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Facilitating Faculty Mentoring within a Community of Practice Model

Despite this growing knowledge base on faculty mentoring in higher education, providing effective mentoring for faculty presents several dilemmas for department chairs: How can chairs promote collaborative mentoring in an inherently hierarchical context? How can chairs create trust in an evaluative relationship? How do chairs find time to mentor? The proposed session offers a *community of practice* model for mentoring (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger 1998) as a way to address these dilemmas in providing mentoring to department faculty.

The most prevalent form of mentoring in academia is one-to-one mentoring between “experienced” and newer faculty members. Though the recent literature on faculty mentoring promotes a movement away from top-down models of mentoring, the *dyad model* continues to be the dominant form of mentoring in academia, where senior faculty members pass down knowledge and advice to junior faculty members. Though faculty members benefit from interactions with individual mentors, the junior-senior model is time-consuming and positions junior faculty members as less skilled or knowledgeable than “expert” senior faculty. This dichotomy can stigmatize junior faculty members and promote the belief that experienced faculty do not need mentoring. Newer models of faculty mentoring promote more reciprocal relationships of *co-mentoring* with a two-way exchange of knowledge and support. In these collaborative models, all faculty contribute to “the growth and development of all partners” (Mullen & Schunk, 2010, p. 187). One such collaborative model is the community of practice model.

In this presentation, we discuss the ways in which department chairs might effectively facilitate mentoring within their department through a community of practice model. At the heart of a community of practice is learning through joint participation in the shared practices of the community (department), such as designing curricula, engaging in research, providing service, and advising students. Rather than labeling particular members as novice or expert, mentor or mentee, the community of practice model frames membership in terms of one’s participation in the community’s practices. Such a model puts our shared engagement in practice at the center of faculty mentoring and development. Faculty mentor and are mentored as they jointly negotiate shared tasks and share knowledge and experience needed to complete tasks.

Our roundtable will begin with a discussion of audience members’ current experiences and dilemmas with faculty mentoring. We will then explicate the central components of a community of practice model for mentoring and how a community of practice model serves as an effective way to facilitate mentoring for department faculty. Drawing on our own experiences mentoring *and* being mentored in a community of practice, we will illustrate how this model serves to build trust among faculty members and break down traditional boundaries between novices and experts. In the process, we’ll share professional products produced from our collaborative mentoring and resources we have created to educate our faculty about this model. We will ask audience members to share their input on this emerging model and provide time for a discussion of the issues raised during this roundtable.