While I walked across campus on my first day of work as a new faculty member at a community college, I was greeted by several members of the faculty and my supervisor. They graciously helped me locate and arrange my office, showed me around campus, and introduced me to many new people, including students. As the first day of class approached, one of the faculty members in my department helped me plan for the first college course I would be teaching. I learned how to prepare a course syllabus, access required textbooks from the bookstore, and use classroom technology. I did not ask for help; it was just offered. Throughout the semester I tried teaching strategies included in the book given to me by my supervisor. Some worked and others did not, but it was exciting to try so many new things. A member of the faculty offered to accompany me to the first faculty meeting and explain meeting protocol. I was nervous. After the meeting, several faculty members approached me to discuss our similar interests in student success, and I learned about a retention study being conducted at the college. I even was asked to participate in the project! I ended up contributing to the project during the spring semester and as a result, co-authored my first scholarly publication. It was a great first year as a community college faculty member. I have learned so much about my students and my role in facilitating their success. Because of my colleagues, I feel connected—like I am part of the community college family. I could stay in this job forever!

The fictitious experience may or may not reflect the culture experienced by faculty new to the community college environment. However, the story reflects a culture where mentoring is a shared value.
of faculty and administration. The community uses mentoring as a strategy for socializing new members to the faculty role. As newly-hired faculty establish relationships with colleagues and learn the practices and beliefs of the group, they become embedded members of the community. Embeddedness can reduce an employee’s intent to leave or actual leaving (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, & Erez, 2001). Thus, establishing a culture that includes faculty mentoring can be beneficial to the success of a community college.

**Conceptualizing the culture**

In order to effectively infuse mentoring into the culture of a community college, it is important to understand the concept and associated terminology. Despite an abundance of published literature, a single definition of mentoring, recognized across all disciplines, does not exist. Roberts (2000) uses a phenomenological approach to identify common themes among the various published definitions and consolidates a comprehensive definition of the concept. According to Roberts, mentoring is “a formalized process whereby a more knowledgeable and experienced person actuates a supportive role of overseeing and encouraging reflection and learning within a less experienced and knowledge-able person, so as to facilitate that person’s career and personal development” (p. 162). Using his definition, it becomes apparent that in a community college setting, faculty more knowledgeable about the practices and policies of the educational community can assume a supportive role in the development of such knowledge in newly-hired faculty.

Just as the literature reflects multiple definitions of mentoring, it also includes a variety of models, frameworks, and schemes used in disciplines such as education (Holloway, 2001; Kajs, 2002; Kunselman, Hensley, & Tewksbury, 2003), nursing (Andrews & Wallis, 1999; Thorpe & Kalischuk, 2003), and science and engineering (Kasprisin, Single, Single, & Muller, 2003). Literature reviews (Kajs, 2002; Kunselman et al., 2003), Kolb’s theory of experiential learning, Knowle’s adult learning principles (McKinley, 2004), and career development theories (Perna, Lerner, & Yura, 1995) have served as the foundation for the various approaches. While the models and their bases vary, several attributes remain consistent among them—the use of specific terminology, the importance of identifying the shared responsibilities of those engaged in the mentoring relationship, uses of a process for selecting members of the relationship, and the practice
of maintaining the mentoring relationship over time.

Since mentoring relationships consist of a less experienced and a more experienced individual, it is important to consistently use appropriate terminology when discussing practices that might become part of written policy or agreements. For example, coach and preceptor are terms that have been used interchangeably with mentor, yet these may reflect a short-term relationship rather than the long-term relationship that is a key part of effective mentoring. According to Young and Wright (2001), a mentor is the experienced or skilled member of the relationship who serves as the guide. The less experienced member is referred to as the protégé or mentee.

While some mentoring relationships consist of one mentor and mentee, others include a group approach where multiple mentors facilitate the development of a single mentee. Regardless of the approach, participants must understand the responsibilities associated with their positions and be prepared to function effectively in their respective roles. Since participants must actively contribute to the relationship, administrators need to be attentive to the time required for collaborative conversation between mentor and mentee because workload issues have the potential to impede the development of successful mentoring relationships.

