

Mentoring Experiences of Undergraduate Social Work Faculty: Navigating the Academic Maze

Martha Ellison¹, Wayne Moore² & Andrea Johnson³

Abstract

There is a paucity of research examining the experiences or impact that mentoring has had on new social work faculty members who teach in social work education programs. This exploratory study addresses the limited research available on mentoring experiences of social work education faculty by examining the mentoring opportunities and experiences for Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) faculty. The results suggest that there is a need and desire from junior BSW faculty members for more scholarly assistance to help them succeed in the academy. Implications for future endeavors to enhance the mentoring experiences and programs for both undergraduate social work faculty and other junior faculty members are discussed, along with specific recommendations to enhance academic success.

Keywords: Mentoring, BSW Faculty Mentoring, Tenure & Promotion, Career Development

Success in the academy is contingent upon more than having a command of one's academic specialty. It is also dependent upon learning to navigate the politics of the institution, receiving grants, being published in top journals, serving on the "right" committees, and performing well in the classroom. However research has indicated that graduate education provides insufficient preparation for the realities of academic life (Austin, 2002; Frongia, 1995; Meacham, 2002; Schuster, 1993).

¹PhD, Professor, Department of Social & Behavioral Sciences, Union College, 310 College Street, Barbourville, Kentucky 40906, Phone: 606-546-1313, E-mail: mellison@unionky.edu

²PhD, Professor, Department of Sociology & Social Work, North Carolina A&T State University, 1601 East Market Street, Greensboro, NC 27411. Phone: 336-508-3650, E-mail: wmoore@ncat.edu

³PhD, Lecturer, Department of Sociology, High Point University, 833 Montlieu Ave, High Point, NC 27262. Phone: 336-476-4710, E-mail: anjconsulting@gmail.com

Given the financial exigencies facing academic institutions, tenured earning and tenured faculty lines, once thought of as untouchable, are being reconsidered in this new economic climate. Today there has been a shift by the reduction of teaching faculty and lowering compensation patterns between 2000 and 2012 in public and private universities and colleges. Other efforts undertaken have been to eliminate low-enrollment programs, reduce campus services and operations, provide stricter oversight in student matriculation towards graduation, reduce monies for faculty development, and increasing on-line and distance education courses. Institutions have limited or eliminated tenure-track positions or sought to reduce full-time faculty members through retirement or early retirement incentives; the major shift has been utilization of part-time instructors especially at public master's and bachelor's level institutions (Carlson, 2013; Desrochers & Kirshstein, 2013; Herbert 2013). Furthermore, at both large state university systems and private institutions, the number of faculty positions has declined while administrative and professional staff have increased across all sectors of higher education. Many faculty members are becoming more dissatisfied in their work environment as their department and institution continue to invest less and less to support faculty members (Kanuka, 2009; Simon & Banchemo, 2010).

Into this challenging environment a new assistant professor hired into a tenure track position or the professional who has decided to make a career transition attracted to the idea of an academic career may encounter any number of obstacles as they transition into the academic world. Mary Sorcinelli (2001) identified major issues a faculty member may confront, especially those new to the academy: 1.) a desire for an intellectual community but otherwise experience isolation and loneliness, receiving little to no mentoring at all; 2.) finding tenure expectations are not clear with little feedback as they move along in the "mysterious" tenure and promotion process; and 3.) feelings of being overwhelmed and overworked in the struggle to balance the demands of establishing an academic career, meeting the demands of the academic life, as well as attending to the needs of their personal life..

Mentoring is one practice that has been used in the academy to help junior faculty members succeed. Mentoring new faculty members by senior faculty members has been the primary means in which colleges and universities integrate new faculty into the organization, help them socialize into their roles, and perform their tasks related to teaching, scholarship, and community service (Johnson, 2007; Kram, 1985).

The concept and practices of mentoring are not new; in fact the first reference to mentoring was found in Homer's poem, *The Odyssey*, from which many believe the word "mentor" is derived.⁴ Zellers, Howard, and Barcic (2008) define mentoring as "a reciprocal learning relationship characterized by trust, respect, and commitment, in which a mentor supports the professional and personal development of another by sharing his or her life experiences, influence, and expertise" (p. 555).

Interest and research on mentoring, and the benefits of formal versus informal mentoring in the corporate, medical, and academic arenas, have evolved since the 1970s. The business sector brought to the forefront the positive impact and benefits mentoring provided. Roche (1979), surveying American executives, reported that mentored executives earned more money, established career goals, and enjoyed greater career satisfaction. In the 1980s, academic medicine and higher education focused on the organizational context of mentoring by examining the impact of mentoring on relationships, career development, and career satisfaction, and distinguished between formal and informal mentoring (Blackburn, Chapman & Cameron, 1981; Bogart & Redner, 1985; Darling, 1985). Mentoring programs in the early 1990s were prescribed to address the concerns that women and minorities in higher education, law, and medicine were not successful in gaining tenure. They needed guidance and assistance to meet the demands of an academic career (Allen, Eby, O'Brien, & Lentz, 2008; Mills, 1994; Sands, Parson, & Duane, 1991). During this period, research shows that new faculty members expressed dissatisfaction and disillusionment within the teaching environment (Bolger & Kremer, 1999). Sorcinelli (1994), in a longitudinal study, found 33% of new faculty members reported being very stressed in their first year. This rose to 49% in year two and upward to 71% by the fifth year. By the mid-1980s and 1990s, universities and colleges began to place a greater emphasis on publication and successful grant awards as major criteria for tenure and promotion decisions. Even institutions that historically emphasized their strength in teaching pushed faculty members to develop either funding or publication records or both as the path to tenure and promotion (Boice, 1992; Brent & Felder, 1998; McDonnell, 2009; Payne & Huffman, 2005).

