Mentors and Muses: New Strategies for Academic Success

Holly Angelique, Ken Kyle, and Ed Taylor

ABSTRACT: Mentoring programs in higher education institutions have met with mixed success. In response to the limitations inherent in the dominant approaches to mentoring, we present an example of a unusual mentoring program, the New Scholars Network (NSN). The NSN is a variant of traditional mentoring approaches, having evolved from mentoring into musing. Framed within a radical humanist philosophy, musing is a process of creating peer communities that facilitates connections between naturally developing relationships, shared power, and collective action. Through mentoring as musing new faculty have the potential to evolve as change agents in the institution, instead of assimilating into the existing system.

KEY WORDS: mentoring; peer mentoring; new faculty.

While sometimes billed as a utopia-like ivory tower, offering employees privilege and sanctuary from the demands of the real world, the university is often more dystopian than utopian for graduate assistants and faculty members—especially new and junior faculty members (See Kalivoda, Sorrell & Simpson, 1994; Olsen, 1993; Sorcinelli & Austin, 1992). Universities can be and all too often are atomizing, disassociative institutions that feed off of graduate assistants, untenured faculty members, and tenure-track faculty members (Boice, 1992). This is especially the case in small universities, branch campuses, and interdisciplinary departments. Moreover, the material resources available at smaller universities and branch campuses are often limited, possibly resulting in new tenure-track faculty falling through the cracks. Such isolation and resource scarcity can have debilitating effects on new, tenure-track faculty members' morale; post-graduate school adjustment; and, therefore, also on their prospects for acquiring tenure.

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Many institutions have addressed these challenges by establishing formal and informal mentoring programs. However, mentoring programs in higher education have met with mixed success. Though not all identical, such programs are based on the premise that more experienced faculty will assist, guide, and support the new and non-tenured faculty through the murky and sometimes treacherous waters leading to tenure (Daloz, 1999; Jacobi, 1991). On the surface this seems like an obvious and effective approach. However, based on what is reported in the related literature and our experiences, mentoring in its traditional form can be problematic (Darwin, 2000; Powell, 1999). Subsequently, other forms of mentoring have emerged in higher education, such as peer mentoring (Campbell, Angelique, Bootsmiller, & Davidson, 2000; Smith, et al., 2001; Sparks & Bruder, 1987). In peer mentoring, faculty of mutual interest and stature form dyads or triads to share job related information and career strategies and to provide each other with emotional support. However, peer mentoring has its limitations as well. For example, opportunities for faculty from marginalized groups to find likeminded colleagues can be quite limited, particularly on smaller campuses; and there is an assumption that colleagues of equal stature will work in each other's best interest regardless of the competitive culture that often exists in higher education institutions (Stalker, 1994).

In response to these limitations we provide an example of a new mentoring program, the New Scholars Network (NSN), in a small university. The NSN is a variant of traditional mentoring approaches, having evolved from mentoring into musing. Framed within a radical humanist philosophy, musing is a process of creating peer communities that facilitates connections between naturally developing relationships, shared power, and collective action. Through mentoring as musing new faculty have the potential to evolve as change agents in the institution, instead of assimilating into the existing system.

To contextualize our efforts, we first provide an overview and critique of mentoring. We explore traditional mentoring and discuss peer mentoring as a possible alternative. Second, we share our experiences within the NSN as an indigenous peer mentoring group. Third, we recount the way the NSN developed from a peer mentoring group to a musing collective, i.e., a faculty mentoring group that conscientiously responds to multiple relationships and related power dynamics among members. In addition we discuss the theoretical underpinnings of our musing activities. Realizing that our unease and stress in adjusting to a new and rather unexpected work environment are not unusual, we present our experiences as a guide for other new tenure-track faculty members and administrators in higher education.

Traditional and Peer Mentoring

Over the last three decades, interest in mentoring and attempts to implement successful mentoring programs have increased throughout higher education. Review of the literature on mentoring suggests that the types of mentoring programs, the assumptions underpinning them, and the goals of mentoring programs vary greatly. They might best be presented as falling along a continuum. Nevertheless, to facilitate discussion, we divide mentoring into two distinct types—traditional mentoring and peer mentoring. Indeed, traditional mentoring programs and peer mentoring programs themselves may be said to fall along continua of their own. Accordingly, we realize that there is overlap between these categories and that we are creating these types as much as we are reporting on them.

