Online Faculty Perceptions on Effective Faculty Mentoring: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

When higher education leaders give little thought or offer little mentoring to their faculty members, there is risk of driving faculty members from teaching online and of them having a poor experience in online teaching. Without mentoring support, faculty members may feel disconnected and unsupported. The purpose of the study was to examine the mentoring processes reported by faculty members teaching at online institutions of higher education in order to understand the processes of mentoring that these educators purport to be most beneficial to them in their faculty roles. Data from exploratory, opened-ended, and anonymous survey items completed by 26 faculty members generated a vivid picture of the needs of mentoring faculty members. Results of the survey indicated that faculty members need and want mentoring. The participants reported that they value communication as a critical component on a number of levels. When faculty members feel that what they do is valued, they are more to continue working and want to continue improving as educators. Future quantitative studies could further add breadth to these new understandings of what faculty members need and want in terms of mentoring and training, thereby laying the groundwork for the development of an online faculty-training model.

Introduction

Responding to the increasing demand for online education, more and more traditional brick-and-mortar universities who have historically offered face-to-face instruction are strongly encouraging their respective faculty to convert or create and teach their courses online. In a recent Babson report by Allen and Seaman (2014), *Grade Change: Tracking Online Education in the United States,* chief academic officers strongly believe that the number of students taking online courses and programs will continue to increase and nearly seventy-percent responded that online education will remain integral to their respective long-term institutional strategies. Pursuant to the socioeconomic forces triggering this demand, many educational policy leaders

and institutional administrators involved in teaching and learning have facilitated tremendous transformations, yet commonly fail to consider how delivery and interaction among faculty might differ from teaching in a physical classroom. Alongside the increasing demand for online education is the need to have inclusion through faculty support and mentoring within the framework of the university (Rogers, McIntyre, & Jazzar, 2010). When institution leaders give little thought or offer little mentoring to their faculty members, there is risk of driving faculty members from teaching online and of them having a poor experience in online teaching (Rogers et al., 2010). Without that support, faculty members begin to feel disconnected and unsupported. As online education expands for institutions of higher learning, the situation clearly dictates the need to reimagine, reassess, and restructure the ways in which faculty that teach online courses are supported and guided throughout this process. It is highly documented in the literature that faculty members need mentors to help with direction in order to teach effectively within higher education (Bryant & Lockhart, 2007); therefore as the number of colleges offering online classes continues to grow, it becomes imperative for online faculty to feel connected and to interact with more experienced online faculty members who can mentor them while they teach online courses.

Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the mentoring processes reported by faculty members teaching at online institutions of higher education in order to understand the processes of mentoring that these educators purport to be most beneficial to them in their faculty roles. To achieve this goal, an effort was made to discern the emerging themes between institutions and to apply the best suggestions and practices to online education programs that currently do not undertake formal mentoring for online faculty members. By studying online faculty members' in-depth responses about faculty mentoring, there was the expectation that information generated from online faculty members could help with refinement, redefinition, and development of future online education programs and future faculty mentoring programs and could further lead to future quantitative studies for exploring the statistical differences between enrollments and persistence rates for online programs.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study were to determine (RQ1) the views of the participating faculty members regarding the level of mentoring support offered toward traditional classroom programs as opposed to online education; and (RQ2) what aspects of mentoring for online program faculty members are perceived by participating faculty members as being paramount to their individual success within the online classrooms.

Literature Review

In order to synthesize the general body of knowledge currently available regarding this field, one noted realization was that few studies available explored in any depth the mentoring of faculty serving online programs. Given the fact that mentorship programs for online educators are not as advanced as the rest of the field of online learning, the primary focus of the following review is on the state of mentoring itself. This review catalogues and assesses a) the current state of in-person or traditional mentoring in the United States undergraduate and graduate students and what mentoring programs provide; b) online mentoring vs. face-to-face mentoring; c) crucial faculty mentoring skills; and d) motivation, support and guidance.

What Faculty Mentoring Programs Provide

The current body of research indicates that professional development occurs in stages that extend well beyond their first year in the profession. As described by Feiman-Nemser and Remillard

(1995), teaching expertise sufficient for educators to be considered experienced enough to move out of a mentoring relationship, or move onto autonomy without a great deal of professional support and development, does not occur until after they have taught for 5 to 7 years (p. 4). These authors categorized the development of faculty members into several stages, beginning with an initial period of survival and discovery, which leads into a time of experimentation and consolidation, and finally, a point of mastery and stabilization (p. 4). This final stage, categorized by Conyers, Ewy, and Vass (1999) as the point during which faculty member competence is achieved, is the point at which the faculty members' experience has generated a level of strong expertise in their fields to a point at which they can be considered proficient and capable of moving forward on their own.