⁴For those who may not know the story: Odysseus while away on his epic journey, entrusts the care and oversight of his son Telemachus, to his faithful servant Mentor, who was caring but incompetent. However, Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom and compassion, intervened. Assuming Mentor's form, she guided and protected both son and father on their journeys. Hence, the term "mentor" has come to mean a wise counselor who will oversee and guide another (Columb, 1918; Scott, 1898).

In social work education, the literature is replete with articles suggesting the need for social work educators - especially new faculty members, women, and minorities - to establish "mentoring relationships" to achieve their professional goals. However, little discussion is provided on the processes, methods, and ways to find a mentor, how to create a mentoring environment, or how social work faculty have been mentored (Branwein, 1980; Green, 2008; Sansone, Bedics, & Rappe, 2000; Weick, 1991).

Research about actual mentoring experiences in social work education, however, is quite limited. Wilson, Pereira, and Valentine (2002) state that "The mentoring in other professions has been researched and discussed, [but] the social work profession has paid scant attention to it [mentoring] in either practice or academic settings" (p. 318). Given the dearth of research in this area, the authors chose to conduct an exploratory study of the mentoring experiences of social work faculty members who teach undergraduates. For the purposes of this study, mentoring is defined as acting as a guide or a trusted counselor.

Literature Review

The literature suggests that, across academic disciplines, faculty members who have experienced positive mentoring report higher levels of career satisfaction, higher productivity, as well as insight into the formal and informal expectations of their academic department and institutional culture (Austin, 1996; Cawyer, Simonds, & Davis, 2002; Johnson, 2002 & 2007; Schrod, Cawyer, & Sanders, 2003). It appears that a supportive climate helps faculty members adapt to the demands of the academy. Therefore, one would believe that mentoring would be a well-established practice in most institutions and utilized by all academic programs.

However, despite these benefits, mentoring in the academy may not always be provided, as individual efforts are often valued over collaborative efforts and the quality of mentoring programs varies greatly (Austin, 2003; Brown & Warner, 2005; Ellison & Raskin, 2014; Grove, 2011). A study conducted by Evans (as cited in Grove, 2011) with 1,200 academics across 94 institutions in Britain found that "53% of the respondents did not receive sufficient help or advice from full professors" (p. 1). Brown and Warner (2005) indicate that mentoring is "sadly lacking in the day-to-day academic practice" (p. 9). Johnson (2007) states that "it is not enough to assume that existing faculty will step forward to mentor newcomers." This is true even when a department head assigns senior faculty to mentor juniors" (p. 149). Thus, while mentoring has been shown to be beneficial, it may not always be available to faculty members.

Formal Mentoring: Benefits and Drawbacks

Research has shown there are some significant benefits derived from formal mentoring. These benefits include: a) helping mentees develop multiple mentoring relationships through networking with others; b) expanding access to mentoring to those less likely to be mentored through informal means; c) lengthening the period of time for mentoring; d) engaging mentee and mentor in structured activities (Boice, 1990; Boyle & Boice, 1998; Zellers, Howard, & Barcic, 2008).

While there are many benefits associated with formal mentoring, research has also demonstrated several disadvantages to formal mentoring: a) mentees fear a formal program may be used as an evaluation tool to identify negative qualities; b) no assessment mechanisms exist to evaluate the effectiveness of the program; c) faculty success is determined by insufficient data; d) new faculty members shy away from programs viewed as remedial in nature for fear of being seen as less capable; e) the results of formal mentoring are mixed at best (Boyle & Boice, 1998; Carden, 1990; Jacobi, 1991).

Informal Mentoring: Benefits and Drawbacks

Overall, it appears that more faculty members receive mentoring through informal means, and that academia has relied on informal mentoring as a mainstay (Blue & Kominkiewicz, 2013; Carr, Bickel, Inui, 2003; Ellison & Raskin, 2014; Luna & Cullen, 1995; Zellers, Howard, & Barcic, 2008). Bigelow & Johnson (2001) suggest this reliance on informal mentoring is due to a belief that the complexity of the mentoring relationship negates the use of assigned mentors. Additional benefits attributed to informal mentoring are that informal mentees report receiving more career-related support, and informal mentees had higher salaries than those receiving formal mentoring (Blue & Kominkiewicz, 2013; Chao, Waltz & Gardner, 1992; Ellison & Raskin, 2014; Noe, Greenberger & Wang, 2002).

The most problematic aspect of informal mentoring is that it has been deemed to be less inclusive of diverse faculty members, thus leaving women, minorities, and average or low performing faculty un-mentored (Boyle & Boice, 1998; McCormick, 1997). The practice of "like mentoring like", according to Zellers, Howard, & Barcic, (2008) is due to faculty members being attracted to junior colleagues "who conjure images of themselves" (p.559). Boice (1992) found that informal mentoring occurred with only one-third of new faculty members, and that the mentoring occurred for shorter periods of time.

Components of Effective Mentoring

Effectiveness of mentoring is dependent on various factors that many researchers have identified. These factors include both structural and process components that aid in contributing to a positive mentoring experience. For formal programs, researchers have found that allowing the mentee to select her/his mentor, having a departmental or institutional climate that is committed to the success of new faculty, having appropriate program structure and oversight to ensure regularity and productivity of meetings, having a formative and summative evaluation process, and having adequate planning for the program is essential (Boyle &Boice, 1998; Zellers, Howard, &Barcic (2008).

