

Mentoring/Female Role Models

Educational level: *University* | Beneficiaries: *Students & faculty*

Background

Universities in both high- and low-resource settings face gender imbalances in student enrollment and faculty leadership. Traditional cultural beliefs that the woman's role is in the household have been cited as contributing to early marriages and pregnancies and limited school retention.¹ Studies at the University of Michigan² and the University of Minnesota³ have found that women faculty advance through the professional structure more slowly than do male faculty. Mentoring is a strategy to mitigate these disparities.

Description

For female students, mentors range from former students (University of Nairobi¹) to peer mentors (University of Ottawa^{4,5}) to faculty (University of Ghana,⁶ University of Minnesota Medical School⁷). Many programs are designed to facilitate experience sharing, relationship-building, and academic and career advising. Some programs hold networking and social events and skills-building workshops. The University of Ottawa's peer mentoring program features over 100 undergraduate student mentors in 20 mentoring centers across the university's departments^{8,9} and encourages graduate students to take advantage of peer mentoring to "stay motivated and committed until graduation."⁵ Peer mentors may even be eligible to receive a mentoring scholarship of up to CAD \$4,500.¹⁰ The University of Michigan offers students free use of MentorNet, an external service that provides individual mentoring in science and engineering to undergraduate, graduate, and post-doctoral students and junior faculty.¹¹

More extensive documentation on mentoring for female faculty was available for universities in the US and Canada. Mentoring for female faculty also focuses on career advising, networking, skills development, and experience sharing. The University of Ottawa's Centre for Academic Leadership coordinates the matching of mentors and mentees, who are encouraged to meet in person for 90 minutes at least monthly over the course of one year.^{12,13} The University of Minnesota Medical School has a wide-reaching faculty mentoring program, having developed a policy that all junior faculty members should have a mentor or mentoring team.³ Moreover, the University of Michigan facilitates individual and/or group mentoring relationships through provision of resources (e.g., handbooks and directories of volunteer career advisors),¹⁴ open mentoring sessions, peer mentoring, and "zone mentoring," in which senior leaders serve as resources for multiple faculty members in a particular area.²

Results

Reviewers rated this practice as featuring the following gender transformative characteristics:

- Challenge and change common discriminatory gender beliefs or norms
- Change or attempt to change an imbalance of power or otherwise level the playing field
- Transform family, school, and/or work arrangements so that women are not economically or socially penalized/disadvantaged for caregiving.

By providing examples of female leaders and cultivating leadership skills in female students and faculty, this practice challenges beliefs that women are not competent managers and leaders. Mentoring is also intended to empower junior professionals, thus attempting to level the playing field by demonstrating examples of successful women. Career advising that touches on integrating work and family life helps to transform work arrangements for female faculty. Reviewers did note, however, that there is limited information on what level of education on discrimination or rights the practice offers.

No formal evaluations of student or faculty mentoring at the institutions included in this review were available, though a 2005 survey of female faculty at the University of Michigan indicated perceived positive changes, including improved mentoring procedures for both male and female faculty, increased networking opportunities, and an increased number of science and engineering women faculty who are recruited, hired, and retained.¹⁵ However, respondents also felt that there was still a lack of administrators and male faculty members who are sensitive to issues of diversity. Program data from faculty mentees at the University of Ottawa from 2006–2008 found that over 50% believed “the mentoring relationship helped them to improve productivity, reduce stress, better identify available resources, and better understand their faculty”¹⁶ and that “more than 60% found that the mentoring experience had a positive influence on their job satisfaction and sense of belonging.”¹⁶

Summary conclusions

More documentation and evaluation is needed to determine the effectiveness and gender transformativeness of the practice. Nonetheless, the reviewers did find this practice to have significant gender transformative potential in providing resources to change traditional norms and challenge gender imbalances and motivate female students and faculty to pursue their educational and professional goals.

Reference(s) and source(s)

1. Griffin, Anne-Marea, ed. 2007. *Educational Pathways in East Africa: Scaling a Difficult Terrain*. Kampala, Uganda: Association for the Advancement of Higher Education and Development (AHEAD).
<http://www.pathwaystohighereducation.org/resources/pdf/0047.pdf> (accessed June 3, 2011).
2. University of Michigan. Report of the Subcommittee on Faculty Recruitment, Retention, and Leadership. http://www.advance.rackham.umich.edu/GSE-Faculty_Recruitment_Retention.pdf (accessed June 3, 2011).
3. Shollen, S. Lynn, Carole J. Bland, Deborah A. Finstad, and Anne L. Taylor. 2009. “Organizational climate and family life: how these factors affect the status of women faculty at one medical school.” *Academic Medicine* 84(1), 87-94.
4. University of Ottawa. Student Academic Success Service Student Mentoring Program. <http://www.sass.uottawa.ca/mentoring/> (accessed June 6, 2011).
5. University of Ottawa. Student Mentoring Program: Graduate Studies. <http://www.sass.uottawa.ca/mentoring/graduate/> (accessed June 6, 2011).