Given these preceding stage categories, faculty-mentoring programs as necessarily focusing on the survival and discovery stages of educating students are often mandated to provide new faculty members with the support they require during their first turbulent years in education. The goal of these programs is often simple in scope. These mentoring programs are designed to provide intensive assistance to new faculty members to help them meet immediate needs as they adjust to the demands of teaching as well as to provide them with the support necessary to become socialized to the school or university environment and organization (Conyers et al., 1999).

Many researchers have considered the primary forms of support provided to beginning faculty members. Feiman-Nemser, Carver, Schwille, and Yusko (1999) stated that the primary form of support provided in education mentoring programs is psychological, but these systems of social support are also often focused on instruction and curriculum related inquiries and guidance. Both of these forms of support have been found to be critical for new faculty members, as these professionals often begin teaching with little preparation for the ultimate responsibilities and resources at their command, and they receive little in the way of direct support for what is required of them to meet these responsibilities and properly utilize resources.

The importance of mentoring is observed when considering the responsibilities that faculty members must meet on their first day of their first year in teaching. Tellez (1992) stated that faculty members must carry a full class schedule while simultaneously "adjusting to the school facility and routines, becoming oriented to district policies and procedures, becoming familiar with the specific curriculum and school- or district-adopted instructional strategies," as well as forming their own classroom management style and their own priorities for how their classroom will be run (Tellez, 1992). Given the enormous responsibilities and great potential for stress and difficulty for beginning faculty members, psychological support can be considered key to the first-year experience of any educator, from those of small children to undergraduate college and beyond (Bryant & Lockhart, 2007).

Stansbury and Zimmerman (2000) found that the psychological support provided through mentoring programs often consists of addressing the immediate personal and emotional needs of faculty members who are new to the classroom. This kind of support consists of providing the faculty member with moral support and protecting them from feeling isolated from their peers as well as making pointed suggestions for assisting new educators needing to discover how to best balance the extreme stress and demands of their new responsibilities related to working with their students, other faculty, their school's administration, and the educational institution at large. Additionally, mentoring helps the beginning faculty member to get through the activities and aspects of teaching soon to be seen as standard aspects of their educational practice.

As described by Feiman-Nemser and Remillard (1995), mentoring with an eye for improving faculty development centers on helping beginning teachers "craft a professional identity through their struggles with and explorations of students and subject matter" (p. 4). The ultimate goal of this aspect of mentoring is for novice faculty members to become independent of the mentor and to establish themselves as professionals well-versed in many student-focused methods and principles that can be used in a dynamic manner in the classroom. The faculty members' ability to draw upon the important knowledge they glean from their mentoring experience proves very helpful in assisting students along their own journeys to wisdom. In short, as Feiman-Nemser, Parker, and Zeichner (1990) stated, effective practice-focused educational mentoring has the potential to imbue novice faculty members with a strong foundation of the teaching industry's "collective wisdom about good practice" (p. 16).

Online Mentoring vs. Face-to-face Mentoring

Brooks (2010) mentioned that maintaining face-to-face mentoring can be difficult for online faculty, but with the increased use of online technologies, mentoring can be helpful in giving instruction regarding using all of the web-based tools available for the online classroom. Dahl (2005) pointed out how peer mentoring builds faculty satisfaction by citing Capella University's tenet that states that faculty mentoring begins during the recruitment process and continues throughout a faculty member's time there. Rogers, McIntyre, and Jazzar (2009) pointed out the benefits of using mentoring with adjunct faculty through effective communication and practice. Rogers et al. reported that online faculty members were less likely to feel isolated when receiving effective communiqués from their administration. If interaction from the institution to the online faculty is absent, then professional isolation is likely to prevail. Although face-to-face interaction is preferred over telephoning, using phone interviews or surveys is not always possible because of the nature of the work taking place in an online setting, especially if online faculty teach from a variety of geographical locations. Regardless of the mode of communication used, the importance of effective communication cannot be exaggerated (Rogers et al., 2009). Rogers et al. additionally pointed out the need for astute mentoring by arguing that the time has surely come for online universities to provide mentoring for the online faculty members. These authors identified four cornerstones that comprise an effective program. Those four cornerstones are "professional development, active communication, building balance, and forming relationships" (Rogers et al., 2009, p. 1).

In short, as faculty members mature in their roles as educators for their disciplines, their need for mentoring and the potential improvement to be gleaned from such mentoring can increase by honing important mentoring skills.

