

Mentoring in Academic Libraries

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Abstract

The authors, who have each engaged in mentoring in higher education, surveyed academic librarians in 2017 on their mentoring experiences. Those findings are placed alongside best practices drawn from the literature to discover what motivates academic librarians to participate in mentoring and how it impacts them professionally and personally. Based on this evidence, the authors encourage colleagues to seek professional development through mentoring opportunities.

“Sometimes our light goes out, but is blown again into instant flame by an encounter with another human being. Each of us owes the deepest thanks to those who have rekindled this inner light.” Dr. Albert Schweitzer

Introduction

In a highly technological world in which academic librarians work, they desire to be seen and affirmed as people who make a positive difference on campus at their institutions. They arrive with diverse backgrounds, subject expertise, and aspirations. They undertake fulfilling their primary professional responsibilities in addition to service, and scholarship. Having a mentor to listen and guide one through a particular university system and advance one’s professional career is often desirable.

In Dr. Brene Brown’s new book, *Dare to Lead: Brave Work, Tough Conversations, Whole Hearts* she defines leadership and in doing so, describes mentoring: “I define a leader as anyone who takes responsibility for finding the potential in people and processes, and who has the courage to develop that potential.” (Brown, 2018, p.4). Although librarians earn advanced degrees, work with technology daily, and prepare budgets and strategic plans, they also engage in relationship-building with faculty, staff, and students. The knowledge industry relies on people passing on information and insights gathered through experience and study. Aligning library resources and services with an institution’s mission requires creativity, flexibility, vision, and willingness to invest in developing potential. Human beings thrive in settings that offer training, encouragement, growth opportunities, and recognition. Thus the need for mentoring in academic libraries.

Librarians typically pride themselves on their facility with information, research, and technology. They build discovery and catalog infrastructure, create classification and circulation systems, and develop vast and specialized collections. Librarians still staff the reference desk despite the advent of convenient artificial intelligence devices like Siri and Alexa. Library administrators realize people do not operate at peak performance, unlike machines, unless they are seen, heard, taught, challenged, and valued. To minimize job and career barriers, library administrators do well to support mentoring programs as part of job enrichment efforts. Among the ten behaviors that global, organizational leaders recognized as barriers is “Diminishing trust caused by a lack of connection and empathy.” (Brown, 2018, p. 8). Mentoring addresses the basic human need for connection, for someone to believe in one’s worth, and willingness to invest in one’s professional development. When done well, mentoring energizes an individual and an organization.

This psychosocial dimension of mentoring is recognized in a 2017 article by Farrell, Alabi, Whaley, and Jenda. They warn of “. . . three psychosocial issues--racial microaggressions, the impostor phenomenon, and burnout--that can negatively affect individuals and have far-reaching consequences for an organization.” (p.51). While the psychosocial dimension of mentoring is discussed less in the mentoring literature than is career advancement, it significantly impacts the individual and institution. Academic libraries, like any organization, can become locked in policies and procedures that no longer serve their campus community. Honest communication, innovative ideas, and risk-taking, which are all required to retool for the future, may be absent or may have been withheld in brainstorming sessions.

A mentoring program endorses the conviction that staff are the most valuable asset a library system possesses. Whether undertaken by a library system, a professional library organization, a campus initiative, or even organically at one librarian's request, mentoring can be the first step in addressing low morale, addressing behavior problems, retaining talented librarians, troubled by institutional economics or politics. Mentoring strengthens necessary planning to develop needed expertise to supply future skills as academic libraries continue changing. As David W. Lewis states in his book's conclusion, professional development or mentoring is the means to ensure a readiness to meet changing conditions and a smooth library succession plan. “...my library made a choice years ago to promote from within when leadership positions became available and fill vacancies with entry-level professionals. This provided a career path for existing staff and allowed the library to attract individuals with skills we needed.” (Lewis, 2016, p. 157). According to Usova and Anderson (2016) writing about the Greater Edmonton Library Association pilot program in 2015, a formal, structured program adhering to best practices, is more likely to be successful as expectations on roles and time commitment are clear, training and documentation are provided, thoughtful matching executed, and assessment is conducted (p. 28). In summary, mentoring in academic libraries has the potential to strengthen professional development, improve staff retention, prepare library leaders, and enhance job satisfaction.