6. Centre for Gender Studies and Advocacy, University of Ghana. Mentoring and Professional Development. <http://cegensa.ug.edu.gh/index.php/programs/94-mentoring-and-prof-dev> (accessed June 6, 2011).
7. University of Minnesota Medical School. Medical Education: Faculty Advisors. <http://www.meded.umn.edu/students/advisors/index.php> (accessed June 6, 2011).
8. University of Ottawa. Student Mentoring Program: Student Mentoring Program: Undergraduate Level. <http://www.sass.uottawa.ca/mentoring/undergraduate/> (accessed June 6, 2011).
9. University of Ottawa. Student Mentoring Program: Student Mentoring Program: Undergraduate Level Mentoring Centres. <http://www.sass.uottawa.ca/mentoring/undergraduate/mentoring-centers.php> (accessed June 6, 2011).
10. University of Ottawa. Student Mentoring Program: Student Mentoring Program: Undergraduate Level: CIBC Mentoring Scholarships. <http://www.sass.uottawa.ca/mentoring/undergraduate/cibc-mentoring-awards.php> (accessed June 6, 2011).
11. University of Michigan. Free Mentoring for Undergraduate and Graduate Students. http://sitemaker.umich.edu/advance/advising_and_mentoring_for_students (accessed June 3, 2011).
12. University of Ottawa. Centre for Academic Leadership: What are the steps to getting a mentor? <http://www.academicleadership.uottawa.ca/steps.php> (accessed June 6, 2011).
13. University of Ottawa. Centre for Academic Leadership: What is the length of the Mentoring program? <http://www.academicleadership.uottawa.ca/lengthofprogram.php> (accessed June 6, 2011).
14. University of Michigan. Career Advising/Mentoring for Faculty. http://sitemaker.umich.edu/advance/career_advising_mentoring_for_faculty (accessed June 3, 2011).
15. University of Michigan. March 2005. Summary of Analyses of the Survey of the Climate for Women Scientists and Engineers in 2001 and 2005. www.advance.rackham.umich.edu/climate2005.pdf (accessed June 3, 2011).
16. University of Ottawa. Centre for Academic Leadership: What are the benefits of the Mentorship program? <http://www.academicleadership.uottawa.ca/benefits.php> (accessed June 6, 2011).

Other references used in this review

- Centre for Gender Studies and Advocacy, University of Ghana. Centre for Gender Studies and Advocacy, University of Ghana: Vice Chancellor's Report 2007/08. <http://cegensa.ug.edu.gh/2008.pdf> (accessed June 6, 2011).
- Centre for Gender Studies and Advocacy, University of Ghana. Centre for Gender Studies and Advocacy, University of Ghana: Annual Report 2008/09. <http://cegensa.ug.edu.gh/2009.pdf> (accessed June 6, 2011).
- University of Michigan. ADVANCE Committee Membership. http://sitemaker.umich.edu/advance/advance_committees (accessed June 3, 2011).

- University of Michigan. March 2011. ADVANCE Program Overview. http://sitemaker.umich.edu/advance/files/advance_program_overview.pdf (accessed June 3, 2011).
- University of Michigan. March 2006. Assessing the climate for doctoral students at the University of Michigan: Executive Summary. www.advance.rackham.umich.edu/PhD_Report_es.pdf (accessed June 3, 2011).
- University of Minnesota Medical School. Women's Mentoring Program. <http://www.med.umn.edu/duluth-internal-resources/faculty-and-staff-resources/womens-mentorship-program/index.htm> (accessed June 6, 2011).
- University of Ottawa. Centre for Academic Leadership: Mentoring for faculty. <http://www.academicleadership.uottawa.ca/mentoringnewprofs.php> (accessed June 6, 2011).
- University of Ottawa. Centre for Academic Leadership: What are the objectives of the Mentoring program? <http://www.academicleadership.uottawa.ca/specificobjective.php> (accessed June 6, 2011).
- University of Ottawa. Student Mentoring Program: Student Mentoring Program: Undergraduate Level: How can a mentor help you? <http://www.sass.uottawa.ca/mentoring/undergraduate/how-we-help.php> (accessed June 6, 2011).