Crucial Faculty Mentoring Skills

Podsen and Denmark (2007) presented some of the best techniques and skills for effective mentoring of first-year faculty members under the banner of *cognitive coaching*. They explained that cognitive coaching, as a method of mentoring, is designed to provide beginning educators, particularly in undergraduate and postgraduate domains, with a clear framework and language, as well as skill set, upon which to support both their colleagues (and by extension, their students) to grow. They further explained that the various methodologies which fall under the banner of cognitive coaching include those which enhance faculty members' understanding of higher-level learning skills, foster greater skills in problem-solving and collaborative relationships particularly through group work and in other social settings, and ensure that the beginning faculty members can establish and maintain "genuine trust and rapport" with students, while helping their students to gain competence in subject areas and simultaneously "feeling competent

in challenging work environments" (p. 81). By imbuing new faculty members with the ability to confer upon their students a feelingof competence is a crucial yet often commonly overlooked aspect of the teaching process.

Podsen and Denmark (2007) provided strong examples of the skills necessary for educators of faculty members and particularly for the mentors of these educators. They argued that the cognitive coaching process demands a strong facility with the usage of skills specific to this endeavor, which they argue are highly necessary with regard to attaining the following outcomes: (a) "building confidence in establishing collegial relationships, trust and rapport [with the mentee]," (b) "increasing skill in conducting high-level planning, reflecting, and problem-solving conversations," (c) "promoting [the mentee's] ability to create and ask questions that lead to higher-level thinking," and (d) focusing mentoring conversations for "greater purpose, impact, and understanding" ensuring that the relationship is a meaningful and important one for both parties (p. 80). To this end, they indicated that the purpose of cognitive coaching in education is a simple one: to help colleagues think about their own thinking process when they consider their own education. This statement represents a significant point in revealing that the true purpose of mentoring, greater than simple orientation matters, is to provide the mentee with an environment in which they can consider their own practice and techniques in an exploratory manner.

As a result of these priorities, cognitive coaching requires mentors to be fully entrenched in the methods of active listening. Podsen and Denmark (2007) argued that the mentor is an ineffective coach for the novice educator if they fail to listen to their mentees actively. They make the point that "talk is cheap and listening is rare" (p. 80). As a result, it is important to consider the enormous value that listening has to the world of mentoring and to the mentoring process itself. It is crucial to consider some of the empathy-oriented listening skills so necessary for effective cognitive coaching with novice educators. Pickering (1986) also identified several principles effective listeners must follow in order to become the kind of listeners that are most valuable to mentees include the following: (a) being "other-directed, rather than...[projecting] their own feelings and ideas onto the other," (b) being "non-defensive"; (c) "[imagining] the roles, perspectives, or experiences of the other, rather than assuming they are the same as one's own," (d) listening "as a receiver, not as a critic," and (e) showing a strong "desire to understand the other person rather than to achieve either agreement from or change in that person" (p. 17). These skills are all highly important to being a strong mentor and provide fertile ground for having the beneficial and important conversations about practice so important to effective mentoring.

Podsen and Denmark (2007) said that effective mentors must have a strong ability to build rapport with their mentees. Rapport is a concept which they described as "the ability to make a personal connection and show empathy," a concept which is fostered through both "verbal and nonverbal components" (Podsen & Denmark, 2007, p. 81). The verbal elements include "such actions as the pitch, volume, and inflection we use in our voice patterns, and the general pacing of our conversations" (p. 81). If these elements are casual and comfortable, the mentor can convey empathy and sense of understanding, both crucial to the comfort of the mentee with the mentoring relationship. The nonverbal elements are little different in what they convey but are expressed through "factors such as our body posture, use of gestures, proximity...eye contact, and facial expressions" (p. 81).

Linguistic skills are also crucial to effective peer mentoring in education, particularly as they are embodied in Podsen and Denmark's (2007) cognitive coaching methodology. Active listening is uniquely important to the idea of peer mentoring and takes the following form: "You as the

mentor/listener must take care to attend to the mentee fully, and then paraphrase what . . . [the mentor] thinks the mentee has said" (p. 81). Paraphrasing does not imply the mentor has any agreement with what the mentee has said, but through this practice the mentor conveys the idea of understanding and paying close attention to the points made by the mentee. Linguistic skills such as active listening as presented by Lipton and Wellman (2003) and Costa and Garmon (2002) include pauses, the use of silence, paraphrasing, and meditational questioning. Meditational questioning is a unique technique that encourages the novice faculty member to use hypotheses, analysis, imagination about options, and comparisons and contrasts of specific incidents (Lipton & Wellman, 2003).