Traditional Mentoring

Traditional mentoring reflects the prototypical relationship, as described in Homer's *The Odyessy*, where Athena (disguised as Mentor), at the bequest of Odysseus, serves as a model, advisor, and teacher to Telemachus, his disciple and student (Carden, 1990, Daloz, 1999; Galbraith & Cohen, 1995). Characteristically, mentoring in this form involves a one-to-one, uni-directional, asymmetrical relationship in which a junior and less experienced individual is paired with an experienced person with intent to receive guidance and support (Blackwell, 1989) Whether one's journey is an odyssey or a tenure process, the concept of traditional mentoring is the same.

Through an extensive review of the literature, Jacobi (1991) identified roles that mentors play in their relationship to mentees. They included providing acceptance and support, dispensing advice and guidance, coaching in the ways of the institution, imparting important and sometimes privileged information, offering visibility and exposure, and extending protection—just to mention a few. Advocates of this model argue it benefits both parties. Stalker (1994) identifies three reciprocal outcomes based on a review of the literature, including career advancement, personal development, and professional identification. For example, as mentees are trained in the practical and technical skills of the profession, "they may undertake the more 'mundane task' of the mentors' jobs and free them for more creative pursuits" (p. 364). Therefore, both the mentor and mentee should prosper and grow from the interchange of the mentoring relationship (Cohen, 1995; Daloz,

1999; Wright & Wright, 1987). In essence, complementarity charac-
terizes traditional mentoring relationships (Kram & Isabella, 1985).
Still, given the power differential inherent in such relationships, tradi-
tional mentoring might best be depicted as a hierarchical relationship
with the mentor in the top/superior position and the mentee in the
bottom/inferior position.

Critical appraisal suggests problems inherent in this model (Darwin,
2000; Powell, 1999). Traditional mentoring is an androcentric process
that reproduces "an unavoidable homogeneity and sameness on those
within the institution" (Stalker, 1994, p. 367). It can lead to recycling
the dominant power within workplace relationships. The mentees are
generally mentored by the more powerful faculty in the institution.
The mentor retains control of the power until the mentee is able to
stand on his/her own, generally upon receiving tenure. Then the pro-
cess begins again: the former protégé becomes a mentor for a new
faculty member. "This recycling of power is based on the assumption
that mentoring is a power-dependent, hierarchical activity, which ini-
tiates the protégé and renews the mentor" (Darwin, 2000, p. 4). Ac-
cordingly, traditional mentoring has an exploitative potential, where
the mentor can take advantage of the mentee through unrealistic ex-
pectations, excessive demands for time, and even inappropriate sexual
intimacy (Phillips-Jones, 1982). It is a process that sanctions an eli-
tist patron system, whereby the academically marginalized (marked
by age, race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality) are often excluded and/or lim-
ited in their access to appropriate mentors (Bogat & Redner, 1985; Noe,
1988; Powell, 1999; Stalker, 1994). In response to these and other con-
cerns new forms of mentoring have been emerging in higher education
institutions.

Peer Mentoring

Peer mentoring, sometimes referred to as peer coaching (e.g., Anastos
& Ancowitz, 1987, Sparks & Bruder, 1987) or sometimes as just peer re-
lationships (e.g., Kram & Isabella, 1985) can be thought of as a response
to traditional mentoring. Like traditional mentoring, peer mentoring
is said to promote career enhancement and psychosocial well-being
(Campbell, Angelique, Bootsmiller, & Davidson, 2000). However, based
upon their structural underpinnings, there are significant differences
between traditional mentoring and peer mentoring. For example, peer
mentoring involves participants who are roughly equal in terms of age,
experience, rank, and/or position along hierarchical levels within their

institution. Accordingly, mutuality, rather than complementarity may be said to characterize such relationships; i.e., all participants usually have something of value to contribute and gain from each other. While this mutuality limits career-enhancing functions in comparison to traditional mentoring, it enhances psychosocial functions in important ways.

