3-2013

Disconnect Between Literature and Libraries: The Availability of Mentoring Programs for Academic Librarians

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Academic Librarians

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Abstract

Our goal in this study was to determine the likelihood that a recent graduate entering his or her

first professional position or a transitioning librarian would have access to formal mentoring

programs. The study suggests that, while formal mentoring is valuable, more emphasis needs to

be focused on creating formal mentoring programs to make them more widely available.

Introduction

Articles on formal mentorship programs for academic librarians abound. They often endorse the benefits mentoring provides to both those receiving the mentoring (the mentees) and to the mentors themselves. The purpose of this study is to investigate the prevalence of formal mentorship programs in academic libraries, particularly those designed for new librarians and librarians going through the promotion process. While informal mentoring may be prevalent, it is not easy to evaluate. Formal mentorship programs have an official status that can be more easily assessed.

However, there are many ways "mentorship" can be defined and identified. According to Goldman (2011), mentoring is often defined as a process that supports the mentee's career growth by providing coaching, visibility, protection, and challenging assignments. Additionally mentors support psychological development by acting as a role model, providing confirmation, counseling, and friendship (p. 3). Traditionally, mentoring is seen as a relationship between two co-workers, with the mentor being more experienced and possibly even a supervisor, while the mentee is a junior employee (Mavrinac, 2005, p. 395). Mentoring can occur formally or informally. Formal mentoring happens through official programs offered by an institution, such as the work place or an association. Informal mentoring is unstructured and generally happens through personal relationships or social networks and can be problematic in that it requires the mentee to have appropriate resource pools of mentors (Goldman, 2011, p. 4).

This study was designed to answer the following questions about formal mentoring programs: 1) What is the likelihood a recent graduate entering the profession will have a work appointed mentor in their first professional position? 2) Are there resources for a new librarian to identify an official mentoring program if their employer does not provide one? And, 3) Where is the best place to find a mentor program?

Methodology

This study consisted of a survey of library organizations in the United States from four categories: academic libraries, library residency programs, library associations, and library and information science graduate programs. These library organizations were chosen as those most likely to provide their constituents with access to formal mentorship programs for their interest in providing professional development.

Twenty-seven academic libraries were identified from the list of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Excellence in Academic Libraries Award recipients from 2000-2011 and the Princeton Review list of top libraries (chosen by students) for 2011. Nine current residency programs were identified by using the lists of programs on the ACRL Residency Interest Group webpage and the American Library Association (ALA) list of internships and residencies on the Spectrum wiki (ACRL, 2011; ALA, 2011). Thirty-seven associations were identified using Wikipedia's "List of library associations." Associations that were not available for academic librarians, for example public library specific organizations, were excluded. Finally, forty-nine U.S. library and information science graduate programs were chosen from the searchable database of ALA accredited programs. Twenty of those forty-nine contacted responded. Of the contacted 122 library organizations, 92 responded.

Respondents answered four survey questions via phone, email, and online messaging "chat" services. The survey was conducted during the month of July 2012. The following four survey questions were asked: 1) Do you have an official mentoring program? 2) Who participates? 3) How long is the program? And, 4) Are there enough mentors for the mentees? The responses were compiled in a spreadsheet and results were analyzed using pivot tables.

Literature Review

The benefit of mentoring within the library work environment is well documented in the library and information science literature. Mentoring provides library professionals guidance as they start their careers and assistance during times of transition with support to overcome professional challenges (Bosch, Ramachandran, & Wakiji, 2010, p. 58).

Support can be achieved through informal mentoring, but this shifts responsibility to initiate and organize the mentoring process to the mentee. This is problematic, because a new librarian may not have the network or knowledge to find a mentor. Mentoring programs can cushion and guide the process, especially for introverted individuals (Stephens, 2011, p. 38). According to Lee (2009), effective and structured mentorship significantly impacts employee success and confidence, giving the newly hired librarian an orientation to the university, to the library, and to their professional position and responsibilities (p. 35).

Such formal mentoring programs benefit library organizations as a means for recruitment and retention of the library workforce, while benefiting the employee by engaging them in ongoing learning and professional development (Freedman, 2009, p. 172). Mentorship begets mentorship and provides a mechanism for knowledge transfer (Robinson, 2011, p. 13). Reverse mentoring relationships, "where the lesser experienced protégé helps the mentor to master a new technology or concept" are a valuable form of mentoring as well (Murphy, 2008, p. 436). Mentoring of librarians should be promoted in academic libraries, since few academic librarians have had the rigorous advising and mentorship of the doctoral process that teaching faculty colleagues have had, "so mentoring is an important aspect of career development" (Osif, 2008, p. 346). A doctoral advisor acts as a role model and supports the student's career growth with sponsorship, exposure, and counseling. Neyer and Yelinek (2011) also found a positive

correlation between librarians who had published multiple peer-reviewed articles and those who had been both mentors and mentees (p. 220).