What is Mentoring?

Although definitions vary, mentoring entails a relationship between two people at a minimum, where one willingly teaches the other. Eboni Johnson explains in her book *Librarian as Mentor*, “In the very broadest sense, a mentor is a person who teaches, guides, or gives advice, often - but not always - to someone who is younger and/or less experienced.” (Johnson, 2017, p.vii). Char Booth expounds, “At its best, mentorship is about communication, recognition, and mutual respect. It requires a sensitivity to encourage talent, an openness to generative collaborations, and a dedication to professional and personal growth.” (Johnson, 2017, p.xxi). One of the 2017 survey respondents wrote, “As a mentee, I wanted to develop my confidence and practice looking at the big picture. As a mentor, I try to help new supervisors understand their responsibility to the staff and also their responsibility to the institution.” Mentoring essentially involves listening and empathy, a thoughtful pairing of an experienced, knowledgeable mentor with a teachable mentee, and confidentiality. Mentoring focuses on the other and considers that person's best interests. Ideally, mentoring is a rewarding, mutual experience that strengthens community within the profession.

Mentoring Definition

“A mentor is someone who has experience-based wisdom and who is willing to spend time on issues related to the development of your career. This person's sole focus is you as the

mentee. They do not judge you but work in your best interests and as a guide on the side, not a sage on the stage. Mentors give their time and experience with no expectation of a return of any kind.” ALA Connect. <http://connect.ala.org/mentorconnect-help>

Do Academic Librarians Participate in Mentoring?

Librarianship is a profession that encourages mentoring, and this fact is evident from the literature. Hussey and Campbell-Meier (2017) surveyed more than 700 respondents on mentoring within library settings. A survey on 40 mentoring programs in academic libraries was conducted by Lorenzetti and Powelson (2015) to discover trends and best practices. Leuzinger and Rowe (2017) executed a survey with 230 responses and learned that 25% of academic libraries have mentoring programs and 18% have succession plans while only 4% have both. Nearly 50% of academic libraries had neither (p.4).

Based on these earlier works, the authors conducted their own survey in 2017 of academic librarians who had served as mentors or mentees or both. Between July 19 and August 4, 2017, the authors solicited survey respondents from 25 electronic discussion groups that either had an academic library focus or that could include academic librarians among their subscribers (see Figure 2). Respondents completed a survey of between 21 and 26 questions (depending on whether they had experience as mentees, mentors, or both) (see Appendix 1 for the full text of the survey questions). A total of 514 respondents participated in the survey, representing all fifty U.S. states and ten other countries. In terms of their mentoring role, 41% of respondents (210) had experience both as mentees and mentors. 35% (179) had only been mentees, while the remaining 24% (125) had only served as mentors. Put another way, 389 respondents (76%) have experience as mentees, while 335 (65%) have experience as mentors.

Over two-thirds work at public institutions, while the vast majority of the remaining respondents work at private non-profit institutions (under 2% reported working at for-profit institutions). Just over half of those institutions primarily offer four-year degrees, while 38% primarily offer graduate or professional degrees, and 10% primarily offer 2-year degrees. Nearly 35% of respondents work at institutions enrolling more than a 20,000 FTE student population, with 33% working at institutions between 5,000 and 19,999 FTE students in size. 18% of respondents were from institutions with between 2,000 and 4,999 FTE students. Only 14% of respondents work at institutions with fewer than 2,000 FTE students. The librarian populations of the respondents’ institutions averaged out at 30 librarians. 35% of the respondents’ institutions have fewer than 10 librarians, 25% have between 10 and 20 librarians, and 14% have between 20 and 30 librarians. 7% of the institutions have 100 or more librarians.

The academic library experience of respondents was fairly evenly divided among early career (0-6 years - 31%), mid-career (7-15 years - 33%), and later career librarians (16+ years - 36%). The respondents’ roles in their libraries were predominantly public services in nature (47%), followed by library administrators (19%), technical services (13%), and systems and technology (7%). 10% of respondents chose “other” for their role, adding in descriptors that show responsibilities that joined two or more of the other areas. It would be interesting for further surveys to investigate mentoring in areas that were underrepresented in these results.

When does mentoring make sense professionally?

Mentoring is profitable at any career stage. Early career librarians are developing job skills and self-confidence while collecting institutional knowledge.

