IN THEIR OWN WORDS:
Mentoring in the Changing Academy: Attending to Context - Part 1

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Institutions of higher education, once among the most resilient of our societal structures, have experienced immense pressures for accountability in an array of arenas which, until very recently, have been quite sacred.

Declining state and federal support for higher education, particularly evident in public institutions, has led to increased costs of attendance often without financial aid or scholarship dollars to buffer the increases. Once our nation’s schools promoted their value based on inputs, number of students enrolled, size of the institutional endowment and the number of terminal degree qualified faculty. Now they are asked to measure student learning outcomes and demonstrate the “value added” for the increased costs.

Administrators are now expected to create more efficient institutions, faculty are to be more accountable for effective instruction that promotes greater student learning, researchers and scholars are to address more relevant problems and issues, and development officers are to substantially increase private financial support.

Paralleling these demands have been other changes. Junior colleges have become community colleges, regional colleges and universities have expanded degree offerings often adding significant graduate programs and distance education offerings, research intensive institutions have sought to become research extensive, and the growth of for profit institutions has escalated. Accreditation has come under scrutiny, both regionally and federally, and boards of regents and trustees have increasingly become involved in the daily operation of institutions.

In an era of rapid change, the roles and responsibilities of employees at every level are changing as well. Never before has professional development been a higher priority. Once largely defined as “faculty development,” it now is critical for administrators at all levels, from department chairs/heads, associate/assistant administrators to deans and VPs. Simply “learning on the job” is no longer an efficient or viable way to develop the administrative skill set needed to anticipate and address change.

Mentoring administrators

Mentoring has long been recognized as a highly effective and proactive means of professional development for faculty members; it enhances their instructional effectiveness, research/scholarly productivity and professional immersion in service.

But administrative mentoring, particularly as a career development vehicle for women and ethnic minorities, has been much less focused at the institutional level, with those demonstrating administrative interests or abilities being encouraged to participate in national or regional programs.

The rapidly changing landscape of higher education would suggest that effective administrative mentoring of women and other underrepresented groups needs to be contextually based and will be most successful when the mentoring process as well as content occurs in the context of the administrative work itself.

Mentoring has been defined as an educational process that promotes human development through interaction, in which both the mentor and the protégé experience personal, professional and intellectual growth and
development. Successful faculty mentoring programs have distinct purposes, clearly identified activities, and demonstrable outcomes that fit both individual and institutional priorities.

The same is true for administrative mentoring programs: They are purpose-driven and have contextually based activities and content. Since the administrative roles and responsibilities for which protégés are to be prepared are now moving targets, administrative mentoring programs need to consistently assess the permanence, relevance, and relativism of the content of their programs and activities.

It is particularly difficult for women, who are often more place bound and late to enter administrative careers, to move administratively from one type of institution to another; public to private, comprehensive to research, community college to baccalaureate. That is, both female faculty and administrators tend to develop careers that are contextually based.

Administrative mentoring outcomes are more easily defined within an institutional context rather than a generic one. It is clear a single, generic administrative mentoring program cannot prepare an individual to be effective in all institutional contexts.

In research institutions, administrative mentoring should focus extensively on: faculty scholarship and research productivity, the management of funds from multiple sources, graduate education, library and information management operations, fiscal and administrative management, budget development, and external relationships with legislators, board members, alumni and potential donors.

In comprehensive and baccalaureate institutions, administrative mentoring will focus on: balance between instructional effectiveness and scholarship, student concerns and the interface of student affairs with other areas of the institution, professional development of faculty members, undergraduate education, articulation with transfer institutions, the promotion and tenure process, and interfaces with coordinating boards or commissions.

In open admission institutions, the focus of administrative mentoring is still different: curriculum development for a highly diverse population, fiscal management with limited resources, management of part-time faculty, flexible instructional delivery systems, establishing community partnerships, student support services, and managing multiple instructional sites.

**Stages of mentoring**

Just as institutional contexts in part define different mentoring outcomes and processes, so also do relational preferences, perhaps even more important to women than men in the mentoring process, according to Hagberg and Leider (1986). They suggest that individuals may move through several stages in the mentoring process with the ultimate outcome being the acquisition of administrative skills and expertise. Three of those relational models are particularly appropriate to the administrative mentoring process: associative, adaptive and reflective.

In the *associate mentor-protégé relationship*, the mentor defines the mentoring goals/outcomes either explicitly or implicitly. The mentor also identifies the type of expertise to be developed, the experiences needed to develop that expertise and the time frame for the mentoring relationship. As the mentoring relationship evolves, the protégé gains not only administrative expertise, but professional status by association.

In the *adaptative model*, the relational context is more dynamic and fluid. The mentor-protégé relationship shifts and changes as goals change, the value systems of the individuals or the institutions change, the criteria for success is refined or altered and the developmental needs of the protégé or mentor change. It is both a personal and professional relationship and it sustains through its ability to be dynamic. Professional status is maintained through successful adaptation within and external to the relationship.

In the *reflective model*, the mentor and protégé share a goal of personal empowerment; both provide and receive feedback, both personally and professionally. The relationship is an engaged one that requires reflection and genuine authenticity to sustain itself. It is not time framed and the outcomes are both professional and developmental.

**Women create mentoring programs**

Women administrators on campus have a particular responsibility to create administrative mentoring programs to develop the talents and abilities of those who will lead our nation’s colleges and universities in the future.

Recognizing the importance of the interface of institutional context with relational development provides a framework. It will help both in understanding administrative roles and responsibilities and in establishing the mentoring relationship that will meet the needs of both individuals and schools in an era of dynamic, rapid
Next month will bring Part II: Practical tips on how to create an administrative fellows program on your own campus. Based on the authors' role in the creation of such programs on several campuses.

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