback and encouragement, and participate in group learning (n = 14); group mentoring, characterized by a senior librarian mentoring multiple junior librarians in a group setting (n = 2), and co-mentoring, wherein a junior librarian is co-mentored by a team of senior librarians (n = 3). Thirty-nine programs relied on face-to-face interactions between participants as the primary means of facilitating the development of mentoring relationships. In contrast, one multi-campus institution initiated an electronic peer-mentoring program for librarians situated at geographically dispersed campus libraries (Finlayson, 2009).

Although most programs were formally recognized by their respective institutions, not all originated with, or were established by, senior management. Eleven peer-mentoring initiatives were conceived as grass-roots programs, only later receiving administrative recognition (Exner & Houk, 2010; Finlayson, 2009; Fyn, 2013; Henrich & Attebury, 2010; Keener, Johnson, & Collins, 2012; Level & Mach, 2005; Martorana, Schroeder, Snowhill, & Duda, 2004; Miller & Benefiel, 1998; Ortega, Walker, Young, Bee, & Jones, 2011; Sullivan, Leong, Yee, Giddens, & Phillips, 2013; Tysick & Babb, 2006).

PARTICIPANTS & PARTICIPATION

The authors of 28 studies described mentees as new, junior, pre-tenured, untenured, early career stage and/or assistant librarians/faculty (Table 1). Three programs were open to all staff (librarians and non-librarians); and the authors of nine studies described program participants simply as librarians (Table 1). One institution specifically designed a multi-level program to address the unique mentoring needs of junior, mid-career and advanced-career librarians (University of Delaware Library Assembly of Professional Staff, 2009; Wojewodzki,

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