I suppose I really hoped for someone(s) to identify skills I should develop (or was suited to developing), to help me enter the job market, and help me find meaningful opportunities to practice the skills covered in my MLIS coursework. Working with someone who shared my professional interests was helpful, but I also believed working with mentors who matched my personality was also important ... That fact that neither mentor was possessive or ego-centric was very important: they focused on MY growth not their own prestige. (2017 survey respondent)

Probationary or pre-tenure librarians seek coaching to meet service and scholarship requirements. Having served on the libraries' personnel committee for a three year term, the authors appreciate the complexities of achieving tenure within six years. Support from managers and cohorts vary within a library system, and a mentor's personal consultation may improve the outcome. Middle and senior career librarians benefit from support in new administrative positions or with succession planning. Isolated librarians, whether geographically or on a hostile campus, may value conversation with mentors to receive encouragement and problem solve. Librarians from underrepresented groups in the profession may desire insights and advice from peers with more experience. Traveling in the companionship of wise guides makes professional growth less daunting and more enjoyable. Sometimes mentoring makes all the difference to someone remaining in their job or in the profession.

In the authors' survey, mentees reported receiving mentoring more often in the earlier parts of their careers, with 41% of mentee respondents participating in mentoring as MLIS graduate students, 46% participating in their first year in a library, and 58% participating between years 2 and 6. The 7-15 years period included mentoring participation for 24% of mentees, with participation dropping off below 10% in the 16-25 years period.

Interestingly, mentors' participation in mentoring also began relatively early in their careers, with 38% mentoring in the 2-6 years period of their employment. 53% of mentors reported that they mentored others in the 7-15 years period of their careers, with the percentage dropping to 30% in the 16-25 years period. 14% of mentors also reported participating in mentoring in the 26+ years period.

Sources and Types of Mentoring

Mentoring is not a one-size fits all experience. Embarking upon a mentoring relationship may be voluntary or required, local or distant. Respondents were also asked which entities organized their mentoring experiences (if those experiences were organized). Both mentees and mentors listed the library they worked in (40% of mentees, 36% of mentors) or a library professional organization (37% of mentees, 36% of mentors) as the top sources for formal mentoring experiences. Campus organizations were the next highest group for respondents (10% of mentees, 13% of mentors), with non-library professional organizations accounting for 2% of mentees' arranged experiences and 4% of mentors' arranged experiences.

Based on a literature search, the authors identified 14 distinct mentoring characteristics or methods in use (see "Types of Mentoring" list below). While a number of these are quite common in libraries or other settings, others are less well-known. All of them were chosen by multiple respondents to the authors' survey.

Types of Mentoring

- Cross-generational mentoring
- Hired into a residency program as a new librarian
- Internship as part of MLIS program
- Matched with a mentor through a formal program
- Mentor worked outside of my library
- Mentored by a team of mentors
- Mentored through group interactions (communities of practice)
- Mentoring aimed at groups underrepresented in libraries
- Mentoring aimed at leadership development
- Peer to peer (my mentor held a similar position/specialization)
- Personal request (I sought a mentor on my own)
- Reverse mentoring (younger mentor/older mentee)
- Speed/flash mentoring
- Supervisor as mentor

Table 1 – Mentee Experiences

Experience	% All Mentees	Responses
Matched with a mentor through a formal program	51.92%	202
Supervisor as mentor	38.81%	151
Mentor worked outside of my library	38.56%	150
Peer to peer (my mentor held a similar position/specialization)	35.47%	138
Cross-generational mentoring	33.41%	130
Personal request (I sought a mentor on my own)	26.47%	103
Internship as part of MLIS program	24.93%	97
Mentoring aimed at leadership development	23.90%	93
Mentored through group interactions (communities of practice)	23.65%	92
Mentored by a team of mentors	9.76%	38
Hired into a residency program as a new librarian	6.16%	24
Mentoring aimed at groups underrepresented in libraries	6.16%	24
Reverse mentoring (younger mentor/older mentee)	3.59%	14
Speed/flash mentoring	1.54%	6

