2000

Documenting the Benefits of Undergraduate Mentoring

Chris Koch
George Fox University, ckoch@georgefox.edu

W. Brad Johnson
United States Naval Academy

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/psyc_fac

Part of the Psychology Commons

Documenting the Benefits of Undergraduate Mentoring

Chris Koch
Department of Psychology
George Fox University

W. Brad Johnson
Department of Leadership, Ethics and Law
United States Naval Academy

Mentor was the wise counselor to whom the hero Odysseus entrusted his son Telemachus in Homer's *The Iliad*. It is from Homer's work that the concept of mentoring arouse. Modern interest in mentoring is often traced to the publication of *The Season's of A Man's Life* (Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978). From their interview-based research, Levinson et al. concluded that one of the major developmental tasks in the process of entry into adulthood is forming a relationship with a mentor. Perhaps this is one reason why college professors are increasingly called to mentor students (Ellis, 1992). In this article, we briefly review the literature related to mentoring. In light of increasing discussion of mentoring as an expected professional activity on the part of professors, we then provide an example of how the prevalence and outcome of mentoring can be documented by presenting data on mentoring in the Psychology Department at George Fox University.

What is Mentoring?

What exactly does it mean to mentor a student? Researchers have expressed frustration at the lack of definitional clarity surrounding the mentor concept (Merriam, 1983; Speizer, 1981). The mentoring literature offers numerous definitions, some of which conflict, so that empirical research on the topic may actually subsume several distinct kinds of relationships. Nonetheless, Jacobi (1991) conducted an exhaustive literature review on mentoring undergraduate students and identified several foundational components of mentoring:

1. Mentoring relationships are helping relationships usually focused on achievement.

2. Mentoring includes any or all of three broad components:

   (a) emotional and psychological support;

   (b) direct assistance with career and professional development; and

   (c) role modeling.

3. Mentoring relationships are reciprocal.

4. Mentoring relationships are personal.

5. Relative to their protégés, mentors show greater experience, influence, and achievement within a particular organization or environment. (p. 513)

Most researchers concur that the components of mentoring can be placed into one of three categories based on mentoring function (Jacobi, 1991; Kram, 1988; Russell & Adams, 1997). The three categories include career functions, psychosocial functions and role modeling. Career functions operate at the departmental or institutional level and include sponsorship, exposure and visibility, coaching, protection, and provision of challenging work or research assignments. Psychosocial functions operate at the interpersonal level between professor and student and include acceptance, affirmation, counseling and friendship. Finally, role modeling involves the intentional provision of a senior model or exemplar within the profession. Based on these assumptions regarding mentoring, Clark, Harden, & Johnson (in press) developed the following definition of mentoring:

Mentoring is a personal relationship in which a more experienced (usually older) individual acts as a guide, role model, teacher, and sponsor of a less experienced (usually younger) protege. A mentor provides the protégé with knowledge, advice, challenge, counsel and support in the protégé's pursuit of becoming a full member of a particular profession.

The Benefits of Mentoring

Literature from a range of disciplines confirms that teachers, particularly professors, play a substantial role as mentors to their students (Busch, 1985; Cameron & Blackburn, 1981; Redmond, 1990; Wilde & Schau, 1991). Whether the protégé is a junior manager or an undergraduate student, mentoring has consistently demonstrated positive effects on protégé performance and overall success in organizational and educational settings. Benefits to protégés include more rapid career advancement, higher rates of compensation, greater career opportunity and enhanced professional identity (Fagenson, 1989; Wilde & Schau, 1991). In addition, mentoring leads to enhanced personal identity, better integration of personal and professional roles and even the opportunity to address concerns about self, career and family (Kram, 1988; Wright & Wright, 1987).

Since the benefits of mentoring can be so valuable and impactful, some have suggested that identifying a mentor should be considered a major early career developmental task (Levinson et al., 1978; Russell & Adams, 1997). This is especially true in academic settings where both undergraduate and graduate school mentors appear critical to career development and success of student protégés (Blackburn, Chapman, & Cameron, 1981; Bush, 1985; Cameron & Blackburn, 1981; Reskin, 1979; Sanders & Wong, 1985). For example, research on faculty with doctorates from a range of fields indicates that those who report a graduate school mentor also report higher rates of publication, more grant funding, and greater collaboration with colleagues (Cameron & Blackburn, 1981).

Faculty mentors are also likely to reap benefits from mentor relationships with students. Potential career benefits include acceleration in research productivity, heightened visibility via the achievements of protégés, and tangible rewards and recognition for developing student talent (Busch, 1985). Intrinsic benefits may include a sense of generativity and creative synergy in working closely with talented students. In addition, eminent academicians are commonly noted to have been prolific mentors to students. For example, Kinnier, Metha, Buki and Rawa (1994) content analyzed the obituaries published in the *American Psychologist* from 1979 to 1990 and determined that being a good teacher and mentor was the fourth most common theme.