The services that have been identified as contributing to the effectiveness of both formal and informal mentoring includes activities which provide the mentee with structural and technical advice on the "how to" of teaching; provide career coaching on tenure/promotion; provide socialization into the culture of the academy; provide a highly supportive and challenging relationship that is more collaborative than dyadic in nature; models ways to balance professional and personal life; practices ethical mentoring; provides a sounding board for the mentee; provides advice and information on department politics and organizational bureaucracy; provides professional feedback; and provides assistance with scholarship (Blue &Kominkiewicz, 2013;Ellison &Raskin, 2014; Johnson, 2007; Lee, 2003; Zellers, Howard, &Barcic, 2008).

Mentoring in Social Work Education

One of the first studies on mentorship in social work education was by Robbins (1989), who surveyed 340 graduate and undergraduate social work educators. She found that more female faculty (40%) were mentored than males (27%), but when mentoring was examined by rank there were no differences found between male and female assistant professors. She also found that mentoring did increase scholarly productivity with mentored faculty producing more joint authored articles and book chapters. However, the types of publications did differ by gender with mentored men producing more joint-authored articles than mentored women, and mentored women producing more single-authored books than did mentored men and non-mentored faculty. This finding would suggest that mentored women may benefit more from their mentoring, since single-authored works are valued more than joint- authored works, and books are valued over articles. In addition, Robbins found that men were mentored more by men, but women were equally mentored by men and women.

A striking finding of this study was that 67% of the 340 respondents did not report being mentored, and of the 33% who were mentored, the majority (60%) was mentored by social work educators (p.4).

Wilson, Pereira, and Valentine (2002) conducted semi-structured telephone interviews with 19 new social work faculty members (11 women and 8 men) across the United States to examine their perceptions of their mentoring experiences. Twelve respondents reported being formally assigned a mentor; however, all respondents reported that informal mentoring relationships did develop. Two were approached by senior faculty members, while five developed their own informal mentoring through asking various questions of faculty which led to mentoring relationships. Eleven respondents reported spending most of their time discussing research and scholarship issues. Their findings overall suggest that mentoring did provide positive assistance, especially in areas of research skills, scholarship, social and emotional support, and teaching. Respondents reported that mentoring helped them acclimate to the departmental culture, strengthened their teaching by helping them acquire new techniques and resources, as well as developing the appropriate balance between teaching and scholarly pursuits.

Research specifically focused on mentoring experiences of social work faculty of color and minority groups is very limited. Simon, Bowles, King, and Roff (2004) examined the mentoring experiences of African-American women in social work education. From a mailed survey, the 14 respondents included 12 deans or directors of MSW programs and two MSW agency directors. All reported having had a mentor during their professional careers, but not during their early academic career. They emphasized the greatest benefit they received was being offered challenging assignments and opportunities for visibility during their career mentoring process.

A 2013 study by Blue & Kominkiewicz examined the mentoring needs of social work faculty across their careers. The study utilized an internet survey with 143 social work faculty members. The majority of respondents received (79%, n=113) and provided (69%, n=99) informal mentoring. While this study found a high number receiving mentoring, these mentees noted that there were four barriers to being mentored: lack of time to meet with mentor, lack of institutional or departmental support for mentoring, lack of quality of mentoring, and no formal mentoring process. They found that new faculty and experienced faculty differed on the types of services that they found helpful.

New faculty reported that receiving information about the bureaucracy/organizational climate, assistance with scholarship and tenure/promotion, and being able to meet on an as-needed basis was beneficial. On the other hand, experienced faculty found that receiving assistance with post-tenure review, with time management, with roles for advanced rank leadership, use of technology, and finding balance and meaning throughout their lives were helpful to them.

Only one social work study examined the mentoring experiences and needs of Bachelor Social Work (BSW) and Master Social Work (MSW) field education directors. Ellison and Raskin (2014) surveyed 169 field-education directors nationwide, and found that the majority of respondents received no mentoring for their role as field directors (62%, n=93). Of those receiving mentoring, 67 were mentored informally. These mentored respondents most frequently received services that included listening to the mentee's concerns, providing strategies for success in their field position, giving advice on administering the field program, and an overview of the field program. However, the respondents indicated that they wished to receive advice on field education related research, and jointly publishing, presenting, and researching with their mentor. Unfortunately, none of the 37 mentors published or presented with their mentees, and only 13% of these mentors wanted to provide these services. This finding seems to underscore that there is a disconnect between what services mentees want and what they receive.

Research on the impact of mentoring activities for social work faculty or what they received through formal or informal mentoring is quite limited. Missing in the research is the focus on structures, formal and informal, that are used to facilitate this activity, whether in a department or at a higher level in the institutional system. This research addresses this point by documenting what is occurring in mentoring activities for BSW faculty members in departments or within institutions, as well as informally, and how these efforts are perceived by mentors and mentees.

Methodology

This exploratory study examined the following research questions: Are BSW faculty members being mentored within their department and/or institution? If BSW faculties are being mentored, what activities/services comprise the formal and informal mentoring they experience? How satisfied are faculty members with their mentoring? What activities/services do faculty members want included in their mentoring that is not provided? What mentoring activities do mentors provide? How effective do mentors believe their mentoring is?

What mentoring activities do they wish they had provided but did not? What benefits do mentors receive from being mentors?

For the purpose of this research, a formal mentoring program was defined as “organized, implemented, administered, and monitored by a recognized authority within the institution and/or department.” The informal mentoring program was defined as “not organized, administered, or monitored by an authority within the institution setting.”