However, as other researchers have noted, mentorship programs are not without problems. According to Murphy (2008), "traditional hierarchical mentoring relationships are no longer sufficient for developing tomorrow's library leaders" (p. 434) Differences between the tenure process under which the mentor qualified can result in senior librarian mentors giving contradictory or incorrect information for newer individuals seeking tenure (Murphy, 2008, p. 435). Murphy (2008), Munde (2000), and Goldman (2011) surmise impending retirements will lead to fewer tenured faculty to act as mentors, though Murphy and Munde suggest there could be a move toward more peer or mid-level to new professional mentoring and succession planning (Murphy, p. 435; Munde, p. 171; Goldman, p. 7). Burdensome time commitments, unfair expectations, inequity, and overdependence are potential problems that could cause a mentoring relationship to falter (Goldman, 2011, pp. 3-4). Libraries must be aware of the pitfalls of a mentor-mentee mismatch and the potential obstacles of authority in boss-subordinate mentoring relationships (Freedman, 2009, p. 174).

Goldman (2011) remarks that mentorship problems can be avoided with training and clear expectations for both mentors and mentees (p. 7). As Osif (2008) points out, there is no magic formula for successful mentoring programs, but many authors describe the traits of successful mentor-mentee pairings (p. 346). The importance of communication is noted by Ptolomey (2008), Neyer and Yelinek (2011), and Saylor, Wolfe, and Soderdahl (2011). Ptolomey (2008) urges mentees to "be open and honest about what you are looking for or what you are trying to achieve" (p. 311). Lack of information can stall projects as well as the development of the relationship between a mentor and mentee (Saylor, Wolfe, & Soderdahl,

2011, p. 569). Neyer and Yelinek (2011) note that good interpersonal skills and solid professional skills are equally important and suggest encouraging more experienced librarians to mentor by providing continuing education in mentoring (p. 220). Neyer continues, "most effective mentoring relationships were based on taking the time for the relationship, sharing interests, and having mutual respect for each other." Goldman (2011) also suggests mentors and mentees having reasonable time commitment expectations, mutual respect, and willingness to listen and learn from each other (p. 5).

In Munde's 2000 article on establishing a mentoring program, academic libraries were asked to consider "organizational mentoring" over programs solely developed for orientation or promotion and tenure mentoring (p. 173). Munde's concept of organizational mentoring is "organization-wide mentoring designed to achieve the organization's leadership goals and meet its existing and future personnel needs." Organizational mentoring prepares both staff and librarians for redeployment in new types of positions, predicted vacancies, and interim leadership posts (Munde, 2000, p. 173). Organizational mentoring benefits librarianship generally by developing staff not only for their home institutions but also for future positions in an evolving profession (Munde, 2000, p. 173). Doolittle, Graham, Mendelsohn, Snowden, & Stone (2009) describe how to create a "culture of mentoring" and a formal mentoring program, suggesting good communication from management, clearly defined roles and responsibilities, a reward system, and keeping goals measurable for assessment purposes (pp. 29-31).

Examples and models for mentorship programs in academic libraries are reported in several articles. Most academic library mentoring programs focus either on new librarians or on promotion and tenure mentor program, and many have both, including programs at California State University Long Beach (CSULB), the University of Delaware, Pennsylvania State

University, Colorado State University, Louisiana State University, Yale University, and the University of Utah (Osif, 2008). CSULB librarians designed and implemented a Resource Team Model of mentoring, which provides a trio of senior librarians to support and train a new librarian in their first six months (Bosch, Ramachandran, & Wakiji, 2010, p. 59). The University of California Los Angeles Senior Fellows Program mentors experienced or senior librarians for positions of higher leadership posts such as directorship or dean (Rumble & MacEwan, 2008, p. 272). In order to revitalize their mentoring program, Kansas State University (KSU) Libraries employed tactics such as group mentoring to cover the basic information, volunteer mentors to ensure real interest, written guidelines on program structure such as regular meetings and relationship expectations, and the ability of anyone to ask the Professional Development Committee for reassignment (Farmer, Stockham, & Trussell, 2009, p. 10).