Specifically, peer mentoring promotes information sharing, career planning, and job related feedback. Bound by roughly comparable experiences and perspectives, peer mentors cannot aid one another with the wisdom gained from hindsight. Thus, information sharing is often limited. However, because of the relative equality, participants may more readily offer confirmation, emotional support, personal feedback, and friendship than participants in traditional mentoring relationships. "Through [the] sharing [of] perceptions, values, and beliefs related to their lives at work and through discovering important commonalities in their viewpoints" peers are able to provide confirmation for one another (Kram & Isabella, 1985, p. 118). By drawing upon their own immediate experiences, peers mentors may more readily offer empathetic emotional support rather than just sympathetic support. Moreover, because peer mentors are relative equals in terms of their institution's hierarchy, they may not feel constrained in discussing matters extending beyond their jobs with peers. In fact, they are more likely to be in similar places concerning personal relationships and family responsibilities. Thus, peer mentors may be able to offer greater feedback concerning how work, personal, and family commitments have an impact on one another.

Still, peer mentoring and traditional mentoring do share some qualities. For example, peer mentoring is usually supported by specific work or education related institutions (e.g., Smith, et al., 2001); in fact, sometimes it is mandated (e.g., Sparks & Bruder, 1987). Accordingly, peer mentoring typically is directed toward specific goals determined by an institution. Within the academy, such goals might include improvement of classroom instruction, greater success in acquiring grants, and/or improving the chances of achieving tenure and promotion. In addition, although peer mentoring is more flexible than traditional mentoring, it is still usually a formal arrangement with relatively well defined boundaries. Finally, peer mentoring is generally limited to matched dyads, sometimes triads.

These common characteristics can explain some of the shortcomings of peer mentoring. Peer mentoring may still become hierarchical because of the inherent competitive nature of the institution. For example,

peer mentors with similar rank may have differential status due to success with grants, publishing, and favoritism from department heads. Thus, peer mentoring can be intimidating as well, especially when mandated by one's employer. Mentees can feel threatened by peers in environments in which there is a sense of scarcity, in which predecessors have failed to achieve promotion and tenure, and/or in which competition exists between faculty.

In essence, both traditional and peer mentoring are couched within notions of professional guidance that strive for sameness and homogeneity within the institution. Each model promotes complicity in the "competition for recognition of publications, research, scholarship, teaching, influence and power" (Stalker, 1994, p. 367). Furthermore, while practicing "sameness" untenured faculty, particularly marginalized individuals, become invisible since they pose no challenge to either the academy or the status quo. As such, peer mentoring may offer some advantages over traditional mentoring, yet it still may fall short of fulfilling the needs of untenured faculty members.

In response to these concerns about traditional and peer mentoring we offer a variant model that attempts to build on the strengths and weaknesses of both models. It is important to note that we do not offer this model as an approach that should replace the other two orientations to mentoring. Rather it is an alternative.

New Scholars Network

In this section, we describe the development of an atypical mentoring group in an academic institution. We begin by describing our university environment to set the context from which this model emerged. Second, we offer a brief narrative describing the conception and evolution of the *New Scholars Network* (NSN) as a peer mentoring group. Third, we present the ground rules that have evolved over time. Fourth, we discuss the intended goals of the NSN, and we share successes we have had to date. Finally we consider the unforeseen but beneficial outcomes of our efforts with the NSN.

Background

We are all employed at Pennsylvania State University's Capital College, a small college comprised of two separate campuses (Penn State Harrisburg and Penn State Schuylkill Haven) located an hour and a half

apart. Penn State Harrisburg is primarily an upper level undergraduate (junior and senior) and graduate college with five Masters and two Doctoral programs. Penn State Schuylkill is primarily an entry-level undergraduate college (freshmen and sophomore) although, with the recent integration of the Harrisburg campus, a number of four-year programs have been developed.

In terms of resources, Penn State Capital College is not as well off as the main campus at State College, Pennsylvania. Library holdings are meager in comparison, graduate assistants are very rare, and teaching loads are higher. In addition, faculty members have advising responsibilities that faculty members at the main campus do not have. Some members, typically new hires, minority and women faculty, fixed term and adjunct faculty, have contractual obligations to teach at both campuses. Also, tenure track faculty members at Capital College are expected to conduct research and publish just as faculty members at the main campus. Unfortunately, because of these factors, faculty members feel added stress and concern for achieving tenure and promotion.