The study utilized both quantitative and qualitative questions to examine formal and informal mentoring experiences of mentors and mentees. This allowed documenting, as fully as possible, the experiences of BSW faculty members regarding their mentoring activities. The authors developed a list of mentoring activities/services based upon mentoring literature, experiences of other faculty who had received or provided mentoring, and the authors own experiences with mentoring. Respondents were also asked to identify other services if they were not contained in the pre-formulated list.

As a pilot test, the original questionnaire was reviewed by six BSW faculty members, all of whom had taught from 10 to 15 years. Half of the reviewers had provided informal mentoring during their careers; two reviewers had received informal mentoring early in their academic careers. The reviewers were asked to examine the instrument for clarity, readability, utility, and comprehension, grammatical errors, and any other observations they had about the utility of the survey. The reviewers suggested some minor changes in the wording of a few questions, but otherwise found the instrument appropriate. The reviewers did raise the point that respondents might be hesitant to complete the survey due to its length. The researchers agreed this could lower the response rate, and therefore tried to address this concern by explaining in the cover letter and directions that there were multiple sections to the survey. It was stressed that respondents would only need to respond to the sections that pertained to their mentoring experiences. For example, if a respondent had not been a mentor, the respondent would skip that section. It was believed that these explanations would help increase the response rate.

With this input, a final 55-item survey containing quantitative and qualitative response fields was created; an Internet survey was conducted using SurveyMonkey electronic software.

The survey package consisted of a cover letter and instructions for reaching the survey web site and directing only faculty who primarily taught BSW students to participate in the study. The survey was distributed through the Baccalaureate Program Directors (BPD) *listserv*. The use of the *listserv* was deemed to be the most expedient method to reach the largest number of BSW faculty members. The survey remained open for a six-week period with two follow-up emails to encourage responses. At the time of distribution, the *listserv* consisted of approximately 1,200 to 1,300 subscribers who are primarily social work educators at the baccalaureate level. This research was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the first author.

Findings

Findings are presented in five sections: (1) Demographic information, (2) Formal mentoring – activities and satisfaction from the mentees' perspective, (3) Informal mentoring – activities and satisfaction from mentees' perspective, (4) Mentoring activities as reported by mentors, and (5) Benefits mentors received. A total of 88 surveys were received. Sixty-three respondents had received or were receiving mentoring, with 22 of those through formal mentoring, 41 receiving informal mentoring, and 34 respondents providing mentoring services. Respondents were asked to respond to all areas of the survey that were pertinent to them, so responses to multiple areas of the survey were possible. For example, a respondent who had received mentoring and was also providing mentoring could complete both the mentor and mentee sections of the survey.

Demographics

The majority of respondents were White females with advanced degrees. Respondents ranged in age from 31-68 years of age with 56% being in their 40s and 50s. The majority held a tenure-track faculty line. Furthermore, the majority (88%) had been at their institution from 1 to 10 years with the range being from 1 to 38 years. Among the respondents 55% were affiliated with a public college or university, and 46% were in a private institution. Of the respondents, 76% taught in a BSW program only and 3% had taught in BSW, MSW, and PhD programs. As to their degrees 61% held a PhD, 5% the DSW, and 6.5% other doctorates. Among the respondents, 33% were assistant professors, 33% associate professors, 21% full professors, and 13% as non-tenured faculty members.

Formal Mentoring Activities and Satisfaction from The Mentees' Perspective

Thirty-seven out of 88 (42%) respondents indicated that their department or institution had a formal mentoring program. Only 22 out of 88 (25%) respondents indicated that they participated in a formal departmental or institutional mentoring program. Twenty-four out of 37 respondents indicated that the formal mentoring programs were housed in the Provost's office or the Dean's office; with 13 respondents indicating that the formal programs were operated at the department level.

Respondents were asked to identify any institutional mentoring activities that were not included in the pre-identified list of activities contained in the questionnaire. The activities that were identified as part of the institutional programs were: (1) providing mentees information about human resource services, (2) providing mentees with an overview of the institution, (3) the institution's assignment of a mentor, (4) opportunities to meet other new faculty members. Departmental mentoring programs included only one activity that was not on the pre-identified list: meeting tenure criteria that the institutional programs did not address.

The 22 formally mentored respondents identified four principal reasons for participating in formal programs: (1) being told about it (n= 16 of 22), (2) it was relevant to their career (n=13 of 22), (3) being advised that it was necessary (n=13 of 22), and (4) the program was geared for junior faculty (n=5 of 22).

Respondents were asked to identify the activities which they received from their mentor. Twenty-one mentees (one respondent did not provide responses) reported receiving the following services most frequently: discussion of strategies for success (n=15 of 21); advice on office/institutional politics (n=14 of 21); meeting to discuss progress and work (n=12 of 21); engaging in scholarly discussion; and providing teaching tips (n=11 of 21). Only four of twenty-one reported that they published with their mentor, and six of twenty-one indicated that they presented at conferences together and had worked on research together. (See Table 1.)

Participants were asked to rate how adequate they believed the activities were carried out by their mentors through the formal mentoring programs using a Likert Scale of 1-5, with 1 representing "not adequate", 2 as "somewhat adequate", 3 as "adequate", 4 as "slightly above adequate", and 5 as "extremely adequate". Activities of formal institutional programs received an overall rating of 3.2 and 3.1 for activities of formal departmental programs.

Recipients of departmental mentoring rated advising on office policies, providing strategies for success, and peer review of teaching as “extremely adequate”. Departmental mentoring activities that were rated at either “inadequate” or only “somewhat adequate” were joint publication, joint work on research, and peer review of research.