Table 2 – Mentor Experiences

Experience	% All Mentors	Responses
Matched with a mentee through a formal program	58.51%	196
Mentored as a supervisor	47.46%	159
Mentee worked outside of my library	38.81%	130
Mentored library residents or MLIS interns	36.72%	123
Peer to peer (my mentee held a similar position/specialization)	35.82%	120
Cross-generational mentoring	32.83%	110
Personal request (a mentee sought me out)	31.04%	104
Mentoring aimed at leadership development	19.40%	65
Mentored through group interactions (communities of practice)	15.52%	52
Mentored individuals as part of a team of mentors	12.53%	42
Mentoring aimed at groups underrepresented in libraries	12.53%	42
Reverse mentoring (younger mentor/older mentee)	5.37%	18
Speed/flash mentoring	5.37%	18

The types of experiences were quite similar, with formal mentoring programs topping both lists, along with mentoring by supervisors, mentoring by individuals outside of the mentee’s library, and peer-to-peer mentoring. Mentoring by personal request of the mentee (as opposed to mentoring in a formal program) was also among the most chosen options for both mentees and mentors.

What motivates a mentee to enter into this relationship?

Academic librarians work in turbulent, demanding environments. Librarians may be called upon to apply their expertise in campus initiatives (interdisciplinary research, student success), technological system overhauls (discovery service, institutional repository, data management), assessment of services and spaces (scholarly communication, information literacy, OER) responding to legal challenges (accessibility, electronic resources licensing), and

forging relationships with changing administrators. In other words, flourishing as an information professional on campus is no easy matter.

Perhaps this explains why mentees seek mentoring. Indeed, mentees value practical advice from a trusted colleague. A mentor that is willing to advance one's professional development is most welcome. Mentees also appreciate being able to vent, sound off, and be listened to by someone safe, who believes in them. Often mentees seek or are assigned a mentor to navigate successfully the promotion and tenure process. Mentees also take advantage of job hunting tactics offered by a mentor. Knowing how the system works and using networks in place are invaluable. Sometimes mentees benefit from a mentor sharing her thoughtful environmental scan of an institution's politics and personalities. This may spare them from making costly missteps. Finally, mentees may simply seek inspiration and need a role model. A mentor who can place daily activities into a big picture framework, may enable a mentee to endure short-term annoyances in light of contributing to a significant library initiative.

Mentees & Mentors Aspire

"I hoped to share my experiences in a way that was meaningful to my mentees, to help them avoid some pitfalls, to help them network, to help them by providing suggestions to make their goals easier to achieve, to help them in any way THEY wanted or needed."

"I realized my first year into my current position that I badly needed mentoring both professionally and personally or I was not going to get tenure. My supervisor mentored me in the professional aspects of my responsibilities. He told me what to do to get tenure and I did it and I got tenure. I sought a second mentor who was both a technical services librarian and a strong Christian. She mentored me in my personal and professional life and my faith, which is precisely what I asked her to do. One of her friends who was also a librarian at our organization provided much helpful career and life advice."

"Professional guidance; confidentiality; a push when I needed one, and solid questions when I wanted to try something she knew I was not ready for; honesty about my strengths, weaknesses, and skill set; a trust relationship, where I could feel safe sharing and disagreeing; a willingness to discuss both my successes and failures, what I did right and what I could do better next time, steering me to beneficial training and relationships."

"I expect(ed) a confidential, empathetic mentor who could help me make sense of confusing workplace dynamics, tricky interpersonal situations, and what I want(ed) next in my career. I wanted a friend, an inspiring role model, and someone from whom I could learn."

Mentoring Challenges

Although mentoring can produce good outcomes, not every mentoring experience is positive. Sometimes the matching does not result in a compatible pairing. This may be due to a lack of relevant experience or confidentiality or inconsistent communication. Allowing reassignments is a worthwhile option in mentoring programs. Sometimes mentees' goals are vague, unrealistic, or unachievable. Sometimes a mentor lacks the necessary training to be effective. Careful thought should be given to designing and coordinating mentoring programs in order to avoid fallout from poor planning: no mentor training, no time-release, no prompts, no recognition in promotion and tenure, little administrative support, or insufficient program duration.

Survey Respondents' Negative Mentoring Experiences

"After 5 years of providing nothing but frustration and obfuscation, my departmental mentor 'disowned' me and told me to look for someone else. She blamed our lack of 'constructive interactions' on me."