These techniques are similar to those used when teaching students in classroom environments and mirror many of the elements of behavior and interaction observed at the faculty-student level (Lipton & Wellman, 2003). This interesting duality reflects how the most effective mentor-mentee relationships utilize the best of teaching behaviors and principles. In the classroom as well as in the online space, the best relationships between faculty members are those that reflect the importance of the principles about which both the mentor and the mentee are aware. As the mentor imparts wisdom and understanding on the mentee, the mentee is receptive to this communication and knowledge due to personally understanding the value of receptive appreciation and using active listening skills with students, at least from a textbook perspective (Costa & Garmon, 2002). In this way, the knowledge that the novice faculty member has upon first entry into the classroom is that which offers unique preparation for the kind of understanding and focus necessary to working with a mentor.

Motivation, Support, and Guidance

The mentoring process should be one of support and collaboration. Baldacci and Moore-Johnson (2006) wrote that newer faculty members not receiving supportive and collaborative motivational support from mentors will change schools or leave the profession altogether. Additionally, Moir (2004) described how the crucial capacity of the mentoring faculty member is to care for the emotional and professional needs of the mentee in a timely and responsive manner. Daresh (2003) posited that mentoring programs should include guidelines based on insights from mentors. Along this same line, Kortman and Noaker (2004) indicated the primary focus of the mentor should not only be on motivating the mentee but also on focusing on best practices of mentoring.

Wong and Wong (2009) categorized the mentoring process into three elements: emotional, technical, and instructional. Solis (2007) offered more tools to aid in the relationship such as the following: (a) interviewing the new faculty member during the first mentor-mentee session; (b) observing teaching during an unplanned classroom visit; (c) analyzing videos or audio recordings of teaching; (d) examining the classroom setting to see how it is organized; and (e) taking into consideration the student feedback.

Mentors who understand the motivational factors of the mentees are those who provide the best guidance to faculty members. Montemayor and Romero (2000) recommended that the key concept of this relationship is to understand that all students and mentees are inherently good and worthy of being treated with dignity and respect. Imparting this belief concerning faculty mentees is invaluable in the mentor and mentee relationship.

Theoretical Framework: Directed Learning

In addition to being informed by the perspectives of the faculty members themselves--as well as

various perspectives on interpersonal communication and online education--this study was informed by a theoretical framework offered by Malcolm Knowles (1975). Knowles' theory was used and implemented to show that the clear dividing line with regard to where educational emphasis ought to lie in education. The difference between Knowles' concepts of Self-Directed learning (SDL) and Teacher-Directed Learning (TDL) were seen to inform the difference between different levels of involvement and investment in students by their faculty members, particularly in online education. Online education represents Knowles' concept of self-directed learning since the online classroom space can be described as a unique place for educational delivery and as a place independent of classmates or faculty members and that is the focus of the student. Naturally, this perspective offers little priority to the role of the faculty member as a mentor, so it is not difficult to see how Knowles' concept, taken to its 21st century culmination, might seem to abandon the faculty-student advisory relationship altogether.

Considering the value attributed to the faculty-student relationship when beginning this exploration of faculty mentors was important. Faculty mentors embark on a relationship with fellow members of university faculty, so it becomes crucial for mentors to understand the nature of their mentees' relationships with students, as these teaching relationships form the focus of the mentorship. Applying such theory to the online classroom setting is vital, and particularly to faculty-student relationships.

Methodology

Participants

The sample for this study was recruited from primarily online higher educational institutions, which included faculty members working at both for-profit and non-profit schools. An open and voluntary invitation to participate in this study was sent to online faculty via an online survey and those who agreed to participate were asked only to speak to their online experiences. For the survey, the sample size sought was 35 to 40 respondents (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Marshall, 1996).

Instrument

Before beginning an analysis of the mentoring process of faculty members in online institutions, the research questions were used to develop the instruments. The context of the primary survey was focused on those teaching classes through online institutions. The survey items were employed to delineate and extract important information with regard to the specific mentoring practices experienced and reported by faculty members. The qualitative survey (Appendix A) was composed of open-ended questions and designed according to the research questions to acquire detail and perspective.

The first research question (RQ1) aimed to determine the views of participating faculty members regarding the level of mentoring support offered toward traditional classroom programs as opposed to online education. Sub-questions were developed to encourage participants to consider what type of mentoring would be best for themselves as faculty members in online classrooms. Research question one and associated sub-questions included:

RQ1: What are the views of the participating faculty members regarding the level of mentoring support offered toward traditional classroom programs as opposed to online education?

