Grow your Own Leaders: Cultivating Partnerships to Create a Sustainable Mentoring Program

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This article discusses the development of a mentoring program within the Cornell University Library system with particular emphasis on how internal resources were utilized and strong partnerships with on-campus organizations were cultivated. This has led to a program that aims to provide personal and professional growth within the organization and prepares staff for leadership roles wherever they take root. Included is a brief review of the literature discussing different types of mentoring relationships, how assessment can improve mentor programming, and professional considerations for joining and sustaining a mentoring program.

Introduction

The successful organization is one that fosters a culture of learning, creativity, and support, encouraging staff to grow professionally and personally in ways that benefit the organization as a whole. Mentoring programs, either formal or informal, aim to meet some of these objectives by helping staff adjust to the organizational culture, find their professional niche, and navigate new surroundings and complex departmental structures. This paper presents an approach to a library mentoring program that leverages partnerships with other on-campus organizations to provide expert leadership and mentoring training to both academic and non-academic staff, and couples mentoring objectives with onboarding and new hire programming.

The Cornell University Library reinstated a professional mentoring program in 2010 and solicited feedback from program participants over the course of several years regarding the type of programming and support that would be most beneficial. In 2013, the Mentoring Committee, which oversees the Mentoring Program, established a partnership with the Cornell Team & Leadership Center (CTLC) to better support mentoring pairs and peer groups using unique, insightful, and engaging methodology aimed at building trust, establishing guidelines for mentoring partnerships, and developing leadership skills for all participants. Concurrent with the mentoring program, the committee worked with Library Human Resources to provide additional programming aimed at supporting recent hires in their transition to their new positions and environments. Working with CTLC and Library HR staff, an assessment survey was carried out to determine the effectiveness of this new programming in establishing and supporting mentoring relationships

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and improving the transition and adjustment process for new hires. This assessment will directly inform the continued development of partnerships and programs to meet the professional development needs of library staff. The Mentoring Committee hopes to transition its focus so that it includes not only professional development opportunities but seeks to impact the library profession in a holistic way by identifying and cultivating leadership skills throughout the organization so that individuals are positioned to make meaningful contributions to the field.

Literature Review

The leadership crisis facing the library profession has been anticipated and discussed for well over a decade.[1] Regardless of what percentage of professional academic librarians retire, there will be a need to develop leadership skills among librarians as positions increasingly contain a supervisory component, and the demands of the job—research that gives back to the profession, leading committees and projects—require the skills that we often associate with those in leadership positions.[2] Munde pointed to a need for more responsibility among academic libraries for the development of library leaders and was supported in this position by many.[3] Academic libraries have heeded the call and worked to develop a variety of programs that would help with this development including, but not limited to, mentoring programs.

Traditional mentoring programs and practices, often referred to as formal mentoring programs, have long been an integral part of employee development and learning within higher education. Much of the literature and examples referenced in articles focused on a more traditional mentoring program where junior librarians were matched with more senior librarians to assist them through the tenure process.[4] The programs varied in length and frequency of meetings for the mentee/mentor match as well as how the mentoring program was governed and the type of support that was provided.

Recently, universities are finding obstacles to implementing a formal, one-on-one, tenure-focused mentoring program. With a high number of librarians retiring there is an unequal ratio of junior to senior librarians. As noted by Ghouse and Church-Duran, "one-on-one mentor pairing requires enough qualified and interested mentors to work with those who need mentoring. This is not always possible and may require mentors to take on multiple mentees"[5] and in an era of doing more with less, mentoring only increases the work load of those in a position to mentor. While traditional mentoring programs are certainly popular and effective in many academic libraries, with an eye towards leadership and professional development not aimed solely on the tenure process, they do not address values based on transformational changes, which seek to develop a learning culture.[6] To that end, institutions are exploring informal mentoring programs such as peer mentoring models as well as communities of practice to help facilitate that need.

