FROM THE EDITOR
RECOGNIZING AND VALUING OUR ROLES AS MENTORS

THE ROLE OF A FACULTY member is complex, and our roles as educators, scholars, and citizens can often seem overwhelming. As we strive to develop knowledge, we work on ways to keep our courses up to date and engaging. In addition to these significant roles, we are often engaged in service to our institutions, communities, and national and international projects. This challenge may make it difficult for us to be focused on the activities that may be the most significant in the long term. Our role as mentors to our students can sometimes be an important aspect of our work that we overlook in the rush of activity.

Yet mentorship is a significant aspect of a student's education and development that often occurs outside formal courses and programs. Research considering the effect of mentoring on students has identified how these relationships can make a difference. Students who have had positive mentors are more likely to do well in school, be more productive, have stronger professional skills, be more self-confident, and have larger professional networks. These results have been found with students on graduation and also in their first years in their profession (Hesli, DeLaat, Youde, Mendez, & Lee, 2006; Paglis, Green, & Bauert, 2006).

How can we define mentoring? The term *mentor* comes from the mythological character Mentor, the companion of King Odysseus, who was entrusted with the responsibility of guiding and teaching Odysseus' son, Telemachus, to become a competent successor to the kingdom (Ensher & Murphey, 1997). When Levinson (1985) identified the role of the mentor in his work on adult development, he was referring to the critical part a person in an individual's chosen profession can play in integrating a new person into an appropriate professional role. A mentor will feel some responsibility for the successful development of the student's career and will advance the student's scholastic and professional goals in directions he or she desires. A positive mentoring relationship can contribute to the student's sense of competence, confidence, and effectiveness (Hesli et al., 2006; Paglis et al., 2006; Williams-Nickelson, 2009).

Effective mentoring involves understanding and acknowledging the student's different identities and communities. However, the most effective mentors go beyond simple academic advising to provide emotional and social support to students and make efforts to link students with people and places that can teach them what they need to know. A supportive mentor will get to know what the student's goals are and then identify resources that can move the student in a good direction (Adams, 1992).

Mentoring is not a one-way street. Effective mentoring can also benefit faculty members by attracting strong students who can work with them on research and other projects. Mentoring students on any level can be a way to expand our knowledge of and to learn about different life experiences. And many mentors derive satisfaction from supporting a students' development and seeing them succeed. Most of us can think of times when our students raised our awareness of social conditions, introduced us to different cultures, or made us proud as they overcame challenges to succeed.

Over the past few decades the development of mentoring programs and research has expanded our definition of mentoring (Alvarez, Blume, Cervantes, & Thomas, 2009). Multiple mentors can be very effective in addressing the different needs and interests of students. Peer mentors, often more advanced students, can be very significant in orienting and supporting students in negotiating the informal structures of their programs and schools. And professional organizations or institutions can create mentoring programs to match students and new professionals with those with more experience. One example of an institutional response is the MORE (Mentoring Others Results in Excellence) program, developed by the Rackham Graduate School at the University of Michigan, which is designed to educate faculty about mentoring and to provide assistance to graduate programs (http://www.more.umich.edu/).

Much of the research on mentoring has focused on doctoral student success, and it is clear that this relationship can be particularly significant for students at this level. However, mentoring also can be viewed as an important aspect of the "implicit curriculum" in MSW and BSW programs. Mentorship for students on these levels can be particularly powerful in respect to professional socialization and modeling. Research on mentoring in social work does suggest that social work faculty value the role of mentors, that students would like closer mentoring relationships with mentors, and that mentoring can be a significant element in career development (Brown, Dilday, Johnson, Jackson, & Brown 1998; Pearson, 1998; Pomeroy & Steiker, 2011). These data support the idea that mentoring relationships can be an important, but often overlooked, aspect of social work education.

Our work as faculty requires us to prepare students for the short term and the long haul. Current conditions of globalization and increasing racial and cultural diversity will make the ability to mentor a diverse student body increasingly important. Although studies indicate that students and faculty members are often most comfortable when working with people they perceive as similar to

themselves, mentoring requires working with students from many different backgrounds (Brown, Davis, & McClendon, 1999). Faculty members need to be welcoming and open to learning from students with a variety of life experiences. Matching faculty and students who share intellectual interests and taking time to build honest communication are two strategies that can be used to overcome identity based differences (Hill, Castillo, Ngu, & Pepion, 1999).

We need to recognize that mentoring relationships do not exist in a vacuum. The larger institution will engage in policies and practices that support or discourage mentoring (Hill et al., 1999). Programs can provide comprehensive student orientations that organize student "buddy" networks and support academic and social activities that bring faculty and students together to support different forms of mentoring. Developing "mentoring plans" can be one way for faculty–student pairs to identify short- and long-term goals for student development. When students and faculty meet to develop mentoring plans, it provides a context for creating an open and comfortable relationship.

The programs most supportive of mentoring will build these activities into faculty workload and performance evaluations. They will provide faculty members with the knowledge and skills to be effective mentors and recognize those who have worked well with students. This could include workshops on mentoring and access to research on effective mentoring practices. Whether mentoring is considered a "teaching" or "service" activity by the program also communicates the significance of this work.

The significance and importance of mentoring in the development of social work students is clear. How we do this work is affected by conditions on every level of our own ecosystems. I challenge all of us to consider how to build our own capacities as mentors and to advocate for institutional practices that support mentoring practice. Most of us would not be where we are without those who came before us and lent a hand; let's consider how we can do that for others as they rise in our profession.

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