1.1. *What types of professional development are most crucial to your success?*

1.2. *What are possible ways to mentor students through an online classroom?*
1.3. *How does your professional mentoring assist you in this role of mentor to your students?*
1.4. *If you are not properly supported, how is it possible to properly mentor your students?*
1.5. *What is the importance of mentoring to professional development?*
1.6. *If it is possible to mentor fellow faculty in an online forum, how do you do so or recommend doing so?*
1.7. *What is the importance of faculty members' mentoring development to the successes of their students in their online courses?*

The second research question (RQ2), was answered through the development of specific sub-questions designed to understand what faculty members believe to be their primary responsibilities. These questions, as with many of the other questions in this survey, were left deliberately open-ended, to encourage the faculty members to identify with terms such as level of mentoring support according to their own perceptions and experiences. Questions included:

RQ2: What aspects of mentoring for online program faculty members are perceived by participating faculty members as being paramount to their individual success within the online classrooms?

2.1. *How do you view your peers at other online institutions?*
2.2. *How much and what types of support do they receive from their administration?*
2.3. *How do students benefit from additional faculty mentoring support?*

Data Collection and Analysis

Participants' responses to an online survey were collected via an online delivered self-report survey form, with consideration given to the anonymity of the participant in the survey. The data analysis was presented in several different ways. The most straightforward method for data presentation required that the information be consolidated into a narrative to allow for the instant interpretation of the participants' responses to the items. Answers to the open-ended survey questions were analyzed in their entirety using the qualitative analysis software NVivo. The qualitative research questions required the use of NVivo to observe the likelihood of participants reporting different experiences at their respective institutions.

The qualitative data gleaned from the online survey were analyzed and presented in block text with regard to the interpretations of the survey results. While prose narrative is the most traditional method in which qualitative findings are shared, this method was far from the most efficient way to convey the results. To this end, it was crucial that balance between description and interpretation be maintained.

Findings

To assess the views of the participating faculty members regarding the level of mentoring support offered toward traditional classroom programs as opposed to online education (research question one), common themes were evaluated from survey items (Questions 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3). Analysis of those interview questions revealed themes regarding feedback, contact, directions, technology, communication, and tools. The participants indicated that feedback fosters learning in their response to Question 1.1. The participants expressed staying in contact and being available as well as following rules and guidelines and access to technology are important for success for Question 1.2. The participants indicated that they would benefit from more communication and an increased number of tools in their responses to Question 1.3.

Question 1.1: Regardless of the school at which you work, what do you feel that faculty who assist in the mentoring of online faculty can learn regarding thorough and complete methods for mentoring? Please express what are your definitions of "thorough and complete mentoring?" Open coding revealed only one theme related information based on what could faculty who assist in the mentoring of online faculty can learn regarding thorough and complete methods for mentoring. The majority of participants responded by indicating feedback. Responses regarding what online mentoring faculty who assist other online faculty can learn regarding thorough and complete methods for mentoring are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Question 1.1 Open Coding Responses Leading to Feedback Theme

Participant	Phrases/descriptive words
5	Sharing knowledge and techniques
14	Feedback
15	Feedback
16	Engage with
17	Mentors should address
19	Feedback
22	Get feedback
25	Pre- and post- conference
26	Share errors, praise, and opportunities

Selective coding of Question 1.1 generated a composite response of feedback. One participant's statement that reflected the axial coding composite with the most congruence was selected. Participant 19 stated, "Just paying attention to some issue like student feedback will motivate most folks to pay attention and to improve in these areas." The actual advice given by a mentor may or may not be effective, but the attention paid to this or that detail is effective.

Question 1.2: What aspects of mentoring for online program faculty members are most important to success within the online classrooms?

Open coding revealed three themes related to information based on aspects of mentoring for online program faculty members are most important to success within the online classrooms. Many participants responded by indicating contact. Responses regarding aspects of mentoring for online program faculty members seen as most important to success within the online classrooms are presented in Table 2.

Selective coding of Question 1.2 generated a composite response of contact, directions, and technology. One participant's statement that reflected the axial coding composite with the most congruence was selected. Participant 10 stated, "Daily contact—telephone calls rather than e-mails—shadowing new faculty in his/her classes – being available anytime, anyplace."