"A negative mentoring experience I had was significant. I expressed interest in writing an article but didn't know how to get started, didn't know the submission process, wasn't sure if my ideas were good ones. My supervisor/informal mentor told me to 'just write something' and we could put her name on it in addition to mine, and that would help get it accepted into a journal. I didn't get the guidance I was seeking, and that's when I stopped asking for help."

"The formal mentoring process was disappointing. The mentor lived far away and I was a very new librarian. She wanted to talk about long-term goals and I wanted to talk about immediate work challenges as I was just a baby librarian. She was really nice, but we weren't on the same page."

"I was a Spectrum Scholar early in my career with built-in mentoring - formal mentoring. Those experiences were not as successful as designed because there was little attempt to make a personal connection from my 'mentors', and they were not regionally accessible. When I mentored an MLIS student working in our library, she simply did not take the experience as a professional opportunity and did not behave as a professional."

Mentors

If mentoring is fraught with potential problems and complaints, why do mentors volunteer? Mentors are motivated to mentor by various factors. Some find satisfaction in giving back. They may empower mentees in essential but unfamiliar skills such as presenting at professional conferences, publishing, grant-writing, or national committee service. Some mentors want to help mentees set SMART goals (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely). These goals might include admission to an MLIS program, preparing a promotion and tenure dossier or job change coaching. Other mentors are enthusiastic about guiding new library directors. Some mentors enjoy encouraging new librarians who are first generation college grads, internationals, or members of underrepresented groups. Other mentors are committed to passing on institutional knowledge and culture.

Mentoring Made a Difference

"To me the most significant experiences are when both Mentor and Mentee learn from each other. What is often missed is that librarians coming into an organization have a lot to give. Significant to my mentoring experience is what I was able to learn from my mentee. ... One day we met for lunch and afterwards he showed me the various APIs that can be used in D2L. ..."

"Her initiative to act in the absence of a formal program and in the absence of a nurturing culture made a significant impact on me."

"I have a particular mentor who is very positive, but who also challenges me. She has the amazing ability to highlight for me the areas in which I need to grow in a way that I hear her and feel empowered (not ashamed or guilty) to pursue the growth I need."

“I was struggling with an absurd organization chart I had inherited in my new position. After a lot of thought, I came up with a series of small moves that I thought I could make over time to improve our structure and reporting relationships. My mentor took one look at the chart and said ‘blow it up!’. So I went ahead with a major reorganization which let me made significant progress ...”

“I wanted to break down in tears and quit my managerial role and the mentor I had talked me through it. I felt less like a failure and my imposter syndrome began to fade away.”

“The woman I asked to be my mentor had a way of calming me down and helping me look at things in perspective. Since I suffer from Generalized Anxiety Disorder, it helped to have someone calmly tell me that I was doing well and there was either nothing to worry about or the situation was fixable and here were the actions I needed to take and everything would turn out fine in the end.”

The preceding six survey respondents’ recollections of what mentors provided to them. What we learn from these voices about mentors is that it is critical and life-changing in some cases. Mentors dispense wisdom and counsel, based on a lifetime of experience, to one who seeks a listener and guide in decision-making. A mentor takes time to understand a mentee’s spoken and unspoken fears, scars, and needs as a person and as a librarian. Without judgement, the mentor enters into a situation and offers a way to travel onward professionally. The mentor serves the interests of the mentee in good faith rather than focus on what might go wrong for the department or library when change ensues. Bicknell-Holmes concurs that honest communication and confidentiality characterize the ideal mentor (2018, p. 8).

Mentoring Best Practices

The survey respondents shared aspects of their mentoring experiences that can be used to build a set of best practices for mentoring relationships. These came from both direct questions about facets of the mentoring they experienced and also open ended questions about what an ideal mentoring experience includes. Their responses are divided below into two categories: (1) logistical elements of how mentoring should operate and (2) characteristics that mentors should exhibit. The discussion below identifies best practices for mentoring in both of these groupings, which are summarized in the “Mentoring Made a Difference” section above.