Geographically, Penn State Harrisburg is located on a former military base in a small rural town in central Pennsylvania near the state capital, and Penn State Schuylkill Haven is located in a small rural town as well. Both campuses are primarily commuter campuses, and as such neither has developed a strong university atmosphere or a "college town" feeling surrounding the campus. Additionally, central Pennsylvania is primarily blue collar, working class, provincial, and politically conservative. Not surprisingly, relations between the college and the surrounding communities are mixed.

To help ease the transition into a tenure-track role, some of Capital College's academic units have established a traditional mentoring program for new hires. Each new tenure-track faculty member is assigned a senior faculty member as a mentor. Efforts are made to match mentors and mentees according to scholarly interests, though most often it is a self-selection process involving both the faculty member and mentor. Some have found their mentors to be instrumentally helpful, insightful about the political climate of the college, strategic in terms of class scheduling, and a source for learning about the dominant discourse of the institution.

However, given the college's small size, the pool of tenured faculty members capable of serving as mentors is small. Therefore, mentors and their mentees may be geographically located at different campuses, which can cause logistical problems. Moreover, each campus has its own structural and cultural problems which can undercut the effectiveness

of mentors whose mentees are located at another campus. Again, given the small size of the faculty, mentors and mentees may not be as well matched in terms of academic discipline. For example, an NSN member whose discipline is community psychology has a sociologist as a mentor. Another NSN member whose discipline is adult education has a mentor who is a professor in teaching and curriculum for K-12 educators. Many of us have been unable to find senior faculty members who are knowledgeable about our fields of interest and have been frustrated with attempts to get advice on funding sources, publishing outlets, and other resources needed for academic success. Because of the limited mentor pool, some mentors have multiple mentees; thus they must divide their time and attention between them. Indeed, in one situation, four NSN members have the same mentor, who is incidentally located at a different campus. While this approach continues with moderate success, growing frustration by unmet needs of untenured faculty members sparked the development of NSN in the spring of 1997.

NSN Scholars Network

The NSN was developed by a faculty member at Penn State Harrisburg, Dr. Holly Angelique, who three years ago asked other untenured faculty members if they would be interested in starting a peer mentoring support group. It grew into a support group with roughly 10–15 members. Of the larger group, on average 4–6 members attend meetings regularly. We share a number of similarities as well as some important differences in terms of personal background and work expectations. For example, none of the current NSN members is from Pennsylvania. Currently our membership is predominantly white, predominantly male, and between the ages of 35 and 55. Moreover, most of us earned our graduate degrees from Research I universities and therefore expected greater resources for research and publication. All of us are based at the Penn State Harrisburg campus with no comparable group at the Schuylkill Haven campus.

We come from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds (Adult Education, Community Psychology, Criminal Justice, Education, Forestry, Humanities, Justice Studies, and Library Science) and work in undergraduate and graduate fields housed in three different schools, the School of Behavioral Sciences and Education, the School of Public Affairs, and the Library. Finally, while most members are single, three are married; and one is a single parent.

Ground Rules

As a peer mentoring group, we thought it a good idea to develop and maintain some ground rules for our association. Since its founding three years ago we have maintained two offices, President and Secretary. The President's primary mission is to offer rudimentary agendas for meetings while the Secretary's primary mission is to keep records and send out reminders about meetings. However, meetings themselves are open and non-hierarchical by design. Membership is open to all new/untenured (but tenure-track) faculty members in our College at either branch campus. Each year new faculty are invited to join. Regularly scheduled meetings are held twice a month in an effort to promote attendance and group cohesion. One meeting is usually scheduled on Friday evening for a social hour at a local restaurant. The second meeting in the month is more task related, involving a discussion of group projects and/or editing each other's work.