Peer mentoring seeks to pair "an inexperienced person with a knowledgeable individual or group of the same status."[7] Colorado State University Libraries and the University of Delaware Library have implemented such peer mentoring programs to support newer librarians as they navigate a new working environment and organizational culture. Other programs are even more casual and pull together groups of librarians on an as-needed basis.[8] Peer mentoring emphasizes the democratic culture of learning organizations, increases connections and networking opportunities, and provides for a richer more diverse perspective on an issue or workplace culture than traditional on-to-one mentoring programs can provide.[9]

Similar to peer mentoring but with a slightly different twist, communities of practice are evolving at some university libraries as another attempt to provide employees—both entry level and senior—with professional development opportunities. The three dimensions of communities of practice are a domain (subject the group members are passionate about), a community (member relationships that provide the foundation for learning), and a practice (the activities that the group develops together).[10] University of Idaho implemented a community of practice as a replace-

ment for the traditional mentoring model. While the implementation of the program was not without its challenges, the collaborative approach of a community of practice has been beneficial to new librarians.[11]

All of these types of mentoring programs are examples of purposeful mentoring. Each one has a goal or objective in mind with each process: facilitating tenure, diversification of knowledge, or learning a particular skill. And while professional development and growth is a clear objective for all, none of these examples specifically identified leadership development as an objective. Additional gaps in the mentoring programs based on the literature include the inclusion of non-academic staff in mentoring partnerships, the creation of thriving and sustainable programs, the training and coaching of participants, and the assessment not only of the programming provided but of the success of the mentoring partnerships themselves.

The Cornell University Library (CUL) Mentoring Program works to improve the organizational climate of the Library by supporting the personal and professional development of staff at all levels of the organization. The Mentoring Program directly supports the Library's Strategic Plan, specifically Goal VII: "To promote an organizational culture that helps library staff succeed in a changing environment and embraces broader engagement within the Cornell community," by supporting the development of staff skills through the sharing of expertise, information, and best practices, as well as encouraging collaboration among colleagues.[12] The Mentoring Committee, which oversees the program, is responsible for (1) recruiting members for the Mentoring Program; (2) matching mentors and mentees based on individual needs and interests; (3) supporting the mentoring pairs to ensure successful partnerships; (4) planning and scheduling networking and educational events; and (5) conducting an annual assessment of the program.

A Brief History of the Cornell University Library Mentoring Program

The current CUL Mentoring Program grew out of a pilot program that was launched during the 2010-11 academic year. The program was open to all CUL staff, and participants filled out an application indicating their interest in being a mentor or mentee, as well as what they were hoping to explore in their mentoring partnership. Options included: learning about the organizational culture of the Library and the university; networking within the Library and the profession; giving/receiving informal career advice and guidance; connecting with peers outside a specific department or unit; or giving/receiving support and assistance navigating work-related issues. Applications were submitted toward the end of the Fall 2010 semester and pairs were matched at the start of the spring semester. The program lasted from January to June 2011, and included several events—an open house prior to the start of the program, an orientation after pairs were matched, and an end-of-year celebration to wrap-up the program—intended to support the pairs in their mentoring activities. Thirty-two pairs participated in the pilot program, and a survey distributed at the conclusion of the pilot indicated that pairs were interested in more support from the Mentoring Committee, as well as a program that lasted the entire academic year in order to build a truly meaningful mentoring relationship.

Building off the success of the pilot, the 2011-12 program had even higher levels of participation. More than 25 new pairs enrolled and many pairs from the pilot program chose to continue their partnership into the next academic year. Participants included newly hired staff, long-time employees, and several members of upper-level Library administration. Inclusivity—engaging staff at every level of the organization and from every part of the Library—had emerged as a key goal of the pilot program, largely in response to concerns that past mentoring opportunities at CUL had been limited to academic librarians only. By encouraging all staff to participate in the Mentoring Program, the committee demonstrated the Library's commitment to cultivating leaders at all levels of the organization and providing leadership opportunities to staff who might not have the chance to develop such skills in their day-to-day work.

The committee matched 16 new mentoring pairs during the 2012-13 program, and continued to provide guidance and support to mentoring pairs from the previous years, whether they chose to continue working together formally or informally. In addition to the traditional one-to-one partnership, for the first time participants were also given the option of being assigned to a small mentoring group (with three or more members). The Mentoring Committee also hosted a popular "speed networking" event prior to the deadline for applications, enabling staff to come meet colleagues from across the Library in a fun, low-pressure environment and identify potential mentoring partners.