Mentoring In Psychology

Mentoring as a faculty activity has received increasing attention within psychology. Many graduate and undergraduate psychology programs now use the term mentoring to describe the sort of relationship they believe frequently exists or that they hope to foster between students and faculty. Promotional brochures may contain statements such as your students enjoy close mentoring relationships with faculty. Unfortunately, very few programs actually document either the prevalence or effect of student-faculty mentor relationships.

Sparse survey research indicates that approximately 50 percent of psychology graduate students report having a mentor in graduate school (Atkinson, Casas, & Neville, 1994; Cronan-Hillix, Gensheimer, Cronan-Hillix, & Davidson, 1986; Kirchner, 1969). Recently, Clark et al. (in-press) surveyed 1000 recent doctorates in clinical psychology and found that two-thirds had been mentored. More importantly, those that had been mentored reported significantly greater satisfaction with their doctoral program and rated the mentor relationship as extremely important to them, both personally and professionally. The most recent study of mentoring in psychology (Johnson, Koch, Fallow, & Huwe, 1999) found that psychologists obtaining their degrees between 1945 and 1998 were significantly more satisfied with their doctoral program if they had a faculty mentor. Further, those who had been mentored themselves were significantly more likely to have mentored junior professionals in the field.

In spite of these positive findings at the graduate level, we were surprised to find no research concerning the prevalence or outcome of mentoring undergraduate students in psychology. Therefore, in this paper we report the results from a preliminary investigation into the effects of mentoring on undergraduate psychology students. Specifically, we present one way that programs can assess the impact mentoring has on their students and discuss the ramifications of the findings.

focus

An Evaluation of Mentoring Psychology Majors at George Fox

As part of an assessment program, a survey was sent to alumni who graduated between 1991 and 1995 with a psychology degree from George Fox University. The survey contained questions regarding employment and graduate school, a comment section, and questions related the objectives and values statements found in the undergraduate catalog. The objectives and values can be summarized into three categories: being prepared for one's career, being prepared for life in general, and being an active member of the community. Thirty-six surveys were mailed and 20 alumni responded, for a 56 percent return rate. Twenty percent of the respondents noted that they wished they had taken more advantage of research opportunities. Therefore, the psychology faculty began developing strategies to actively involve students in research. One of the most visible strategies was hosting an annual undergraduate research conference for the social sciences starting in the spring of 1995. In order to assess the success of the strategies, we maintained statistics similar to those reported in the CUR Directories and conducted a similar survey of our alumni who graduated between 1996 and 1998.

In terms of research involvement, there were eight student presentations and one student publication between 1991 and 1995. In comparison, between 1996 and 1998 there were 32 student presentations and 16 publications. These figures show an obvious increase in undergraduate research and general support for the strategies used by the department to increase undergraduate research and promote student-faculty mentoring. However, we were also interested in whether or not students who were mentored perceived any differences in the quality of their educational experience at George Fox. Sixty-four surveys were sent to alumni who graduated between 1996 and 1998. Twenty-three surveys were returned for a 36% response rate. The surveys were identical to those sent to students graduating between 1991 and 1995 except there were several questions related to mentoring. Specifically, we provided the definition of mentoring presented above and asked students whether or not they were mentored and whether or not their mentor was in the psychology department or outside of the department. Of the 23 respondents, 15 reported being mentored.[1] All mentors were psychology faculty. Students who were mentored were more satisfied with the psychology program than those who were not mentored ($t(17) = 2.69$, $p < .02$). In addition, students who were mentored felt that George Fox ($t(15) = 4.14$, $p < .001$) and the psychology department ($t(15) = 3.39$, $p < .004$) prepared them better for their current position (i.e., job or graduate school) than students who were not mentored. Interestingly, there were no differences between mentored and non-mentored students in regard to being prepared for life, being an active member of the community, or for any of the values listed in the catalog. Comparing across time periods, students graduating between 1991 and 1995 were similar to non-mentored students graduating between 1996 and 1998. Thus, mentored students graduating between 1996 and 1998 were more satisfied with their educational experience at George Fox than those who were not mentored during the same time period or had graduated earlier. No other differences were significant.

Conclusions

An alumni survey was used to examine the effect of mentoring on the undergraduate experience of psychology majors at George Fox University. However, mentoring outcomes can be examined in a variety or ways. For instance, mentoring can be addressed in exit interviews, student portfolios, or, similar to teaching, mentoring can be assessed with a standardized evaluation form. Given the potential benefits of mentoring on students' personal and career development and satisfaction with their major and the relative lack of information regarding undergraduate mentoring, we encourage faculty to include some measure of mentoring in their ongoing program of departmental or institutional assessment.