Table 2

Question 1.2 Open Coding Responses Leading to the Themes of Contact, Directions, and Technology

Participant	Phrases/descriptive words

Contact	
2	Communication
4	Communication between students and instructor
9	Communication
10	Daily contact and being available
16	Be available
22	Staying in contact and being available
23	Don't be unavailable
26	Communication
Directions	
6	Trends and techniques for online learning
7	Course instructions, student instructions,
15	Learning objectives
18	Rules, guidelines, procedures, etc.
26	Information
Technology	
12	Good speed of internet and design of web pages
15	Learn new technologies
21	Technology platform
24	Technical support or orienting to online environment

Open coding revealed two themes related to information based on what mentoring participants would have been preferred to receive more of for themselves. Five participants responded by indicating communication and five indicated tools. Responses regarding the two themes are presented in Table 3 below.

Question 1.3: What type of mentoring would you have preferred to receive more of for yourself? How would this additional mentoring have been achieved?

Table 3

Question 1.3 Open Coding Responses Leading to the Themes of Communication and Tools

Participant	Phrases/descriptive words
Communication	
15	"Chat with the prof"
16	More conversations
17	Engage in conversations
21	More connection—a chat room
23	Communication
Tools	
4	Learn how to use more interactive tools
5	Rubrics

6	More new technologies
22	Developing courses
25	Developing rubrics

Selective coding of Question 1.3 generated a composite response of communications and tools. Two participants' statements that reflected the axial coding composite with the most congruence were selected. Participant 15 stated, "I would like to have received more mentoring regarding practical methods for using discussion boards. Also, I would like to incorporate more short video segments for my online lectures. Finally, I would like to learn how to host a weekly 'chat with the prof" online." Participant 6 stated, "I want more on new technologies and how to integrate them. I wish someone I knew could show me how to build educational video games, but I just don't know anyone. And the books I read on the subject are more about the theory and less about the actual building of games and software needed to build games."

To assess the aspects of mentoring for online program faculty members perceived by participating faculty members as being paramount to their individual success within the online classrooms (research question two), common themes were evaluated from the responses provided for Questions 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, and 2.7. Analysis of those interview questions revealed themes regarding improvement, positive, interactions (electronically), communication, experience, enhancement and response, and positive significance. In response to Question 2.1, participants indicated that being mentored has improved their ability to mentor other faculty members and students. In responses to Question 2.2, participants noted that they feel positive about how their mentoring experience has improved their ability to teach online. In responses to Question 2.3, participants indicated that effective mentoring from fellow faculty members and administration came from their interactions and electronic communications. In responses to Question 2.4, participants indicated that if they do not receive the information properly from other faculty members and administrators, it affects their interaction with students. Furthermore, they indicated that they mentor their students properly by communicating, and this skill has been learned from years of experience. In responses to Questions 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7, they expressed the themes of communication and feedback. Participants said that being professionally mentored assists them in the role of mentoring students because the experience allows for enhancement and gives them the ability to apply what they have learned. Mentoring is important because it provides positive significance, such as learning faster and better.

Question 2.1: Discuss how this mentoring affects your ability to mentor other faculty members and students?

Open coding revealed only one theme related to information based on how this mentoring affects the ability to mentor other faculty members and students. The majority of participants responded by indicating improvement. Responses are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Question 2.1 Open Coding Responses Leading to the Improvement Theme

Participant	Phrases/descriptive words
1	Learn new techniques
3	More effective
7	New understanding
12	New methods

16	Techniques and styles
17	Offer suggestions for best practices
18	Take bad advice and make it good
19	Some good models to work from
23	Create a positive and empowering situation
24	Ensure best possible support
25	I now have a model

Selective coding of Question 2.1 generated a composite response of improvement. One participant's statement that reflected the axial coding composite with the most congruence was selected. Participant 6 stated, "I have a drive to help other faculty in the ways I've been helped. I consider myself unbelievably blessed with the mentoring I've received over my career and definitely feel the need to pay it forward."

Question 2.2: How do you feel that this has improved their ability to teach their online students?

Open coding revealed only one theme related to information based on how mentoring improved their ability to teach their online students. The majority of participants responded by indicating positive. Responses are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Question 2.2 Open Coding Responses Leading to the Positive Theme

Participant	Phrases/descriptive words
6	To integrate ground breaking ways
10	More empowered
14	Give them tools
15	Like to improve outcomes
18	Helps a lot
20	Continual improvement
21	Keeps faculty up-to-date on improvements
24	Better conduits to success

Selective coding of Question 2.2 generated a composite response of positive. One participant's statement that reflected the axial coding composite with the most congruence was selected. Participant 18 stated, "Of course, first you have to be very involved then lighten up. This helps and rewards the teachers. Over time, it helps a lot."

Question 2.3: How do you receive effective mentoring from fellow faculty members and administration?