The logistical elements include aspects and practices that could be chosen for formal mentoring programs but also utilized in more informal arrangements. Survey respondents were asked to indicate whether or not their mentoring experience included several components. The three components which were chosen most often were meeting in person (84% of respondents), online communication (70% of respondents), and unplanned, informal exchanges (64% of respondents). Less common were four other components that were chosen by roughly 40% of respondents: assessment or feedback, defined goals or outcomes, thoughtful pairing of mentee and mentor, and arranged events for mentoring (meetings, workshops, etc.). The least chosen component, by only 27% of respondents, was regular prompts for discussion. These results suggest that the mentoring experiences represented by survey respondents were flexible in terms of how the mentor and mentee met, and not very structured in terms of including defined outcomes, assessment methods, or set meetings or guided discussions.

Survey participants were also asked to describe a significant mentoring experience. Several logistical elements were shared in these descriptions, and those that appeared most often could serve as best practices. Participant input should be a part of the mentor-mentee matching process to ensure a good fit and also to increase the likelihood of psychological

compatibility in the pairing. A strong theme in the comments was the need for regular meetings at a frequency that works best for the mentee. Successful experiences for mentors included structured training and providing an adequate pool of mentors to not overload any individuals with mentees. Something that appeared in comments from mentors was the need for incentives to attract mentors to a program and also the recognition of mentors' service in promotion and tenure policies. A number of mentees spoke of situations where working with a peer mentor in their libraries led to the design of research studies and helped them develop skills in publishing, presenting, or grant-writing. Educating librarians in these skills could be designed as an expectation of some mentoring programs. One final logistical element was that regular assessment of mentoring programs is crucial and that assessing participants' experiences can help organizers address or avoid difficulties and make overall improvements.

Mentors and mentees should consider the following characteristics as crucial to performing their roles. Survey respondents were also asked to choose the most important three characteristics they value in a mentoring experience. The top three choices were listening and empathy (55% of respondents), the mentor is knowledgeable and experienced (44%), and confidentiality (31%). Closely following that last choice were thoughtful pairing of mentee and mentor (30%), the mentee is open and teachable (28%), and that the pair share common interests (28%). The remaining two characteristics on the survey were that achievable goals should be set for the mentoring experience (25%) and that the mentor and mentee should be close enough to meet in person (22%).

Relationship-building is central to mentoring. While some mentoring programs give careful attention to matching mentor and mentee, based on completed questionnaires, most mentoring programs operate on the basis of mentors who are unpaid volunteers or who are assigned by their institution as a job duty. Programs rarely rely on psychological screening of the mentor. Programs may not offer mentor training, to the detriment of the mentee. Mentoring, however, is serious business as is leadership. Corporations and sports organizations go to great lengths to locate the right coach or administrator and willingly pay sizable salaries. Employees are arguably an organization's most valuable asset. As noted earlier, Brown's definition of "leader" overlaps with the role mentors play. Ideally, daring leaders and mentors possess these character traits.

Mentors need empathy or the ability to connect with the feelings related to their mentee's experiences. Mentors need to set safe boundaries so the mentee can be open, honest, and authentic in conversations. This fosters trust between them. Keeping confidences allows trust to develop. Survey respondents often referred to the importance of confidentiality. Brown refers to this characteristic as "vault". "I need to know that my confidences are kept, and that you're not sharing with me any information about other people that should be confidential" (p.225). Although mentors are not know-it-alls, they are curious about life and "always learning" (p. 92). Consequently, the mentoring experience is mutual. Mentors also recognize and normalize fear and uncertainty as part of life and the workplace. "There is incredible relief and power in naming and normalizing fear and uncertainty (p.105).

Finding one's way in academic libraries is challenging as one must acclimate to the culture, politics, and personalities on campus. Sometimes mentoring includes acknowledging less than ideal situations that involve discord and difference. Sometimes fear surfaces in transitions from old to new ways of operating. For example, staying current with emerging technologies requires vigilance and effort, as librarians use and train others in systems, software, and search. Problem solving is ongoing in this environment. As new technology is adopted across the university, old methods are discarded. This places stress on people and budgets. Mentors need courage to be clear and kind and say what they mean about changing

realities. Moving forward courageously and accepting change, whether changing work protocols or changing jobs) is easier when supported. In summary, a mentor is one who willingly journeys with the mentee for a time, listens, and guides on behalf of that individual's well-being.