The peer-mentoring model is also mentioned as a means for peers to collaborate and get feedback, particularly when participants have common research interests. Lieberthal (2009) highlights the peer-mentoring model as a way to counter shrinking numbers of seasoned mentors due to retirements and creation of new positions for which there is no apparent mentor (p. 33). The Junior Faculty Research Roundtable (JFRR) of the Library Association of the City University of New York (LACUNY) is a peer-mentoring group for junior library faculty at the colleges and graduate schools of the City University of New York (CUNY). JFRR facilitates structured discussions centered on scholarship (Cirasella & Smale, 2011).

Associations are a place mentees may turn to for both formal and informal mentorship. Although the mentorship is often informal in library associations, which by their nature provide the vital element of a professional social network, formal programs tend to last longer (Zabel, 2008). According to Zabel's s 2008 study, the American Association of School Librarians

(AASL), ACRL, the Library Leadership and Management Association (LAMA), the Library Information Technology Association (LITA), and the Association for Library Collections and Technical Services (ALCTS) have formal programs. The New Members Round Table (NMRT) has two formal programs. Some sections of the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA) have programs but there is no division-wide program. The American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) has a program and also hosts a Newer Law Librarians Conference held in conjunction with the AALL annual meeting. The Medical Library Association (MLA) has a mentoring database of members by specialty and geographic location allowing members to connect with mentors on their own initiative (Zabel, 2008, pp. 353-358).

Results

The purpose of this study was to determine the availability of formal mentoring programs to academic librarians. The study investigated whether four types of organizations had formal programs and if there were enough mentors to be matched to mentees, as well as program duration and who is being mentored. Data was analyzed as a whole and by type of organization to determine if type of organization correlated with higher likelihood of offering a formal mentoring program.

One hundred and twenty-two (122) organizations were contacted via phone, email, and chat, and ninety-two (92) provided responses, for an overall response rate of 75%. The lowest response rate, 41%, came from library and information science graduate schools, likely due to the time of year (summer) and the method used to contact (email). Residency programs, academic libraries, and associations, had response rates of 100%, 96%, and 100% respectively (see Appendix A).

Sixty-one percent of the respondents did not have formal mentoring programs. As illustrated in Table 1, of the 92 organizational leaders interviewed, 36% did have programs and were able to answer the remaining survey questions. More than half, 55%, of those with programs were meeting the demand. Programs ran anywhere from eight weeks to more than 2 years. Programs were generally held for all librarians or for people new to the field.

Table 1. Summary of Survey Data from Organizations Overall

Do you have an official mentoring program?		Is demand met?		How long is it?		Who are being mentored?	
No	56	Yes	20	2-3 years	1	All librarians	14
Yes	36	No	5	2 years	8	New librarians	7
	92	Unknown	11	1 year minimum	3	Students	4
(Did not respond: 30)				1 year	9	Medical librarian needs accreditation	1
(Total contacted: 122)				12 weeks	1		
(Response rate: 75%)							
						Librarians, untenured	1
						Newly hired, any level	1
						Undetermined	8

Residencies and Fellowships

According to the ACRL Residency Interest Group, residency programs are one or two year programs "designed to provide a broad range of experiences in academic and research librarianship for early-career librarians" (ACRL, 2012). By looking at the ACRL Residency Interest Group webpage and the ALA website, following leads, and making phone calls, nine programs were identified as being active. Contacts for these programs were interviewed by phone.

Five out of nine residency programs had formal mentoring programs. The residency programs lasted two years and mentoring happened during the entire duration (see Table 2).

Table 2. Residencies & Fellowships

Do you have an official mentoring program?		Is demand met?		How long is it?		Who are being mentored?	
No	4	Yes	5	2-3 years	1	Resident/fellow	5
Yes	5			2 years	4		
	9						
(Did not respond: 0)							
(Total contacted: 9)							
(Response rate: 100%)							

Academic Libraries

Academic libraries were identified from "top" and "best" lists from ACRL and the

Princeton Review. A total of twenty-seven libraries were contacted and all but one responded.

Slightly less than half, 46%, had formal mentoring programs. The majority of respondents felt

the known demand was met. In this setting, programs lasted one or more years, and mentees

included untenured, newly hired, and all librarians (see Table 3).