Although students who were mentored were more satisfied with their educational experience at George Fox, they did not report any differences on the values taught at George Fox compared to those who were not mentored. Therefore, the mentoring that took place appears to have primarily impacted student satisfaction (Johnson, Koch, Fallow, & Huwe, 1999). This finding suggests that the mentoring relationship needs to be intentional. If the purpose of the mentoring relationship is to develop better researchers, then engaging students in the research process is sufficient. However, if the purpose of the mentoring relationship is to help develop students who are good researchers and reflect a certain set of values, for example, then faculty need to purposefully engage students in activities that fosters growth in both areas. This implies that faculty members explore both mentoring contexts and activities that fall outside the traditional research lab. Thus, the psychosocial and role modeling functions of a mentor do not necessarily begin and end with a particular research project.

---

[1]Degrees of freedom for the following tests vary due to incomplete data. For instance, four respondents did not indicate whether or not they were mentored.

Although mentoring may need to be intentional, we need to be careful about how we mentor. The goal of mentoring is not to create faculty clones. Instead, the goal of mentoring is to impart knowledge, encourage students, and develop in them a set of skills that will allow them to succeed both professionally and personally. In sum, as faculty members seek to intentionally mentor undergraduate students, they must carefully define criteria for successful mentoring and then select those student-faculty activities and contexts most likely to achieve those ends.

Chris Koch is currently the Western Vice-President of Psi Chi and an active mentor of undergraduate research. He is also on a personal crusade to teach his students the finer points of college football.

W. Brad Johnson, formerly on the faculty at George Fox University, is an assistant professor of psychology in the Department of Leadership, Ethics and Law at the United States Naval Academy. He now goes by the nickname "sir," and frequently orders his students to study psychology.

References

Atkinson, D. R., Casas, A., & Neville, H. (1994). Ethnic minority psychologists: Whom they mentor and benefits they derive from the process. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 22, 37-48.

Blackburn, R. T., Chapman, D. W., & Cameron, S. M. (1981). Cloning in academia: Mentorship and academic careers. *Research in Higher Education*, 15, 315-327.

Busch, J. W. (1985). Mentoring in graduate schools of education: Mentors' perceptions. *American Educational Research Journal*, 22, 257-265.

Cameron, S. W., & Blackburn, R. T. (1981). Sponsorship and academic career success. *Journal of Higher Education*, 52, 369-377.

Clark, R. A., Harden, S. L., & Johnson, W. B. (in press). Mentor relationships in clinical psychology doctoral training: Results of a national survey. *Teaching of Psychology*.

Cronan-Hillix, T., Gensheimer, L. K., Cronan-Hillix, W. A., & Davidson, W. S. (1986). Students' views of mentors in psychology graduate training. *Teaching of Psychology*, 13, 123-127.

Ellis, H. C. (1992). Graduate education in psychology: Past, present, and future. *American Psychologist*, 47, 570-576.

Fagenson, E. A. (1989). The mentor advantage: Perceived career/job experiences of protégés versus non-protégés. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 10, 309-320.

Jacobi, M. (1991). Mentoring and undergraduate academic success: A literature review. *Review of Educational Research*, 61, 505-532.

Johnson, W. B., Koch, C., Fallow, G., & Huwe, J. (1999). Mentoring in clinical and experimental psychology programs: 1945-1998. Manuscript submitted for publication.

Kinnier, R. T., Metha, A. T., Buki, L. P., & Rawa, P. M. (1994). Manifest values of eminent psychologists: A content analysis of their obituaries. *Contemporary Psychology*, 13, 88-94.

Kirchner, E. P. (1969). Graduate education in psychology: Retrospective views of advanced degree recipients. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 25, 207-213.

Kram, K. E. (1988). Mentoring at work: *Developmental Relationships in Organizational Life.* Lanham, MD: University Press.

Levinson, D. J., Darrow, C. N., Klein, E. B., Levinson, M. H., & McKee, B. (1978). *The Seasons of a Man's Life.* New York, NY: Ballantine Books.

Merriam, M. (1983). Mentors and proteges: A critical review of the literature. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 33, 161-173.

Redmond, S. P. (1990). Mentoring and cultural diversity in academic settings. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 34, 188-200.

Reskin, B. F. (1979). Academic sponsorship and scientific careers. *Sociology of Education*, 52, 129-146.

Russell, J. E. A., & Adams, D. M. (1997). The changing nature of mentoring in organizations: An introduction to the special issue on mentoring in organizations. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 51, 1-14.

Sanders, J. M., & Wong, H. Y. (1985). Graduate training and initial job placement. *Sociological Inquiry*, 55, 154-169.

Speizer, J. J. (1981). Role models, mentors and sponsors: The elusive concepts. *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 6, 692-712.

Wilde, J. B., & Schau, C. G. (1991). Mentoring in graduate schools of education: Mentees' perception. *Journal of Experimental Education*, 59, 165-179.

Wright, C. A., & Wright, S. D. (1987). The role of mentors in the career development of young professionals. *Family Relations*, 36, 204-208