

Overheard at the BRASS Mentorship Open Forums

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When planning the new BRASS Mentorship Program, the BRASS Membership Committee chose a different approach: a mentee-driven program. As a new member of the BRASS Membership Committee, I had my first meeting working on our Mentorship Taskforce this February, moderating open forums for mentors and mentees. I loved what I heard and thought everyone should know how cool the program is. During our forums, I proposed that we share the accomplishments of the pairs; but mentors weren't sure how, saying "we'd share, but I don't have the time" or "I don't know if my particular story is that interesting". I want to commend our pairs who signed up for the first year of the program, and compliment their innovative, unique mentorship approaches.

The common thread among mentors: "How do you mentor a superstar, what do I have to offer"?

Excitingly, mentees were not all established business librarians. The first mentor described their mentee's situation: currently serving as a public librarian, but applying for academic business librarian positions. Their meetings were brainstorming sessions, not only planning how to gain skills and experience, but also planning business programming for patrons in her library. This even included ways of incorporating business librarianship into children's programming. This brought both mentor and mentee out of their fields of expertise and onto some shared ground. It also helped the mentee plan their professional growth in ways that could demonstrate experience in an academic context. This business librarian mentor appreciated learning about the public library context, given his increasing relationships with local public librarians regarding entrepreneurship and local small business development.

Speaking of shared ground, the Zoom room had a chuckle when one mentor shared she was mentoring another mentor! I had never heard of a case where an early/mid-career librarian mentored an established business librarian, but both librarians expressed tremendous appreciation for swapping roles. Seeing a mentor role as a form of continuing education was a great idea, especially in a field like ours. It helped break the silo feeling of the more established librarian, and served as a foil to the culture at her current institution.

Not all mentees had lofty aims and appreciated the low-stakes approach that mentee-driven mentorship afforded. Like one pair, that treated their year as a writing challenge. After hearing the mentee's research goal, the mentor explained the business librarian research landscape, and created some helpful guidelines such as: target journals, editing advice, and experience along the research process. For many, the mentorship became a monthly check-in with a peer, and then evolved into a professional friendship. As previously stated, business librarians often are a solo shop, and mentors and mentees alike loved the chance to regularly speak with

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someone who had a similar experience as a solo practitioner. For others, monthly check-ins took on a new dimension, as mentorship became networking. One mentor not only shared their thoughts, but regularly involved a host of business librarians in their network. With a prompt from their mentee, this mentor would invite a peer they saw as “more experienced” with certain BizRef related job duties.

As a new BRASS member, I am glad I got involved with the Membership Committee, but I wish I had been involved in the Mentorship Program. With organizations as large as RUSA BRASS, it is not always easy to see where a person may fit, especially if your job duties encompass more than academic business reference. I see the program as a great first step. The advantage of a mentorship driven model is obvious: you can get whatever you want from your mentor. In a lot of cases, mentorship was not exclusively related to business librarianship, it also became networking, professional development, and friendship.

The Membership Committee plans to kick off next year’s Mentorship Program in September, if you have interest in being involved on either side, we’d be happy to match you! And, if you’re worried about how to organize the pairing, we’ve created a helpful set of guidelines and check-ins along the way. Ultimately, we’re excited to see where you take your mentorship!

If you want to know more about how the program’s founding, check out Steve Cramer’s Liaison Life blog: <https://liaisonlife.wordpress.com/2022/12/16/brass-mentoring-program/>