Roles and Responsibilities

The NSN provides a forum to advance scholarship. We offer advice and suggestions on research proposals and ongoing research. We develop ideas for joint research endeavors. We provide support by: (a) sharing information on potential grant sources; (b) giving editorial advice on grant proposals; (c) providing information on conferences; (d) identifying potential journals for each others' work; (e) proof reading and editing each others' work; (f) voicing concerns related to teaching; (g) reviewing syllabi; (h) assisting with vita and resumé development; (i) offering advice on preparation of annual reviews and promotion and tenure reviews; (j) sharing ideas on balancing teaching, research, and service activities; (k) discussing ways to manage time; and (l) exchanging information on community connections.

Goals and Successes to Date

NSN members place great emphasis on professional development issues (covered at each meeting), and we have engaged in a number of collaborative efforts. Examples include: (a) participating in an interdisciplinary conference session on consciousness-raising in and outside of the academy—one NSN member as organizer/discussant and two as individual presenters; (b) giving a workshop on alternative mentoring

practices at an international conference; and (c) working on a qualitative research project.

Unanticipated Outcomes

In addition to furthering our professional development, the NSN has led to a number of unanticipated but positive outcomes. These have included easing the transition to post-graduate school life and assisting members in understanding the political climate of the college. Members share information about coffee shops, restaurants, theater, and other cultural events. We offer support for one another as we cope with work and relocation-related stress. The NSN serves as a social outlet, with group members forming friendships and engaging in social activities. Due to the provincial nature of our community and the somewhat anti-intellectual climate of central Pennsylvania in general, the social aspect of the group is particularly important. The group meetings also provide a forum to vent and share concerns. In addition, as a collective voice we have been able to instigate change within some of the departments. For example, as a group confronting department heads concerning the lack of funds for research, we have secured additional funding, e.g., increased photocopying budgets.

Transcending the Peer Mentoring Model

It is clear to see that the NSN peer mentoring group has been beneficial to its group members from the start. We had become increasingly dissatisfied with the limitations of peer mentoring as we had come to understand it. Furthermore, the literature on peer mentoring did not accurately reflect the nature of our faculty group particularly, since our group was not sanctioned or supported (e.g., release time, monetary support) by the institution (e.g., Smith, et al., 2001). Simply put, we still wanted more and could see even greater potential for how the group could help us as non-tenured faculty. Therefore, in this section we describe the evolution of the NSN from a peer mentoring group to a musing group (see Angelique & The Musing Collective, 1999), a group that deliberately functions from a feminist, rather than an androcentric standpoint. Finally, we discuss the NSN experience in terms of its appropriateness and applicability for use as a model for others to imitate.

We decided to unpack the term mentor and work to create a model with feminist underpinnings. Toward that end, NSN has flexible boundaries that are malleable. Its structure is somewhat fluid and can

be altered to fit the needs of the moment. As such, the NSN is in continual flux, yet maintains a consistent structure. Members work together as a group to form the substance of NSN. To date, we have had a core group of three members as the nucleus. Our commitment to a group effort is in contrast to other forms of mentoring that are usually organized in dyads. With this image we were able to envision a different kind of group that transcended mentoring as it had previously been defined. In short, the NSN is able to transform and change to suit its members' needs. Thus, the group as it exists today looks much different from the original group. This difference is most evident in the terms of relationships among group members.

To further explain, Darwin's (2000) critique of traditional mentoring offers a useful theoretical perspective for conceptualizing our experiences and the changing/developing nature of our emerging group. She challenged the orthodox, functionalist approach to mentoring as efficient, instrumental, and unproblematic. Darwin challenged assumptions about knowledge and power embedded in traditional mentoring. What emerges from her work is a "radical humanist" perspective, a culturally aware and power-sensitive theoretical framework for understanding and reframing the purpose of mentoring, particularly in recognition of the diversity within the workplace. While her work focuses on senior/junior dyads, her framework is appropriate to understand musing. Social justice is placed in the foreground, so that power relations within the group and institution are always open and able to be challenged. New faculty perspectives are valued and sought out. "Mentoring becomes a collaborative, dynamic, and creative partnership of coequals, founded on openness, vulnerability, and the ability of both parties to take risks with one another beyond their professional roles" (p. 206). Members in this type of group find themselves to be "co-researchers" in the search for career advancement and meaning of work in higher education. Simply put, Darwin advocates a form of peer mentoring informed by feminist insights and theory.

