



## Mentoring Future Professionals

by Cathie Ann Schweitzer

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For many individuals, the effects of a mentoring program continue to exist beyond the life of an undergraduate mentoring program. Faculty and students should form mentoring relationships to provide opportunities of encouragement, counseling, academic guidance, and facilitation. Networks and contacts established through mentoring can enhance the professional experience. Although much has been written in both the professional and popular literature about mentoring, no single accepted definition of mentoring exists. For purposes of this article, the following definitions will be used:

- Mentors: Individuals who go out of their way to successfully help their protégés meet life goals.
- Protégés: Individuals who have received special assistance from other persons (mentors) in reaching their life goals.
- Mentoring: Assistance given to a protégé by a mentor (Phillips, 1982, p. 4).

A mentor is an experienced professional who takes personal interest in an undergraduate student's career and provides guidance and assistance to that student. The student, or protégé, learns from the mentor and provides assistance in various activities (Wilde & Schau, 1991). The mentor can take on many roles--guide, tutor, coach, and confidante (Abney, 1987). The essence of mentoring can be described as sharing power, sharing competence, and sharing self (Bolton, 1980). Mentors teach, guide, sponsor, advise, support, facilitate, promote, and protect their protégés. Research shows that mentors do make a difference in people's lives. Mentors assist in developing their protégés' characters by helping them form ideals and values. More specifically, research shows that mentoring helps retain students in programs. Mentoring relationships may be informal and develop

spontaneously. Students may seek out professors who meet their needs and who treat them as professionals. Mentorships may form by mutual consent. Recently, though, many institutions have begun to realize the importance of mentors and have instituted programs to replicate this informal relationship in a more formal, organized manner. Whatever the method, it is important to facilitate mentoring for students interested in entering the HPERD (health, physical education, recreation and dance) fields, as well as to define the kind of mentoring assistance and strategies which may be helpful professionally.

### How Do I Get Started?

Fortunately, some institutions are addressing the issue of starting a mentoring program. Finding a mentor is an active process requiring vision, planning, and sensitivity (Jeruchim & Shapiro, 1992). Albion College, in Michigan, recently began a formal mentoring program in the physical education department, modeled in part after the program at the University of Michigan. Most mentors in the program have at least two protégés. The process is as follows:

- One professor serves as program coordinator and is responsible for recruiting potential mentors and protégés. A brochure explaining the mentoring program is available.
- Once the pool of mentors/protégés is established, the matching process begins. Interested persons fill out a questionnaire on their interest in the mentoring program and their expectations of a mentor/protégé.
- The department then hosts a dinner where mentors and protégés meet, define their program objectives, and schedule their next meetings. Communication is established through a structured two-way interview between mentors and protégés about backgrounds and interests. This important first meeting provides an orientation for mentors and protégés, and expectations and obligations are established at this time.
- The mentoring process continues throughout the academic year. At the end of the semester, mentors and protégés share their experiences at another dinner sponsored by the department. An informal evaluation is conducted at this time by each mentor and protégé. They discuss whether expectations were met, identify barriers encountered, and make suggestions about future meetings.
- A formal mentor/protégé evaluation is conducted at the end of the year by the program coordinator.



After filling out an evaluation form, mentors and protégés meet separately with the program coordinator and discuss the matching process, challenges of the relationship, and barriers encountered, and recommend alternative strategies.

- The program is structured to give mentors the flexibility of setting up their own objectives, meeting times, and places. The door is always open to those who might wish to become involved later.

Southern Illinois University at Carbondale sponsors a mentoring program in which retired faculty members serve as mentors. Retirees who are interested in resuming contact with students and the university are preferred. A pool of potential mentors and protégés is coordinated through the efforts of a recruiter (Bedient, Snyder, & Simon, 1992). Other mentoring programs, in which a veteran teacher is paired with a less experienced teacher, exist in several school districts across the country. These teacher pairs may observe one another's classes, meet for lunch once a week, or simply hold telephone conversations. Both instructors receive intrinsic rewards from the experience, which promotes excellence and renews excitement and enthusiasm for teaching. The success of these programs varies. Recruiting and matching mentors to protégés is the single most important aspect of a mentoring program. Mentors and protégés who match on paper may have personality differences. To increase success in mentoring programs, obtain central administrative support; provide structure and activities for the mentors; conduct frequent formal evaluations of the program; communicate with graduates who may be able to contribute to the program later; and establish clear goals for the program.

### **What are the Goals/Objectives of a Mentoring Program?**

An analysis of interviews with mentors and protégés revealed several advantages that can be achieved in a mentoring relationship (Wilde & Schau, 1991). Most mentors and protégés reported that both career and psychological aspects existed in their mentoring relationships. Foremost was the professional development of the protégés. Protégés also reported that their mentors helped them develop a professional identity. Faculty mentors can increase students' employment possibilities by helping them improve their technical skills. They may also help students obtain graduate assistantships or their first jobs. Some students commented specifically on the lack of research activities available to them. Faculty members should

collaborate with students in curricular and scholarly endeavors that provide opportunities for professional development. The most beneficial relationships go beyond career functions. One protégé stated:

*[My mentor] inspired me and gave me moral support and counsel. She helped me to achieve my dream. Not only did she teach me the technical skills of teaching, but she helped me learn the values and standards of the profession while developing my own professional identity.*

The particular mentor gave the student responsibility and the opportunity to prove what she could do. Mentors also benefit from the process. They learn, grow, and are able to have a greater effect on students. They have the opportunity to exercise their leadership abilities. Many mentors expressed a renewed sense of professionalism as a result of their participation in the program.

### **What are the Stages/Phases of the Mentoring Process?**

According to Abney (1991), the process of mentoring consists of three stages: learning (developing a bond between the mentor and protégé); leading (nurturing); and lobbying (promoting the protégé). Jeruchim and Shapiro (1992) believe that mentoring is "the pinnacle of relationships along a continuum of work relationships, starting with a peer and moving up to coach, sponsor, and finally mentor" (p. 27). Mentoring relationships change during the different stages. During the learning stage, there is usually a mutual administration and a sharing of reciprocal feelings and values. Mentors usually serve as role models for protégés to look up to admire for their behavior, values, professionalism, and competence. During the leading stage, mentors serve in the role of coach, which typically includes daily hands-on involvement, providing feedback and appraisals, and helping protégés improve technical skills. Mentors assist with problems or obstacles encountered by protégés and help identify and clarify goals. The coach concentrates on skill development, but also suggests strategies and shares information about the profession. During this stage, mentors focus on developing competence and character. A mentor's primary function (as many identify it) is to promote the protégé. Mentors get students involved in professional organizations, place their names on committee lists, and involve them in program presentations. Simply put, the mentor lobbies for the protégé. Mentoring relationships have certain qualities that distinguish them from work relationships. A stronger degree of identification



exists between a mentor and protégé than in any other work relationship. The degree of emotional involvement also makes mentoring relationships unique. Mentoring relationships constantly change and evolve; emotions may range from respect, mutual admiration, idealization, to possibly, affection. And unlike most other supervisory positions, mentors have power within the organization and also access to influential people and to information and resources. For many individuals, the effects of a mentoring program continue to exist beyond the life of an undergraduate mentoring program. The positive effect of mentoring on young people who are pursuing careers in the HPERD fields cannot be disputed. Faculty and students should form mentoring relationships to provide opportunities for encouragement, counseling, academic guidance, and facilitation.



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