Open coding revealed two themes related to information based on how participants received effective mentoring from fellow faculty members and administration. Nine participants responded by indicating electronically, and seven responded by indicating interactions. Responses regarding the two themes are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Question 2.3 Open Coding Responses Leading to the Themes of Interactions and Electronically

Participant	Phrases/Descriptive Words
Interactions	
1	Workshops
3	Meetings
5	Resource centers
15	Workshop
18	All interactions
21	In service training sessions
24	Meetings
Electronically	
3	E-mails
6	E-mails
10	Simple telephone call
17	Email messages
19	Phone conferences, weekly email
20	Electronically
21	Emails, WebEx training
25	Online
26	Email

Selective coding of Question 2.3 regarding how you receive effective mentoring from fellow faculty members and administration resulted in the composite responses of interactions and electronically. One participant's statement that reflected the axial coding composite with the most congruence was selected. Participant 21 stated, "In service training sessions, one-on-one question/answer emails, [and] videos/WebEx training."

Question 2.4: If you do not receive this information effectively from other faculty members and administrators, what do you do to mentor your students properly in the online classroom?

Open coding revealed two themes related to information based on what participants did to mentor students properly in the online classroom. Six participants responded by indicating communication. Responses regarding the two themes are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Question 2.4 Open Coding Responses Leading to Themes of Communication and Experience

Participant	Phrases/Descriptive Words
Communication	
2	We will Skype
3	Feedback
10	Feedback
20	Communicate excessively
23	Reach out

26	Contact

Experience	
7	Previous experience
17	Over the years
18	Experience
22	Lots of experience

Selective coding of Question 2.4 resulted in the composite responses of communication and experience. Two participants' statements that reflected the axial coding composite with the most congruence were selected. Participant 20 stated, "Communicate excessively; keep them engaged and informed." Participant 7 stated, "Go by instinct and previous experience; doing what I feel is appropriate for students."

Question 2.5 What are possible ways to mentor students through an online classroom?

Open coding revealed only one theme related to information based on possible ways to mentor students through an online classroom. Eleven participants responded by indicating communications. Responses regarding the one theme are presented in Table 8.

Table 8

Question 2.5 Open Coding Responses Leading to Communication Theme

Participant	Phrases/Descriptive Words
1	Discussion board
2	Skype
5	Emails
6	Casual discussions
7	Announcements, emails, forums, etc.
10	Messages
14	Chat
15	Discussion boards, class emails
20	Communications, feedback
21	Live chats
26	Phone calls, personal emails

Selective coding of Question 2.5 resulted in the composite responses of communication. One participant's statement that reflected the axial coding composite with the most congruence was selected. Participant 10 stated, "Frequent individual messages – don't treat a class as a 'group' . . . treat them individually, know their names, their interests, and goals. Take an active role in helping students achieve their goals."

Question 2.6: How does your professional mentoring assist you in this role of mentoring students?

Open coding revealed two themes related to information based on how professional mentoring assisted online faculty members' role of mentoring students. Five participants responded by indicating enhancement. Responses regarding the two themes are presented in Table 9.

Table 9

Question 2.6 Open Coding Responses Leading to Themes of Enhancement and Response

Participant	Phrases/descriptive words
Enhancement	
1	Provide examples
3	Tailor my responses
7	Helps me instruct and guide
10	Learning new practices
12	Prepare
Response	
20	Mirroring
21	Can relate
22	Follow the behavior

Selective coding of Question 2.6 resulted in the composite responses of enhancement and response. Two participants' statements that reflected the axial coding composite with the most congruence were selected. Participant 7 stated, "Helps me instruct and guide them through their educational process." Participant 20 stated, "Follow the behavior set by the mentor."

Question 2.7: What is the importance of mentoring to professional development?

Open coding revealed only one theme related to information based on the importance of mentoring to professional development. Twelve participants responded by indicating positive significance. Responses regarding the theme are presented in Table 10.

Table 10

Question 2.7 Open Coding Responses Leading to Positive Significance Theme

Participant	Phrases/descriptive words
4	Very high
5	Critical
10	Critical!
12	Gives an upper edge
14	Very important
15	Learn faster and better
17	Learn something new
20	Is leading force
21	Improves
22	Make the path to follow
25	Indispensable
26	Can encourage and provide

Selective coding of Question 2.7 resulted in the composite responses of positive significance. One participant's statement that reflected the axial coding composite with the most congruence

was selected. Participant 20 stated, "Mentoring is the leading force in professional development."