To define the emerging NSN in light of Darwin's work, we chose the term "musing" to replace mentoring (Angelique & The Musing Collective, 1999). As a complementary term to mentoring, musing also has its roots in Greek mythology in general, and in *The Odyssey* in particular. We use the term "musing" to underscore the importance of people in relation to others (Leadbeater & Way, 1996). This encompasses limitless ways of organizing mutually beneficial peer relationships. Musing relationships are not limited to two people nor to professional roles only. It is not a static concept, rather an action. It is something we

Table I
Dynamic Components and Foundations of Musing

Dynamic components	Foundations
Inspiring	Multiple organic relationships
Encouraging	Interdisciplinary differences
Making connections	New kinds of relationships
Increasing opportunities	Shared power
Celebrating successes	Support
Identifying issues	Spirit of collaboration
Taking risks	Network development
Asking	Group cohesion
Listening	Collective structure
Creating community	Paradigm shift

do. As such, musing has many dynamic components (see Table I). To expand upon our experiences with these themes, we have increased our opportunities by writing and presenting papers together as well as conducting workshops together. We celebrate successes, such as papers accepted for publication and getting new academic positions. The nature of our structure leaves little room for unhealthy competition. We have identified and fought to remedy university problems, such as gender discrimination in salaries. By becoming a collective, we are able to take risks and negotiate the power structure of the university in ways that individual, unempowered, untenured faculty members can rarely do alone. In sum, we continue to create a peer community.

There are several foundations upon which musing was developed. First, musing involves the connections of naturally developing relationships. We understand that we cannot get all of our professional needs met by one person any more than we can get all of our friendship needs met by one friend. We also understand that naturally developing relationships are more beneficial than mandated mentoring relationships (Angelique & The Musing Collective, 1999). We value interdisciplinary differences as a source of enrichment. We have established new types of collegial relationships. As such, we have developed both professional working relationships and personal relationships as well. For example, members of the NSN have gone hiking and played racquetball together. The importance of these social activities cannot be overstated. The isolation of living in a small, provincial environment in addition to the general isolation that most new faculty members experience can lead to serious depression and/or a lowered quality of life. By establishing relationships with others we discovered that our overall sense of well-being

is enhanced. As a consequence, we find that we are more productive academically and that we are in better spirits overall.

Second, musing involves shared power. While we do rotate positions, such as secretary, we operate with a spirit of collaboration. As such, the group has become cohesive. As a result, we find that the transition from mentoring to musing has required paradigm shifting. Not only do we consider professional development as a central goal of the group, but we also are cognizant of our other needs as new faculty members in an isolating environment. We acknowledge that we come to our careers not simply as academics—we bring with us many intersecting identities. Musing is a perspective that is responsive to the multiple identities that each individual brings to his or her academic career. In short, musing is a radical humanist/feminist notion of mentoring that may be more beneficial to new academicians than traditional or peer mentoring.

Conclusion

As institutions of higher education are continually challenged to confront the growing attrition of nontenured faculty resulting from overbearing workloads, job dissatisfaction (see Gilbert, et.al., 1997; McLeod, 1999) and competitive job markets, it becomes imperative that a broad range of strategies be explored. Our experience suggests that traditional mentoring as an intervention, particularly framed within the functionalist perspective, is limited and offers little hope to address the concerns of the diverse workforce on campuses today. Furthermore, due to its homogeneous orientation it fails to provide the proper setting for many new faculty to flourish and grow. There are never enough good mentors to go around, particularly for those who are the most marginalized and voiceless within the institution. Furthermore, even when mentoring does succeed, it is most likely to produce faculty who are not going to question the orthodoxy of the present system, further embedding and reifying the very barriers to changes that need to be implemented (Tierney & Bensimon, 1996). In response, new strategies for mentoring new faculty, such as musing, are needed. These strategies must operate within a new framework where power relationships and faculty subjectivity are in the foreground (Darwin, 2000), rather than merely promoting assimilation into the existing system. As such, we offer our experiences as a peer mentoring group that metamorphized from a functionalist to a radical humanist and feminist paradigm of musing. These experiences might serve as a guide for other new faculty members and emerging academic scholars.

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