

Assessing the Success of a Mentoring Program beyond Satisfaction Surveys

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ABSTRACT

Assessment provides the information needed to determine how well a mentoring program is meeting its goals and how it could improve. A continuous cycle of evaluation strengthens a mentoring program and contributes to the professional growth and success of participants. Assessment also may be a key factor in securing the support of the administration regarding funding, the time allowed for participants, and credit given to mentors during annual evaluations. The assessment of many faculty development programs is limited to participant satisfaction. While this measure could be used to predict future participation, as well as to modify elements to address areas of dissatisfaction, it is limited in its scope. There is often little attempt to determine the impact of the program on the participants' abilities, skills, and future careers. In this poster session, the researcher will share experiences in assessing a mentoring program for librarians in a large academic library. Assessment measures address the goals of the mentoring program, which include improving mentoring competencies, increasing the confidence of participants, and expanding future participation in the program.

OVERVIEW OF THE CONTENT

A mentoring program must include assessment to ensure its effectiveness, relevance and sustainability. Lunsford (2016) identifies several reasons for evaluating a mentoring program. First, assessment provides unbiased information about changes needed in the program. Also, assessment results can identify how efforts and resources should be directed to improve the program. Furthermore, the assessment information can be shared with participants and stakeholders to emphasize the success of the program. Disseminating this information to administrators may be a key factor in securing program funding and time allowed for participants. The assessment also is needed to track the mentoring program's implementation plans and goals (Bland, Taylor, Shollen, Weber-Main, and Mulcahy, 2011).

A continuous cycle of assessment strengthens a mentoring community and contributes to the achievement and transformation of all participants. Input must be gathered from all protégés and mentors to understand diverse perspectives. The mentoring program will be able to help everyone succeed only if it is open to feedback and suggestions for improvement.

The assessment of many faculty development programs is limited to participant satisfaction (Chism & Szabó, 1997; Hines, 2009), largely due to ease of administration. While this measure could be used to predict future participation, as well as to modify elements to address areas of dissatisfaction, it is limited in its scope. There is often little attempt to determine the impact of the program on the participants' abilities, skills, and future careers.

This case study concerns the assessment of a mentoring program for librarians at the University of North Texas (UNT). UNT is the largest public university in the Dallas-Fort Worth area with over 37,000 students. The Libraries employ approximately 59 librarians. The program includes mentor-protégé dyads, mentor training, and two peer-mentoring groups. Assessment measures address the goals of the mentoring program, which include improving mentoring competencies, increasing confidence of participants, and expanding future participation in the program.

The UNT Libraries' mentoring program administers two assessments, the Mentoring Competencies Assessment (MCA) and a satisfaction survey. The MCA was originally developed by the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine to evaluate a mentoring program for biomedical researchers and validated by Fleming et al. (2013). The library's program assesses the satisfaction of protégés with the *End of Program Evaluation* instrument (University of Illinois at Chicago Administrative Professional Mentoring Program [UIC-APMP], 2014).

Mentoring competencies were assessed at the beginning of the first year of the UNT Libraries' mentoring program with the Pre-MCA survey (Center for the Improvement of Mentored Experiences in Research [CIMER], 2017b), and at the end of the year with the Post-MCA survey (CIMER, 2017a). We modified the competencies slightly to apply to more general programs. Protégés reported the importance of specific mentoring competencies, while mentors reported their confidence in their competencies, using a 1-7 Likert scale. Furthermore, we modified the prompt for the Post-MCA for Protégés from "Please rate how skilled you feel your mentor is in each of the following areas" to "Please rate how important each of the following areas are to you." We made this change because the protégés would not have known their mentor well enough at the start of the program to provide a valid assessment. We decided, then, to measure changes in the protégés' ratings of the importance of the mentor competencies. All but one mentor rated their overall confidence in the mentoring capabilities higher at the end of the program. The protégés rated nearly all the mentoring competencies higher in importance at the end of the program than at the beginning. The aspects that the protégés gained the greatest respect for included networking, acknowledging the protégés' successes, constructive feedback, establishing trust, and accommodating various communication styles.

At the end of the first year, the administrators of the mentoring program assessed the satisfaction of all participants using the *End of Program Evaluation* (UIC-APMP, 2014). Protégés and mentors reported being satisfied with the program (median of 6 for both groups on a 7 point Likert scale) and that the program was effective overall (median of 5.5 and 6, respectively).

Results from the assessments indicate that the program is meeting its goals of improving mentor competencies and improving the confidence of participants. The success of the program has been instrumental in securing administrative support for funding and attracting new participants.

Now that the measurement cycle of the first year of the mentoring program is complete, the organizers plan to add more assessment measures to improve the program and evaluate its outcomes. A steering committee for the mentoring program will conduct focus groups of participants to gather in-depth information about how the program helped them and how it could be improved. The committee also will assess the participants' scholarly activities by evaluating the nature and extent of presentations and publications listed on the librarians' curricula vitae. Finally, the committee will gather information on the extent of participants' engagement in the mentoring program, including attendance at group mentoring meetings and the topics discussed at those sessions.

This case study is of interest to mentoring program organizers because it will help them realize why assessment is essential to the success and sustainability of a mentoring program. The study also helps organizers understand how to apply multiple measurements to gather information that can be used to implement changes needed in a mentoring program.

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