Table 3 - Mentoring Best Practices

Mentoring Logistics	Mentoring Characteristics
Assess the experience	Clarity and kindness
Create structured programs with goals, requirements, and prompts	Confidentiality
Encourage regular meetings	Empathy
Grant release time/recognize as professional service	Establish boundaries
Intentionally pair mentors and mentees	Knowledge and expertise shared
Meet in-person	Lifelong learners
Train mentors	Listen
Use peer mentors	Mutuality
	Non-judgment / acceptance
	Normalize uncertainty
	Trust

Conclusion

Mentoring is clearly present in academic libraries and has made an impact in the careers of librarians. The participant quotes below illustrate the powerful impact mentoring can have, while cautioning against poor practices. There are a wide variety of mentoring approaches in use that can be implemented by libraries, professional organizations, and even individual librarians to share and receive career guidance and support. Having surveyed academic librarians, reviewed the literature, and personally participated in mentoring experiences, the authors offer the following observations.

First, connecting with another person, especially one engaged in teaching, learning, and research, can be transformative. Relationships enrich what might otherwise be an impersonal, isolated work world. Who will speak for me? Who will write a reference on my behalf? We grow by understanding work and life through perspectives other than our own. Mentoring may result in meaningful relationships, as we listen to each other's stories of hardship and aspiration.

Second, time spent mentoring is an investment in the profession's future. Whether the mentor encourages a mentee through the promotion and tenure process or whether an administrator provides staff professional development to ensure successful succession planning, mentoring can be an essential ingredient. Mentoring allows experienced academic librarians a way to pass on what they have learned over a lifetime: campus culture, complex library system, emerging technologies, and a changing publishing landscape. Mentoring is mutual and intentional about sharing knowledge, networks, power, and recognition. Preparing the next generation for new responsibilities is worthwhile and rewarding.

Third, mentoring is neither intuitive nor easy. Sometimes potential mentors need to be trained before they are ready to mentor. Guidelines for acceptable behavior can be shared by the library administration or the mentoring program and participants can practice role plays. Librarianship is intended to be inclusive and a profession that welcomes diversity. Past abusive experiences or microaggressions may prevent a librarian from entering fully into a mentoring experience. Some "mentors" may be unable to consider the interests of others; not everyone is altruistic. Mentoring, therefore, should be voluntary rather than required by an institution. Including safety outlets and boundaries is important in any mentoring program. If a pairing is not compatible or causes harm, then allow the pair to disengage with dignity. Attempt a better psychosocial or professional fit. Ideally, mentors accompany the librarians they are mentoring in their professional journey and at their pace. They may affirm strengths, cultivate potential, and assist the mentee to navigate the profession of academic librarianship.

Mentoring fulfills the need for relationship-building within library organizations and allows for individuals to reflect, regroup, be challenged, and thrive. Libraries and professional organizations that provide mentoring opportunities set themselves apart as compelling cultures to join. Librarians should seriously consider seeking out mentoring throughout their careers.

Mentoring is Foundational

"My last job was at a large ARL with a culture of professionalism and mentoring. My job now, at a community college, has provided me with fewer development opportunities, and this is a big factor in how long I intend to stay at this institution."

"Mentoring has been incredibly important to me. I wish mentorships were included as a given in every MLIS program and every new position, and I wish that more workplaces were more supportive of those who chose to be mentors. It's the best way to pass information on from more experienced to less experienced librarians, and it's good for the profession as a whole. It's also incredibly important for POC, LGBTQ, and first generation librarians."

"I think it can be a huge waste of time if not done properly. There need to be expectations for the mentor and the mentee. ... The fact that one of my mentors never spoke to me and that went on for months is inexcusable for a tenure-track librarian."

“I belong to ACRL's New College Library Directors Mentoring Program. Both my mentor and mentee experiences were arranged through the program. ...This program is absolutely incredible. It's hugely important to my work life.”

Additional Resources

The authors have compiled an extensive bibliography on academic library mentoring at <https://tinyurl.com/acadlibmentoring>

Appendix: Mentoring Survey Questions

Mentoring has the potential of impacting individual lives and the profession of librarianship. Mentoring connotes a wise, trusted counselor, guiding someone less experienced. In academic librarianship, mentoring may operate in different ways for different purposes. What has your mentoring experience entailed?

If you have been either a mentee or a mentor (or both) and work in an academic library, we would very much appreciate your completing this survey. It consists of approximately 20 questions and should take 10-15 minutes to complete. Your responses will be kept anonymous, and data other than text comments will only be presented in aggregate form.

