



Tuesdays With Bobbie: Faculty Mentoring for Instructional Success

In Mitch Albom's best-selling memoir, *Tuesdays with Morrie*, the main character meets with Morrie, a former professor, every Tuesday. Morrie mentors his student during these weekly sessions as they discuss answers to life's toughest questions. The premise of *Tuesdays with Morrie* touches on a matter highly relevant in today's educational context—the importance of mentorship.

Teaching reading to remedial students had been my bread-and-butter since becoming an educator. So when I learned my college would be eliminating its reading department, I was faced with a monumental, life-changing crisis. Fortunately, I would be teaching credit-bearing courses in another department, the English department. But transitioning to teaching a subject completely beyond my pedagogical preparation felt overwhelming. Although integrating remedial instructors into credit-bearing courses is becoming widespread across community colleges, many college administrators are challenged with how best to support this transition without professional disruptions. As a tenured faculty member—and the last remaining reading instructor at my college—the Dean of Student Success had the brilliant foresight to match me with a well-respected adjunct instructor in the English department to assist me through the institutional transition.

Like in *Tuesdays with Morrie*, my faculty mentor, Bobbie, and I also met once a week on Tuesdays throughout an entire semester. Although I was in my sixteenth year of teaching at the time, I can attest to the benefit of a meaningful mentoring relationship for an academician at any point in his or her career. With Bobbie's mentorship, I began to competently teach basic writing skills to my students and successfully prepare them to pass their end-of-semester English exit essays.

Bobbie allowed me to guide our weekly discussions according to the topic outlined in the departmental syllabus for each week that we met. She shared her own teaching techniques, but also helped me to understand theories and concepts unique to teaching writing that were foreign to me, such as parallelism in thesis sentences. Learning and preparing to teach new concepts in advance of class lectures equipped me to teach confidently and avoid causing confusion for my students. On one occasion, Bobbie visited my classroom for peer observation—a welcomed opportunity—and she provided a constructive evaluation afterward. Her help with lecture preparation,

her observational feedback, and her encouragement were all priceless and only resulted in further affirmation for me to keep moving forward during this new venture.

Another result of the mentorship is that a genuine friendship developed between Bobbie and me. Because research indicates that a successful mentoring relationship usually includes compatibility, a growth mindset for change, and a sense of altruism, it seems only natural to think that many mentors and mentees who pair up for professional development will also develop a convivial bond (Johnson 2012). Moreover, in their research of mid-career faculty mentoring, Amanda Reese and Kimberly Shaw (2014) found that friendship that grows from a mentor/mentee relationship “provides a space for social engagement.” An open and engaged environment is beneficial, and arguably necessary, to any academic organization interested in promoting and achieving success. In case you need another reason to believe in the benefit of mentoring, faculty mentoring is also a cost-effective solution with a long-term positive impact (Zellers, Howard, Barcic 2008).

I believe that mentoring is empowering and ensures competent instructional delivery during any instructor's transition from developmental curricula to full departmental integration, or into any new, unfamiliar field of instruction. The following conversation starters may help initiate discussions about the feasibility of faculty mentoring on your community college campus:

1. Inquire about a stipend or course release as compensation for your time and expertise to mentor a colleague for one hour a week. My mentor received a \$500 stipend at the end of the sixteen-week semester during which she mentored me.
2. Research has found that adjuncts generally experience a disconnect on their campuses and report having “limited collegial interaction” (Meixner, Kruck, and Madden 2010). As stated, Bobbie is a well-respected adjunct faculty member at my college. Tapping into the adjunct workforce on your campus could allow for mentoring opportunities as well as a way to enhance adjuncts' social engagement on campus.
3. Communicate the benefits of mentorships to relevant administrators, chairpersons, deans, or the individual who you hope will become your mentor. In addition to the shared knowledge and professional development mentorship provides individual mentors and mentees, research indicates that faculty mentoring is beneficial to academic departments by reducing turnover, increasing

performance evaluations, and developing an effective team (Bryant and Terborg 2008).

4. The mentor and mentee arrangement can be as flexible or as structured as necessary. Bobbie and I used the syllabus as our guide to address weekly lecture needs and topics for conversation, but a mentorship can follow any sort of format that is most useful to faculty mentorships at your college.

Just because an instructor lacks specific knowledge does not translate into his or her inability to learn and adapt to that knowledge. A mentorship only makes the transition easier. I am proof that a meaningful mentoring experience can encourage instructors to embrace change and learn new skills that will ultimately benefit students.

Diane Lerma, *Assistant Professor, Education*

For further information, contact the author at Palo Alto College, 1400 W Villaret Blvd., San Antonio, TX 78224.
Email: dlerma@alamo.edu

References

Bland, Carole J., Taylor, Anne L., Shollen, S. Lynn, Weber-Main, Ann Marie, Mulcahy, Patricia A. (2009). *Faculty Success Through Mentoring: A Guide for Mentors, Mentees, and Leaders*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, ISBN: 9781607090687, Chapter 2, 11.

Bryant, Scott E., Terborg, James R. (2008). Impact of Peer Mentoring on Creating and Sharing Organizational Knowledge. *Journal of Managerial Issues*. Vol. XX, No. 1, 26.

Johnson, Roberta. (2012). Peer Mentoring in the Academy. *The Changing Profession*. Vol. 127, No. 4, 975.

Meixner, Cara, Kruck, S.E., Madden, Laura T. (2010). Inclusion of Part-Time Faculty for the Benefit of Faculty and Students. *College Teaching*. Taylor and Francis Group. 58, 146.

Rees, Amanda & Shaw, Kimberly. (2014). Peer Mentoring Communities of Practice for Early and Mid-Career Faculty: Broad Benefits from a Research-Oriented Female Peer Mentoring Group. *Journal of Faculty Development*, Vol. 28, No. 2, 10-13.

Zellers, Darlene F., Howard, Valerie, M., Barcic, Maureen, A. (2008). Faculty Mentoring Programs: Reenvisioning Rather Than Reinventing the Wheel. *Review of Educational Research*, Vol. 78, No. 3, 557.