
**Categories:** Student Support, Mentoring

**Summary**

This article examines the possible causes for what it refers to as the “low durability and impact” of minority college student mentoring programs. It tries to rectify this problem by suggesting a conceptual model for such programs. In doing so, the author emphasizes the need for programs that offer “a cogent definition of mentoring, that reflect on roles that can be played in mentoring, and consider the cultural and social implications for an alternative mentoring model—network mentoring.”

According to Haring, a survey of the scholarly literature on mentoring at the tertiary level of education shows a distinct paucity in articles discussing minority student programs. Haring argues that this suggests that such programs suffer from a lack of persistence. In assessing the causes of this weakness, the author identifies a few key factors. First, minority student mentoring programs, like many that serve non-minority populations, lack a clear definition of what mentoring is. Such amorphous views of what mentoring entails result in a lack of purpose, and subsequently diminished benefits. Second, most minority student mentoring programs depending a matching system in which mentors and their respective mentees are paired through introductory meetings, and that then assumes that the mentor and student will continue to develop their relationship on their own. Such a design, however, is based on a faulty assumption that posits the mentor as a person who has skills and/or a position of importance, and is motivated to assist the mentee, who is involved in the program due to a need based on some personal weakness. Aside from the fact that such matching systems are general quite hit or miss in terms of the strength of the arranged matches, they are premised on the construct that the mentor is the only person in the relationship with something of value to offer, further demeaning the mentee. Finally, minority student mentoring programs tend to suffer from limited staffing. Often times, such programs are managed by a single staff member with some clerical support.

Having identified the common weaknesses of minority student mentoring programs, Haring shifts to a discussion of how to strengthen these programs. The starting point, according to the author, is to effectively define mentoring so as to provide clarity and purpose. Haring offers the following definition as an effective base for mentoring: “mentoring is significant career assistance that is given by a more experienced person(s) to less experienced one(s) during a time of transition.” This definition, argues Haring, has several strengths. By characterizing the purpose of mentoring as giving assistance, it broadens the potential functions of the mentor, and suggests the utility of conducting a needs assessment at the beginning of a mentorship. By referring to the qualification of mentors as “experience,” rather than age or position, this definition also creates a broader base for potential mentors, including advanced students. Finally, the use of the word “transition,” highlights the range of challenges to which the mentor might offer assistance: matriculation into college, entering a difficult cultural environment, etc. Implicit in this conceptualization is the need/opportunity to consider a variety of questions that might shape both the nature and programming of such mentorships: what challenges
must be met to make a particular transition; how do specific challenges of minority students differ from those faced by other students at the institution; what adjustments can/should the institution make to ease these transitions.

Haring concludes the article by offering two potential, alternative models of mentoring for minority students that have experienced success elsewhere. The first is “Grooming Mentoring,” in which the mentor’s primary purpose is to help the student through the processes of transition attendant to higher education. The model is based on the experience and assumes a unidirectional flow of benefits from mentor to mentee. This model, according to Haring, is particularly well-suited for students who accept the institution as it is and want to “fit in,” and mentors desirous of passing on their experiences so as to create “a new generation in their own image.” The second model, “Network Mentoring,” is based on non-hierarchical connections between a number of people who exchange benefits and commit to help each other with a variety of professional and social needs. Finally, Haring notes that the two models can be successfully blended.

Applications

Haring’s article offers some insight into the potential weaknesses of current/future mentoring efforts at U.D.C., as well as some remedies for these pitfalls. In particular, this article notes the dangers of creating programs that lack an effective foundational definition and the institutional support to ensure success. It also offers some conceptual food for thought in shaping mentoring efforts: presenting brief descriptions of some alternative models. Unfortunately, Haring’s work here lacks a certain practical utility. First, despite her efforts, the definition of mentoring that she offers as a guiding concept seems as vague as those she decries. Moreover, in this regard, at least one of the two alternative models presented, “Grooming Mentoring,” fails to embrace the basic conceptual underpinnings that she argues are crucial to more effective mentoring. Additionally, since the article offers no direction as to how to facilitate or arrange either of the alternative models proffered, it would seem likely that any potential effort to put them in place could just as easily fail to effectively match participants. This is not to suggest that “Grooming Mentoring,” which sounds relatively traditional, and “Network Mentoring” do not offer promise. Rather, the problem stems from Haring’s failure to offer much in the way of clear, practical guidelines in establishing such programs. At best, then, this article offers some useful warnings of what not to do, and suggests models that, given further investigation, might provide substantial benefits for mentoring at U.D.C.

Citations of Interest


Haring, M.J., “Network Mentoring as a Preferred Model for Guiding Programs for Underrepresented Students,” in Frierson.

Welch, O.M., “An Examination of Effective Mentoring Models in Academe,” in Frierson.