For institutional programs, helping mentees get appointed to committees, advising on office politics, and advice on managing work and personal responsibilities were rated as “extremely adequate”. Half of respondents who received mentoring through institutional programs indicated that the services of finding others for joint work on research and joint publications were “not adequate” or only “somewhat adequate”.

In rating their overall formal mentoring experience, both at the institutional or department level, 46% (n=22) of respondents rated their overall experience as “adequate” to “extremely adequate”.

Positive comments reflect this:

- It was what I needed at the time. It was early in my career...enabled me to develop skills and competencies as a teacher.
- It was a wonderful experience having a mentor who was open to helping others understand the academic process and institution.
- Mentor provided helpful information on potential grants and contracts.
- Mentor helped me to take my dissertation and carve out papers for publication or presentation at conferences.

However, 60% of respondents reported formal mentoring did not help them achieve their professional goals. Sixteen respondents who were critical of their experience provided the following comments:

- Mentor did very little, I listened to her concerns more than her helping me.
- Mentor [was] like a police officer keeping track of me and removing any opportunity for self-determination.
- I achieved my professional objectives but it had nothing to do with my mentor.
- The mentor was a poor match and the relationship ended.

Mentees were asked to identify what activities they wanted to receive that they did not receive. The activities desired but not received were: engaging in scholarly discussion (n=9 of 18), advise on scholarship and provide teaching tips (n=8 of 18), joint work on research and publication, jointly present at conferences, and advice on obtaining funding (n=7 of 18). (See Table 1.)

Ten respondents indicated that they had discontinued involvement in their formal mentoring programs for the following reasons: unable to find someone with whom they could relate (n=4 of 10), did not believe mentoring was relevant to their specific faculty position (n=4 of 10), did not like how the program was operated (n=3 of 10), and did not find it helpful (n=2 of 10). (See Table 1.)

Four respondents indicated they had changed mentors for the following reasons: (1) mentor was judged not helpful, (2) mentor was too busy to work with mentee, (3) mentor left the school, (4) mentee felt mentoring was no longer needed. The majority of respondents (n=12 of 22) who indicated they were being formally mentored stated they would participate in their mentoring program until they were granted tenure.

Informal Mentoring Activities and Satisfaction-Mentees' Perspective

Forty-one respondents indicated they had or were participating in informal mentoring, with 22 of the 41 respondents indicating that this relationship had been ongoing for more than five years. The majority (n=24 of 41) were being mentored by a current colleague who was a member of their institution.

The most frequently received activities as reported by 38 informally mentored respondents (three respondents did not supply responses) were the following: (1) feedback regarding demeanor in meetings (n=31 of 38), (2) engaging in scholarly discussions (n=27 of 38), (3) discussing strategies for success (n=27 of 38), (4) advising on office/institutional politics (n=21 of 38), (5) providing teaching tips (n=20 of 38), (6) recommending for conferences and other activities (n=19 of 38). (See Table 1.)

Fourteen mentees reported wanting their informal mentors to provide the following: assistance with obtaining funding (n=7 of 14), publication of articles together (n=7 of 14), and work on research together (n=6 of 14), advice on balancing work and personal life obligations (n=6 of 14), and engagement in scholarly discussions (n=6 of 14). Nevertheless, 90% (n=41) of informally mentored respondents believed they were reaching their professional goals because of this connection. (See Table 1.)

All 41 respondents stated that their informal mentors had been helpful to them, and rated their informal mentoring as “adequate” or “extremely adequate” on the 5-point Likert Scale provided. Comments on informal mentoring reflect this:

- Encouraged me to pursue research agenda and publish to meet tenure.
- Helped me balance academic reality and family needs.
- Was a strong role model, open to any question or concern I had, and assisted me to develop a plan for tenure and promotion.
- Invited me to work on a research project and several articles for publication.

Even though all respondents rated their informal mentoring as “adequate” to “extremely adequate”, several comments revealed some elements of dissatisfaction:

- I had to initiate most conversations... I would like more proactive than reactive.
- Lack of guidance in grant writing, research, and publication has been problematic.
- Department and school had no mentoring program; my mentor provided limited help in constructing a tenure and promotion plan.
- Mentor talked about how the tenure process changed in department but gave me no specific help or guidance.

Table 1. Activities Formal and Informal Mentees Report Receiving & Activities They Wish to Receive

Activities	What Mentees Receive Formal Mentoring (n=21)	What Mentees Want to Receive Formal Mentoring (n=18) **	What Mentees Receive Informal Mentoring (n=38) ***	What Mentees Want to Receive Informal Mentoring (n=14) ****
Meet to discuss progress/work	12/57%	0	7/18%	0
Review written work	10/48%	0	17/45%	0
Discuss strategies for success	15/71%	4/24%	27/71%	0

Feedback re. demeanor in meetings	5/24%	0	31/82%	0
Intro. to key people in field	10/48%	5/28%	16/42%	1/7%
Recommend for conferences/ other activities	8/38%	0	19/50%	0
Monitor work load	9/43%	0	8/21%	0
Engage in scholarly discussions	11/52%	9/50%	27/71%	6/43%
Recommend to serve on Journal boards	3/14%	0	6/16%	0
Provide teaching tips	11/52%	8/44%	20/53%	4/29%
Jointly work on research	6/29%	7/39%	12/32%	6/43%
Jointly present at conferences	6/29%	7/39%	13/24%	4/29%
Jointly publish	4/19%	7/39%	8/21%	7/50%
Advise on institutional, office politics	14/67%	3/17%	21/55%	1/7%
Advise on balancing work and personal responsibilities	8/38%	3/17%	15/40%	6/43%
Help get appointed to committees- institutional, community	8/38%	5/28%	15/40%	1/7%
Advise on scholarship	0	8/44%	0	1/7%
Advise on writing	0	0	0	3/21%
Advocate for mentee with Dept. Chair	0	3/17%	0	2/14%