It was during the 2012-13 program that the Mentoring Committee established working relationships with Library Human Resources (HR), and the Cornell Team & Leadership Center (CTLC). The committee worked with Library HR to acquire a list of new library hires from the previous two years and specifically targeted them with personalized e-mails prior to the beginning of the application period as part of an effort to focus on staff retention. For the final event of the year, the Mentoring Committee worked with staff from the CTLC to design an event that was fun, engaging, informative, and specifically tailored to mentoring in the Library. Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive, and many indicated that they would be interested in a similar workshop at the start of the Mentoring Program to help newly matched mentees and mentors develop the coaching and mentoring skills necessary for a successful partnership.

Continuing in our efforts to address the issues of staff recruitment and retention, the committee decided to expand the scope of the program during the 2013-14 academic year to include programming specifically for new hires. The committee hosted four "new hire" events—bowling, a trip to the Cornell Dairy bar, and two informal "Lunch and Conversation" gatherings open to all CUL librarians and staff. Though attendance at these events was low, responses from invitees indicated an interest and appreciation that such

events were being offered, as well as encouragement to continue offering this type of programming on different days of the week/times of day. Members of the committee also worked on incorporating information about the Mentoring Program into the CUL orientation process for new hires, discussed in more detail in the next section.

It also became clear at this time that we were not truly addressing the issue of leadership development, due largely to our own lack of expertise. This realization led to our decision to expand the partnership with CTLC and plan a series of workshops for mentoring participants throughout the year aimed at supporting and developing professional growth and mentorship skills. After each event, CTLC staff handed out surveys to participants to gauge satisfaction with the types of activities and programming, and used that feedback to continue customizing the workshops to help participants build trust in their mentoring partnerships, articulate their goals for the program, and communicate more effectively in their professional relationships. CTLC's methodology and role in the Mentoring Program are discussed in greater detail below.

Assessing the Mentoring Program

In the fall of 2014, the authors developed two surveys with assistance from the CUL Research and Assessment unit to do a more in-depth assessment of the Mentoring Program since the pilot. The purpose of the first survey was to reach out to all past participants in the Mentoring Program since 2010 to measure overall satisfaction with the program and specifically the partnership with CTLC. The survey was sent to 93 individuals, and there was a 35 percent response rate. Sixty-four percent of respondents indicated that their expectations for the program were met, with another 27 percent indicating that only some of their expectations had been met. For mentees, the most common expectations included networking opportunities at CUL, guidance with the promotion process, and how to advance in their career. Mentors also expected networking opportunities, expressed a desire

to meet more people outside their department/unit, and wanted to help others.

Forty-eight percent of respondents had attended at least one CTLC event, with 30 percent having attended three or more. Respondents were asked how effective they thought the CTLC programming had been in helping them achieve their mentoring goals. Approximately two-thirds felt the programming had been effective or at least somewhat effective. Those who felt it had been effective liked having an organization external to CUL lead the sessions because they brought a different (and positive) perspective, and felt that the sessions had been thought-provoking and increased their self-awareness. Those who felt the programming had not been effective indicated that they wanted more time to absorb what was being learned and how it applied to mentoring, and felt that they did not get anything out of the session if their partner could not also attend.

The second survey was sent only to library staff members who had been hired within the past two years, regardless of whether or not they participated in the Mentoring Program. The purpose of this survey was to gauge awareness of and interest in the Mentoring Program and specifically our new hire programming, as well as solicit other suggestions on how the Mentoring Program can continue to reach out to and support new hires. The survey was sent to 32 individuals, and there was a 44 percent response rate. Of those who completed the survey, only 21 percent had participated in the Mentoring Program. The majority of those who had not participated (79 percent) had started working at CUL after the Mentoring Program had begun for the year. Twenty-nine percent indicated that they had not heard about the program, and the remaining respondents were either not interested, did not feel they had the time to participate, or were unsure how the program would benefit them. However, the majority of respondents (57 percent) believe that a mentoring program, like the one offered at CUL, is a good opportunity for professional development and indicated that they may participate in the future.