Approaches to initiating a mentor-mentee relationship can be formal or informal. Kajs (2002) indicates the prevailing practice in the discipline of education is for administrators to select teachers to serve as mentors and formally pair them with a mentee. Mentor selection is usually based on competency and compatibility between mentor and mentee. Conversely, Perna et al. (1995) report that pairing of mentor and mentee can occur informally, such as when both individuals have common research interests and their mentoring relationship evolves spontaneously. Regardless of the strategy for identifying appropriate participants, it is important to note that all involved parties commit to a long-term mentoring relationship.

The mission, vision, and goals of an institution can serve as the context for discussion of various mentoring theories. Plans for assessing the effectiveness of mentoring practices should be considered early in the conceptualization phase. Outcome data will assist community members in refining practices, thus leading to ongoing evolution of the mentoring culture. The key components of the conceptualization process can be summarized in Checklist 1.
Checklist 1

Conceptualize the Culture

1. Define mentoring within the context of the community
2. Identify goals of the mentoring culture
3. Devise a framework for creating the mentoring culture
   - Process for identifying and selecting mentors
   - Strategy for pairing of mentor and mentee
   - Identification of responsibilities for mentor and mentee
4. Plan for assessing effectiveness of the new culture
   - Select measurement tools

Creating and sustaining the culture

Once the new culture has been conceptualized, it is time to create the new environment. Key components of the process include communication, supporting those involved in the mentoring relationship, focusing on future mentors, and creating a process for improving practice. Checklist 2 includes strategies to consider at the beginning of the enculturation process.

Checklist 2

Create and Sustain the Culture

5. Plan for development of mentors and mentees
6. Determine how to recognize and reward mentors
7. Develop a continuous improvement cycle
8. Create an evidence base
9. Spread the word to other communities

In order to create an environment where mentoring is a shared value of the community, it is important to communicate attributes of the new culture, as well as the rationale for selecting mentoring practices, to all members of the community. Open forums, small group discussions, and formal written policies are possible options. These strategies can also be employed during the conceptualization process to gather input and feedback from community members.

Effective development of mentors and mentees eases the transition from current to conceptualized culture. The mentor and mentee can gain understanding of their roles and responsibilities from participation in formal professional development conferences, accessing printed and online resource materials, and engaging...
in reflective practice as a way to enhance understanding. They will need institutional support as well as frequent discussions regarding their expectations and experiences.

Since success of the cultural transition depends on senior faculty serving as mentors, it is important to appropriately recognize and reward their contributions to the community. Workload reduction, supplemental salary, and written accolades are just a few suggested strategies for recognizing effective mentors who are willing to share their time and talents with newly-hired faculty. Today’s mentee has the potential to become tomorrow’s mentor. Therefore, encouraging and highlighting effective mentoring relationships should play a key role in sustaining a mentoring culture at a community college.

It would be erroneous to believe that creating and sustaining the new culture will be easy. Incorporating a continuous improvement framework into the mentoring program can help the evolutionary process. Outcomes, in the form of goals and objectives, can be measured and evaluated to serve as evidence regarding effectiveness of the new culture. Results can help community members target areas for enhancement and refinement. As community colleges establish best practices for mentoring, they must communicate their experience to the larger academic community where their evidence base can inform others. Figure 1 depicts the cycle.

**Figure 1.** Enhancing the culture and creating an evidence base

- **Identify outcomes**
- **Implement cultural practices**
- **Refine and enhance culture**
- **Measure and evaluate effectiveness**
- **Share results to create evidence base**
Conclusion

The suggestions throughout are intended to serve as a basic guide for making the fictitious faculty member’s experience described at the beginning of the article a reality. A community could use all components of an established mentoring model or select various practices and combine them to form a model unique to one’s institution. What may be most beneficial to starting the process is exploring and discussing what mentoring means to members of one’s community and what goals could be accomplished by implementing a new mentoring culture. Creating such a culture is one strategy for community colleges to embed quality faculty in their institutions.

References


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