Advocate for mentee within department (with other faculty)	0	0	0	3/21%
Advocate for mentee with SW Program Dir.	0	0	0	1/7%
Advise on obtaining funding	0	7/39%	0	7/50%

Note: number reported differs from total number of formal and informal mentees due to some respondents not supplying responses

*-One response missing

** -Four responses missing

***-Three responses missing

****Twenty-seven responses missing

How Mentors were Helpful as Identified by Mentees (Formal and Informal)

Respondents were asked to explain through open-ended questions how their mentors were helpful in five areas of academic life: scholarship, teaching, understanding department and institutional climate, service, and balancing work and leisure.

Scholarship:

Formal - Nine respondents provided comments indicating that their mentor encouraged the mentees scholarship and kept the mentee on track for tenure, as well as read and provided feedback about manuscripts.

Informal - Twenty-one respondents provided comments which indicated that their mentor encouraged them to devote time to scholarship, acted as a role model, provided supportive suggestions, and worked on research with them.

Teaching:

Formal - Nine respondents provided comments. Three respondents indicated that their mentor provided feedback about the mentee's teaching and/or offered suggestions. Six of the nine respondents indicated that either their mentor did not address this area or suggestions given were not helpful.

Informal - Seventeen respondents supplied comments indicating that their mentors visited their classes and provided feedback, provided teaching tips, reviewed syllabi, and shared material and ideas.

Institutional & Departmental Climate:

Formal - Nine mentees provided comments. Five respondents indicated that their mentor explained how things worked at the institution and what the norms were within the institution and the department. Three respondents indicated that their mentor did not address this area and one mentee indicated that the mentor complained about various people in the institution.

Informal - Seventeen respondents identified that their mentors provided information about what was happening in the institution and the department, suggested ways to meet colleagues outside of the department, provided insights about the political dos and don'ts, and provided a historical context about the institution and the department.

Service to Institution/Community:

Formal-Six mentees provided responses concerning service to the institution/community. Three of these comments indicated that the mentor helped get the mentee on faculty committees and introduced the mentee to key community members. The other three respondents indicated that their mentors did not address this area.

Informal- Eighteen respondents indicated that their mentors helped them by encouraging service activities, role modeling service, and recommended them to various boards and committees.

Balancing Work and Personal Life:

Formal -Four mentees provided comments in this area with three of the respondents indicating that the mentor was either a poor role model or that the mentor did not address this area. One respondent stated the mentor stressed the importance of balancing these two functions but did not discuss how to do so.

Informal - Eleven responses were received indicating that the mentor role modeled ways to achieve this balance, the mentor listened to the mentees concerns and provided perspective, and the mentor shared his/her insight of how to achieve this balance.

Mentoring Activities as Reported by Mentors

Thirty-four (39%) of the 88 respondents indicated that they were serving as mentors to a colleague within their department, and most obtained their mentee through an informal relationship.

The most frequent activities which these 34 mentors reported providing were the following: (1) discussing strategies for success (n=30 of 34); (2) advising on office or institutional politics (n=27 of 34); (3) providing teaching tips (n=26 of 34); (4) recommending the mentee for conferences or other professional activities (n=23 of 34); (5) engaging in scholarly discussions (n=23 of 34); (6) reviewing written material (n=22 of 34); and (7) holding regular meetings to discuss progress or work (n=21 of 34). (See Table 2.)

Fewer than 25% of the 34 responding mentors reported jointly working on research, presenting at conferences, or publishing articles together. Seventeen mentors indicated activities which they wanted to provide but did not: (1) assisting the mentee with obtaining funding (n=7 of 17), (2) co-presenting and co-publishing (n=7 of 17), and (3) advising mentee on scholarship (n=6 of 17). Ninety-four percent of respondents (n=32 of 34) indicated that they received personal satisfaction from being a mentor, with 78% (n=27 of 34) stating that it helped them understand the concerns of new faculty, and 69% (n=23 of 34) indicating that it provided academic stimulation. (See Table 2.)

Table 2. Activities Mentors Report Providing to Their Mentees and Activities Mentors Wished They Had Provided

Category of Activities	Activities Mentors Provide Response Number/Percent (n=34)	Activities Mentors Wish They Had Provided Response Number/Percent (n=17) *
Meeting to discuss progress, work	21/62%	0
Review written work	22/65%	0
Discuss strategies for success	30/88%	4/24%
Feedback regarding demeanor In meeting	8/24%	0
Introduction to key people in the mentee's field	19/56%	1/6%
Recommend mentee for Conferences or other activities	23/68%	0
Monitor mentee's workload	11/32%	0
Engage in scholarly discussions	23/68%	0
Recommend mentee to serve On Journal boards	1/3%	0
Provide teaching tips	26/77%	1/6%
Work on research with mentee	1/3%	4/24%
Jointly present at conferences	7/21%	7/41%
Publish together	8/24%	7/41%
Advise of institutional or office politics	27/79%	3/18%
Advise on balancing work and personal Responsibilities	17/50%	1/6%
Help mentee get appointments to committees- institutional or community	14/41%	4/24%
Advise mentee on his/her scholarship	0	6/35%
Work with mentee on his/her writing	0	2/12%
Advocate for mentee with Dept. Chair	0	0
Advocate for mentee within the department	0	2/12%
Advocate for mentee with SW Program Director	0	0
Advise mentee on obtaining funding	0	7/41%

Note: Total n for table differs from total number of mentors as some respondents did not provide responses.