Findings will be reported at the Academic Library Association of Ohio Annual Conference, and a summary of results will be posted to the listserv where you found the survey link.

Thank you for making time to help one another grow professionally

How long have you worked in academic libraries?

- 0-1 years
- 2-6 years
- 7-15 years
- 16-25 years
- 26+ years

My job is primarily:

- Technical services
- Public services
- Systems/technology
- Solo librarian
- Library administrator
- Other

My institution primarily offers:

- Two-year degrees
- Four-year degrees
- Graduate or professional degrees

My institution is:

- Public
- Private (non-profit)
- For-profit

What FTE student population does your campus serve?

- <500
- 500-1999
- 2000-4999
- 5000-9999
- 10000-19999
- 20000+

How many professional librarians are employed by your campus library?

Where is your campus library located (state/province/country)?

Mentoring role(s) I have participated in (check all that apply):

- Mentee
- Mentor

As a mentee, I have participated in these types of mentoring experiences (check all that apply):

- Cross-generational mentoring
- Hired into a residency program as a new librarian
- Internship as part of MLIS program
- Matched with a mentor through a formal program
- Mentor worked outside of my library
- Mentored by a team of mentors
- Mentored through group interactions (communities of practice)
- Mentoring aimed at groups underrepresented in libraries
- Mentoring aimed at leadership development
- Peer to peer (my mentor held a similar position/specialization)
- Personal request (I sought a mentor on my own)
- Reverse mentoring (younger mentor/older mentee)
- Speed/flash mentoring
- Supervisor as mentor

As a mentee, check the time periods in your career in libraries when you participated in mentoring (check all that apply):

- as an MLIS graduate student
- 0-1 years
- 2-6 years
- 7-15 years
- 16-25 years
- 26+ years
- Other

As a mentee, approximately how many structured/formal mentoring experiences have you participated in? (enter a number below):

As a mentee, approximately how many informal mentoring experiences have you participated in? (enter a number below):

As a mentee, if your mentoring experiences were organized, who arranged them? (check all that apply):

- My library
- A library professional organization
- A campus organization
- A non-library professional organization
- Other

As a mentor, I have participated in these types of mentoring experiences (check all that apply):

- Cross-generational mentoring
- Matched with a mentee through a formal program
- Mentee worked outside of my library
- Mentored as a supervisor
- Mentored individuals as part of a team of mentors
- Mentored library residents or MLIS interns
- Mentored through group interactions (communities of practice)
- Mentoring aimed at groups underrepresented in libraries
- Mentoring aimed at leadership development
- Peer to peer (my mentee held a similar position/specialization)
- Personal request (a mentee sought me out)
- Reverse mentoring (younger mentor/older mentee)
- Speed/flash mentoring

As a mentor, check the points in your career when you participated in mentoring (check all that apply):

- 0-1 years
- 2-6 years
- 7-15 years
- 16-25 years
- 26+
- Other

As a mentor, approximately how many structured/formal mentoring experiences have you participated in? (enter a number below):

As a mentor, approximately how many informal mentoring experiences have you participated in? (enter a number below):

As a mentor, if your mentoring experiences were organized, who arranged them? (check all that apply):

- My library
- A library professional organization
- A campus organization
- A non-library professional organization
- Other

Of the mentoring experiences you have participated in, have any of them lasted (check all that apply):

- for a single meeting
- less than one month
- 1-3 months
- 3-6 months
- 6-12 months
- 1 year or longer
- Other

Which of the following components did your mentoring experiences include? (check all that apply):

- Meeting in-person
- Online communication
- Arranged events for mentoring (meetings, workshops, etc.)
- Unplanned, informal interchanges
- Thoughtful pairing of mentee and mentor
- Regular prompts for discussion
- Defined goals or outcomes
- Assessment or feedback

Which characteristics do you value in a mentoring experience? (check the 3 you find most important):

- Achievable goals
- Common interests
- Confidentiality
- Listening and empathy
- Mentee and mentor are close enough to meet in-person
- The mentee is open and teachable
- The mentor is knowledgeable and experienced
- Thoughtful pairing of mentee and mentor

What did you expect or desire from your mentoring experiences?

What challenges or frustrations did you experience in mentoring?

Describe a significant mentoring experience. What made it so?

Do you have any additional comments on mentoring?

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