Respondents were asked to reflect on the new hire programming offered by the Mentoring Program, and if they had not been able to attend, to indicate why. Forty-seven percent had scheduling conflicts, and 24 percent had not heard about them. There also seemed to be some confusion as to how these events would benefit participants. Though attendance at these sessions had been quite low, 59 percent of respondents indicated that they would be very or somewhat likely to attend future programming, and encouraged us to continue offering a variety of events in different locations around campus on different days of the week/ times of day. Much of this feedback indicates that the Mentoring Committee should improve marketing and advertising efforts, as there seems to be a lack of awareness about this programming and how it can be beneficial to participants.

The Role of Partnerships

As discussed above, the CUL Mentoring Program embraces broad aims in its inclusiveness of all staff at all levels, and its goals are evolving to range from professional and leadership development to staff retention and job satisfaction. As the program has envisioned these broader goals, partnerships with other departments and campus services have played an increasingly important role in program development and sustainability. As mentioned, two key partnerships that have developed in recent programming cycles are the Cornell Team & Leadership Center and Library Human Resources. These groups bring expertise and resources to the table that the Mentoring Committee is not equipped to provide on its own. While the Mentoring Committee is made up of a diverse group of library staff, often with an interest in professional development and mentorship, committee members are not typically trained in areas of leadership development or mentor training. Mentoring programs in libraries often follow similar models, with administration by library staff whose expertise may be outside of the scope of mentorship or organizational development.[13] Thus, partnerships with departments knowledgeable in staff development (e.g., human resources)

or campus programs dedicated to leadership development and team building, such as those demonstrated here, can contribute to the success and impact of mentoring programs.

Cornell Team & Leadership Center

The partnership with the CTLC grew out of an initial end-of-year event held for mentoring participants in 2013. Previous to the CTLC partnership, programming had sometimes been facilitated by the Mentoring Committee, and sometimes by other campus services such as Organizational Development. We decided that establishing a more consistent partnership with CTLC, whose skilled facilitators are trained and experienced in leadership and team building, would allow for a more scaffolded program, consistent with the growth and development of the mentoring relationship through the course of the year. This partnership also provided consistency to the programming and took the onus of program planning off of the Mentoring Committee, allowing more time for developing other programs including outreach to new hires and library-wide networking events.

CTLC has been working with leaders, teams, and individuals since 1997. CTLC works with about 5000 people per year in all levels of Cornell and the greater Ithaca community, including for-profits, non-profits, faculty, staff, and students. CTLC is a part of Cornell Outdoor Education and draws on the richness of experience-based learning, offering custom-designed workshops and trainings based on the needs and goals of the group.

CTLC's mission is to increase the effectiveness of teams by improving communication skills; promoting inclusion and a commitment to diversity; enhancing levels of trust; developing leadership; and promoting greater accountability in team members. These goals align well with those of the Library and the Mentoring Program. In addition, CTLC fulfills customer commitments through thorough needs assessment and by gaining commitment to an appropriate and well-designed process. Through this continued assessment, the Mentoring Committee and CTLC have been able

to design effective programming aimed at enriching mentoring partnerships through trust-building, communication and self-reflection.

CTLC's unique training approach has been developed to engage participants in powerful experiences that transform perspective and inspire new ways of operating. In CTLC's programs and trainings, participants are engaged by a series of group initiatives and challenges—unique exercises that require groups to brainstorm, plan, implement, evaluate, and improvise. These exercises are physically engaging, but not strenuous. After each exercise, group members reflect on their experience and draw out lessons regarding trust, communication, leadership, and high-performance teamwork. These activities are conducted in a supportive environment designed to invigorate and integrate the team. This process closely follows the Experiential Learning Cycle developed by David Kolb[14] (see figure 1). This approach provides a fun and engaging experience for mentoring participants while at the same time has lent the program more structure, purpose, and expert training.