*-Seventeen responses missing

All mentors indicated they had been helpful to their mentees with 27 of the 34 indicating that their mentees listened to them most of the time. Mentors were asked to provide open-ended responses to how they had helped their mentees, in five academic areas: teaching, scholarship, institutional and department climate, service, balancing work and personal responsibilities.

Teaching:

Twenty-four mentors mentioned that they helped in the area of teaching by: 1) suggesting teaching strategies; 2) providing suggestions on how to manage difficult students and dealing with other teaching challenges; 3) providing feedback about observations of classroom teaching, about class assignments, grading, and syllabi; 4) team teaching, sharing assignments and other resources.

Scholarship:

Twelve mentors identified the following ways they helped with scholarship: 1) providing information about grants, publishing venues, collaborators for research, ideas for scholarly pursuits, and how to maximize research for multiple uses; 2) encouraging writing and developing and maintaining a research agenda; 3) helping to develop skills to work in academic environment by publishing together, presenting together, and providing editorial assistance.

Institutional and Department Climate:

The three most frequent methods of helping mentees understand and work with the institutional and department climates identified by 12 respondents were the following: explain political issues; discuss potential minefields; explain expectations and how to meet them; and allow mentee to vent.

Service:

Twelve mentors introduced their mentees to community leaders and they developed and shared projects and committee work. Two respondents indicated that they encouraged their mentee to become involved in university and community service and two mentors helped get their mentees assigned to committees.

Balancing Work and Personal Responsibilities:

Twelve mentors responded to this question, with half of the mentors indicating that they did not discuss this area. Five respondents indicated that they served as a sounding board to their mentees' concerns, and one respondent indicated that s/he discussed the importance of self-care.

Benefits Mentors Received:

Mentors were asked what they gained from being a mentor. Thirty-two respondents supplied responses to this section. Thirty of thirty-two respondents indicated that they received personal satisfaction from being a mentor, with 25 of 32 stating that it helped them understand the concerns of new faculty, and 22 of 32 indicating that it provided academic stimulation. Only two mentors out of the 32 stated that their mentoring was considered as part of their workload, and only seven mentors indicated that it was included as part of their yearly evaluation. Mentors were also asked to rate their overall experience as a mentor. Out of the 30 responses, 20 rated their experiences as either "slightly above adequate" or "extremely adequate." Two mentors rated their experience as only "somewhat adequate", and no respondents rated their experience as "not adequate."

Discussion

The primary purpose of this exploratory study was to determine if BSW social work faculty members are being mentored, either formally or informally, and if so, what activities comprise this process. The findings do indicate that most mentoring is being done through informal channels, and that less than half of the respondents reported that their institutions had formal mentoring programs. Thus, this study supports the findings of other authors that mentoring does not appear to be a regular part of the academic environment (Austin, 2003; Ellison & Raskin, 2014; Brown & Warner, 2005; Grove, 2011). The positive news is that 72% (n=63 of 88) of this sample reported being mentored, and that for the most part mentees and mentors were positive about this experience.

While mentees indicated that they wanted their mentors to work with them on areas of scholarship and teaching, it is apparent from the survey that both formal and informal mentees are only marginally receiving these services. Those receiving informal mentoring rated their mentoring higher than those with formal mentoring, and overwhelmingly believed that they were achieving their professional goals due to their mentoring.

These results echo the findings of other authors that informal mentoring is viewed quite positively by mentees (Austin, 2003; Ewing et al., 2008; Johnson, 2007). Given that these findings correspond to what others have said, it may be time to question why formal programs are not evaluated as positively as informal programs, and to question whether the structure of formal programs might impede their effectiveness. As this study suggests, some only seem to use or perceive formal mentoring as a route to gain tenure as 12 of 22 respondents who were in a formal mentoring program stated they would continue their mentoring until they were granted tenure.

Based upon the qualitative comments from respondents, it appears that the diminished use and value of formal mentoring stems from two areas: the mentors not performing their responsibilities, and the lack of structure for the program. In the first area, the problem appears to revolve around mentors not meeting with their mentees, or mentors using the mentoring sessions to air their own dissatisfactions and concerns. In the second area, the problem is often that the mentor is mismatched with the mentee; for example, having a mentor from the biological sciences mentoring a social work faculty member, or having a non-PhD faculty member mentoring an ABD faculty member. Other problems stem from having few structural guidelines or scant oversight for the mentoring process. These include having few, if any, institutional rewards for mentoring, and time constraints associated with providing the mentoring activities the mentee wants.

The structure of an informal mentoring system is such that many of these issues are avoided. In informal mentoring, the mentee usually knows the mentor prior to the initiation of the mentoring relationship; thus the issues of compatibility, trust, and the ability to relate to one another are resolved before the mentoring begins.

This is not always the case with a formal mentoring program. In an informal system, the mentor and mentee are desirous of and agreeable to this mentoring and, due to their familiarity with one another, may better understand each other's needs. Again, this is not always true with a formal mentoring program.

When one compares what mentees indicate they would like to receive in a mentoring program, and what mentors wished they had provided, there seems to be agreement. However, the question is if there is agreement on what activities are desired why do these activities - publishing, presenting, and working on research - comprise less than 50% of the activities provided through both formal and informal mentoring?

One possible explanation for this disconnect is that mentors may not have time to work with their mentees on research, publication, and presentations. Since it is somewhat less time-consuming to explain the institutional climate or to engage in scholarly discussions, these activities may be more appealing to provide. Another reason may be that the mentor and mentee have different research interests, and thus cannot find common ground to work together jointly, or possibly the mentee is not making his/her desires known to the mentor. Despite these possible reasons, it is interesting that mentees are not receiving some activities that they and the mentors state they desire.