Table 3. Academic Libraries

Do you have an official mentoring program?		Is demand met?		How long is it?		Who are being mentored?	
No	14	Yes	10	1 year	4	All librarians	8
Yes	12	Unknown	2	1 year minimum	1	Librarians, untenured	1
	26		12	2 years	1	New librarians	1
(Did not respond: 1)				Undetermined	6	Newly hired, any level	1
(Total contacted: 27)						Undetermined	1
(Response rate: 96%)							

Librarian Associations

Thirty-seven library associations that offer programs for academic librarians were

contacted and all responded to interview questions. The majority, 62%, did not offer formal

mentoring programs, although informal mentoring is likely to occur. Of the fourteen programs

offered, 64% felt they meet known demand. Programs typically last from one to two years (see

Table 4).

Table 4. Librarian Associations

Do you have an official mentoring program?		Is demand met?		How long is it?		Who are being mentored?	
No	23	Yes	9	1 year	5	All librarians	6
Yes	14	No	2	1 year minimum	1	New librarians	6
	37	Unknown	3	2 years	2	Medical librarian needs accreditation	1
(Did not respond: 0)				Dependent on accreditation	2	Undetermined	1
(Total contacted: 37)				Undetermined	4		
(Response rate: 100%)							

Library and Information Science Graduate Schools

Twenty library and information science graduate schools answered survey questions via

email. Seventy-five percent did not offer formal mentoring programs, though most have

alternatives such as internship and practicum opportunities that may lead to informal mentoring.

Three of the five programs did not feel like demand was met. Programs lasted from a quarter or

semester to two years (See Table 5).

Table 5. Library and Information Science Graduate Schools

Do you have an official mentoring program?		Is demand met?		How long is it?		Who are being mentored?	
No	15	No	3	Quarter or Semester	2	Students	5
Yes	5	Yes	1	1 year minimum	1		
	20	Unknown	1	2 years	1		
(Did not respond: 29)				Undetermined	1		
(Total contacted: 49)							
(Response rate: 41%)							

Discussion

This study was limited by a short time frame (one month), dependence on volunteered information, and narrow scope. The successful fulfillment of mentoring needs is difficult to assess, since it was reported by administrators of programs, not participants. Email inquiries had the lowest response rate. Future studies might benefit from a larger sample size, longer time frame, and inclusion of participants in mentoring. This study scratches the surface of the state of mentorship programs. There is room for further research that could focus on informal mentoring programs, or on all types of programs including pre-professional internships.

Although not without its problems, mentoring is valuable to both mentors and mentees. Librarians at all levels gain from access to mentors in a formalized program to ease transition and processes that are overwhelming such as tenure or promotion. Better prepared librarians overcome challenges and contribute to the field, benefiting library organizations and the profession as a whole. While the value of mentoring is reported by the literature, the majority of library organizations nevertheless do not offer formal mentoring programs. This seems inconsistent and poses a challenge to the library profession. This survey indicates a lack of available formal mentorship programs, and that finding a formal mentorship program is difficult for academic librarians.

Part of the problem is in the ambiguity of the term. Mentoring is sometimes confused with job orientations such as providing new employees with basic directional information, but guidance should support the mentee's career. There may be expectations from administration that librarians will create their own mentoring relationships, want the ability to pick their own mentors, or that supervisors are acting as mentors already. Further qualitative research should be done to provide insight into these and other possible reasons, such as a lack of resources or interest.

If an employer does not provide access to mentors, new and transitioning librarians may need to consider turning to a professional association (see Appendix B for a list of websites). If libraries do not offer programs, they could offer suggestions of appropriate alternatives. Informal mentoring requires mentees to initiate the relationship, but also provide afore mentioned benefits when a formal program is absent.

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Appendix A:

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	20	Unknown	1	2 years	1		
(Did not respond: 29)				Undetermined	1		
(Total contacted: 49)							
(Response rate: 41%)							

Appendix B:

Associations with formal mentoring programs

American Library Association (ALA). "Mentoring Program."
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American Association of Law Libraries (AALL). "Mentor
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Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA). "Mentoring Subcommittee."
    http://www.arlisna.org/organization/com/profdev/mentor/index.html

Asian Pacific American Librarians Association. "Mentoring Program."
    http://www.apalaweb.org/membership/mentoring-program/

Association of Architecture School Librarians. "AASL Mentorship Application Form."
    https://spreadsheets.google.com/viewform?formkey=dGp4V0hMTmZ2dC1RRmwtX0xj
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Association of Jewish Libraries. "Committees."
    http://www.jewishlibraries.org/main/AboutAJL/OrganizationalStructure/Committees.asp
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Chinese American Librarians Association. "Mentorship Program." http://cala-web.org/node/273

Medical Library Association. MLA Mentoring." http://www.mlanet.org/mentor/

Music Library Association. "Career Advisory Service."
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