Cornell Library Human Resources

Mentoring is recognized as an important part of the adjustment of new staff to cultural aspects of a workplace and profession.[15] Mentoring can be seen as complimentary to the onboarding and orientation processes and thus, working with the facilitators of those programs can be a fruitful collaboration to enhance overall staff support and development.[16] The Mentoring Committee partnered with Library HR staff to provide outreach to new hires and enhance the onboarding process with networking and campus exploration opportunities. In addition, a staff member from Library HR sits in an *ex officio* capacity on the CUL Mentoring Committee. The insight and expertise of this committee member has been invaluable to both the development of the program but also as a liaison to HR, providing access to new hire contact information and easing the integration of mentoring programming into the onboarding process, wherein new hires are made aware of the program

FIGURE 1
The Role of Experiential Learning

Kolb's experiential learning theory is typically represented by a four-stage learning cycle in which the learner 'touches all the bases':

1. Concrete Experience (a new experience or situation is encountered, or a reinterpretation of existing experience)

2. Reflective Observation (of the new experience; of particular importance are any inconsistencies between experience and understanding)

3. Abstract Conceptualization (reflection gives rise to a new idea, or a modification of an existing abstract concept)

4. Active Experimentation (the learner applies them to the world around them to see what results)

Effective learning is seen when a person progresses through a cycle of the four stages: of (1) having a concrete experience followed by (2) observation of and reflection on that experience which leads to (3) the formation of abstract concepts (analysis) and generalizations/conclusions, which are then (4) used to test hypotheses in future situations, resulting in new experiences.

Source: David Kolb, Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1984), 42.

and encouraged to enroll upon beginning their terms with CUL.

While the new hire program continues to be a work in progress, encountering challenges of scheduling and supervisory support, there is a demonstrated need for improving the orientation and onboarding process for new hires. The Mentoring Committee's partnership with CTLC allows for more time to be spent in developing onboarding support. While not directly related to the Mentoring Program, onboarding and orientation seem to be a natural fit for a mentoring committee and Library HR partnership. Providing mentorship opportunities to new staff—either in the more traditional one-on-one capacity or informally through networking and social events that bring together new hires with committee members and more senior staff—can contribute to staff recruitment and retention and ease the transition process.

Future Directions

The Mentoring Program is continuing to work with CTLC and Library HR to provide quality programming and support for staff, both new and senior. Recognizing the role of the Mentoring Committee as something more than simply facilitators of the Mentoring Program, but rather with an eye to a more integrated role in leadership and organizational development, has resulted in a shift in focus. For example, with the growing need for new leadership within an aging and retiring workforce, mentoring programs can play a significant role in identifying leadership potential and cultivating talent to fill the gaps. In addition, projects that will develop the Mentoring Program as a CUL-wide resource, such as the current development of online leadership and professional development resources for staff, will expand the program's reach beyond mentoring participants. Our surveys also revealed the diversity in the meaning and manifestation of mentorship amongst library staff, with mentoring happening in many different ways, both within and outside the organization. The Mentoring Committee is in a position to provide guidance for all forms of mentoring relationships.

As the library profession continues to adjust to a rapidly changing information landscape and increasing budgetary challenges, support for staff in this uncertain environment is more critical than ever. Library mentoring programs, well-established in many academic library settings, are poised to play an important role in shaping the future of the profession and providing this much needed staff support. The Cornell Library Mentoring Program will evolve and adapt based on continued assessment and emerging needs of library staff. Feedback from our participants indicates that staff would like to see even more training for mentors, and job-shadowing or hands-on learning opportunities for mentees. Much of our assessment has revealed a need for better marketing on our part, as well as a mix of both formal and informal events. It has also been suggested that we move to an open enrollment or 'on-demand' model for pairing mentors and mentees throughout the academic year. We strive to find opportunities to integrate mentoring into broader aspects of organizational development in our effort to develop a 'culture of mentorship' in which staff at all levels feel empowered to both serve as mentors to others, and to seek out mentorship as they transition through different stages of their career or encounter challenges that require guidance.

For additional information including survey and assessment instruments see: http://bit.ly/CULmentoring

Acknowledgements

Notes

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