Several limitations of this study must be addressed. The use of the BPD *listserv* may have limited responses as not all faculty members who teach or serve in BSW programs may not be on this *listserv*. It is acknowledged that the response rate was small and response numbers varied among the questions, depending on who was targeted to answer. While a higher response rate was desired, Fan & Yan (2010) and Hoonakker & Carayon (2009) found that web-based surveys produce a 10-11% lower response rate than do mailed surveys. Both studies indicate that the length of the survey can impact the response rate for web-based surveys. Although the length of the instrument in this study may have been a deterrent to higher participation, the authors attempted to mitigate this problem by instructing respondents to only answer the sections of the survey that were pertinent to their mentoring experiences.

Additional limitations exist because respondents omitted various questions. This may have led to holes in the data as respondents may have focused on those areas they had either positive or negative experiences.

Some responses may not have reflected the intent of the question, suggesting some confusion in the question construction despite piloting of the survey. A further limitation is that while the authors asked what mentees wanted in their mentoring that they were not receiving, the authors did not ask what mentees did not want to receive; interpreting what they did not want, therefore is difficult. This would be a fruitful area for future research.

The majority of respondents were female and White; therefore, these responses may not represent or reflect the experiences of males or faculty members of color. Given these issues, generalizations from the findings are cautioned. The lack of information about the mentors' preparation for their mentoring presents a void concerning the degree of competence these mentors possessed. These areas would be beneficial to explore in future research.

The small number of responses prevented the use of statistical analysis beyond descriptive statistics; however, the responses shed light on the state of mentoring for BSW social work faculty. Overall, both institutional and social work departmental mentoring programs are rated as "adequate" to assist faculty members. However, there is very little variation in how the services of these programs were rated. In addition, informal mentoring was rated very positively.

Given the exploratory nature of this study, the authors did not examine if differences in mentoring experiences existed by institutional type (research vs. teaching) or by career stage. It is possible that mentoring needs would vary by these factors and would be fruitful areas for future research.

In spite of these concerns, mentoring programs, both formal and informal, do seem to provide some positive benefits to the participants. It does appear that formal programs could be improved to enhance their effectiveness, participation, and acceptability to faculty, such as providing more oversight to the process. If nothing else, providing a well-functioning formal or informal mentoring program sends a message that the institution and social work department values their faculty members and want them to succeed.

Conclusion

Mentoring programs are the vehicle by which many colleges and universities have attempted to assist new or junior faculty members to respond to the challenges of teaching, research, and service at their institutions. Unfortunately doctoral programs have not prepared students for the demands placed upon them if they choose the professoriate as a career path. Nyquist, Austin, Sprague, and Wuff (2001) found that doctoral programs often fail to help doctoral students learn how to teach, provide little feedback and mentoring, especially in preparing doctoral students to the demands and realities of teaching in a tenure-track position in higher education. Furthermore as the literature reports, institutions or departments often provide insufficient mechanisms or mentoring opportunities to assist new faculty members to adjust and build a successful academic career.

There is little question that America's institutions of higher education are facing difficult times. As financial and budget needs constrict full-time faculty positions, and delivery of a curriculum through technology based on-line and distance learning channels, any new faculty member hired into a full-time tenure track position should be offered every support, encouragement, and effort through informal and formal channels to succeed and be successful.

As suggested by this research mentorship activities have been inconsistent on the professional tasks necessary for promotion and tenure. It is critical that opportunities to support and advance the careers of BSW faculty members, as well as other disciplines, be developed not only within institutions but within their respective home departments. Based upon the findings of this study and information gained from the literature review, mentoring programs that would provide the most benefit to mentees would include the following:

- Provision of a means for the mentee and mentor to have choice in selecting one another. This choice could be accomplished by holding a reception or “mentoring fair” which would afford mentees and mentors an opportunity to meet and discuss mentoring needs and services that would be provided.
- Provision of more services or discussions focused on scholarship activities, i.e., working with the mentee on research, publications, and presentations.
- Development of a monitoring and evaluation system, especially in formal mentoring arrangements, that would increase mentor accountability.
- Mentor transparency concerning what services they can and cannot provide as mentors.
- Mentee transparency concerning what services they wish to receive.
- Provision of assistance to the mentee in finding others who can provide services which the mentor cannot or does not provide.
- Mentor knowledge of tenure and promotion criteria and timelines involved.
- Annual review of how a new faculty member is progressing towards tenure and promotion; this may be part of end-of-year review or annual report.
- Discussion of ways to manage and balance teaching, advising, research, and community service.
- Provision of teaching tips or sharing teaching techniques relevant to class content and class size.
- Provision of institutional rewards for mentors who provide mentoring.
- Provision of information to mentors and mentees about grant opportunities and other funding sources that will aid in career advancement.
- Providing opportunities to develop new skill set with technology such as course management applications, communication, on-line or distance learning developments.

Given the current realities of academia, the criteria for tenure and promotion will most likely include more narrow definitions of success and constrictions of faculty positions.

It is important for opportunities to support and advance careers of BSW faculty members and other faculty members in other departments, by assisting them to meet and navigate the myriad demands placed upon faculty members for achieving a successful academic career. Quality mentoring can be one means for a new faculty member to achieve this goal. A college or university's most valuable and expensive resource is its faculty members; a concerted, honest, and good faith effort should be made by the institution or their respective department to ensure their new faculty member can succeed in establishing a career in the academy.

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