Summary

From the research study and questions, four main themes emerged. First was communication, as communication was indicated in almost all responses to the survey. Following communication was the theme of continuing education for faculty members in order to continue growing as an instructor. Feedback and access to provisions, such as technology for the online classroom were the last two overall themes. Overall, participants indicated that they viewed faculty-to-faculty mentoring in a positive light and as beneficial to their teaching and the learning of their students. The faculty members recognized the significance of mentoring to their online classrooms, and they believed increased or regular, consistent communication and interaction between mentor and mentee to be vital to the mentoring relationship. Technology appeared to be important to the participants. The participants indicated that it is important to have mentoring for increased technology use within the online classroom.

Conclusions

While most of the faculty who were surveyed indicated that feedback and communication were essential to their training as online faculty members, the nature of this communication varies by institution. The foremost theme of communication was provided within all of the questions' responses. Therefore, this is something that should be a vital piece of training and on-going faculty professional development.

Online faculty members with quality training and mentoring will provide more quality instruction to their students, which in turn, will raise overall satisfaction among faculty members and students. Administrators need full engagement and involvement with their faculty members to know what their faculty members need in terms of training and support. With this direct line of communication, administrators can provide a positive overall experience for everyone involved in the online learning environment. When faculty members feel that what they do is valued, they are more likely to continue working and want to continue improving as educators.

Implications and Recommendations for Further Study

The findings have revealed some implications for administrators, online faculty members, and students. In addressing the needs for proper and comprehensive training of online faculty members, a systematic method that can be applied within a variety of types of colleges for communicating goals and expectations to faculty members should be developed. If faculty are not properly trained and supported throughout their teaching experience, they are not as likely to demonstrate confidence and comfort in their online teaching ability, which then affects student performance in online classrooms. Online faculty members need to have professional development even after they have been teaching beyond the first year in order to learn new ways to implement different teaching techniques and strategies in their online classrooms. Online faculty members need to receive positive feedback periodically from their faculty mentors along with information about ways to improve if they do not meet the expectations of the higher education institution. Online faculty members need to experience communication before they experience problems with their teaching if they are to be successful.

Quality online faculty members need quality online training and constructive feedback to be able to provide learning experiences to students. This effort can generate a ripple effect for the institution. If the institution provides quality training and feedback to its online faculty members,

then the quality of the instruction in the classroom will improve, and students will be more engaged. "Students need quality instructors to motivate them and to get them engaged in their learning" (D. Moerland, personal communication, December 1, 2011), and quality faculty members need to have been mentored proactively.

The findings in this study lead to inferences for developing additional lines of research for online faculty mentoring. The research of the study reported here could be adapted into a quantitative study to add breadth of understanding of what faculty members need or want for mentoring and training while employed as online faculty members. By looking at percentages and testing for significances, more implications can be made to develop the ideal online faculty-training model.

Future studies include questions about at what specific time frames training and mentoring should occur. For example, some training for teaching online may require candidates to be in class from 1 hour to 16 weeks before being allowed to teach online. Such questions will yield various types of data, thus new answers. Future researchers need to consider what online faculty training should be provided and for how long before a faculty member teaches online. Specifically, training may need to be different for those who have never taught online before than those who have been teaching online for several years for several different institutions.

Future researchers should also inquire about how to implement with greatest efficacy the training of online faculty members. As shown in the results, feedback and communication were themes that were of interest to the online faculty members who participated. While these two themes seem to be common among the participants, the issue of who would deliver the training and how often or how it would be delivered remain to be identified. Examples might include collaborative training using a faculty trainer, an instructional designer, or with the Learning Management staff to deliver training. Different modes of training delivery such as one-on-one, self-paced, or hands-on group training may accommodate different learning styles but need to be studied. Finally, researchers could identify the goals and expectations of the faculty members as both online learners and online faculty members in order to align faculty member expectations between what they are required to do and what they are able to do to become exceptional educators regardless of their discipline or field.

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APPENDIX A

Online Faculty Mentoring Survey

Section 1: Faculty Member Perceptions of Support

1.1 What types of professional development are most crucial to your success?

1.2 What are possible ways to mentor students through an online classroom?

1.3 How does your professional mentoring assist you in this role of mentor to your students?

1.4 If you are not properly supported, how is it possible to properly mentor your students?

1.5 What is the importance of mentoring to professional development?

1.6 If it is possible to mentor fellow faculty in an online forum, how do you do so or recommend doing so?

1.7 What is the importance of faculty members' mentoring development to the successes of their students in their online courses?

Section 2: Online Faculty Members Perceptions of Successful Mentoring

2.1 How do you view your peers at other online institutions?

2.2. How much and what types of support do they receive from their administration?

2.3. How do students benefit from additional faculty mentoring support?

Thank you for your participation.

[Back to the Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration Contents](#)