

Mentoring and Socialization of Future Senior Student Affairs Officers

Michael C. Mason
Berklee College of Music

Little research has been conducted on the academic preparation of Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs). This study investigates the perceptions of mentoring relationships between faculty mentors and their doctoral student protégés who were in training to become SSAOs. Kram's (1985) theory, identifying psychosocial and career aspects of mentoring in organizational development, examines these relationships. Given the findings, a stronger emphasis upon the SSAO applied theory component of the doctoral program is recommended in multiple ways.

INTRODUCTION

Many students enter doctoral programs with the specific intent of joining the ranks of higher education faculty through a clear set of experiences that include coursework, teaching assistantships, dissertation research and the final defense. The body of research on doctoral education and the professional formation of doctoral students primarily focuses on preparing students for the professoriate in Arts and Sciences (Overview of the Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate, 2002; Golde & Dore, 2001; Kuh, 1997; Nyquist & Woodford, 2000). Yet, according to these studies, a number of concerns have surfaced regarding the lack of quality within doctoral education, mainly that doctoral students were not adequately trained for faculty careers (Golde and Dore, 2001, p. 5).

One area identified in the literature to improve doctoral student preparation is the relationship between the faculty mentor and the student protégé. Researchers studying faculty-mentoring programs for doctoral students have reported many benefits for protégés, including advantages in job placement, research skills, research productivity and self-efficacy, and collaborative publications (Kram, 1985; Paglis, Green, & Bauer, 2006; Terrell & Wright, 1988 as cited in Noonan, Ballinger & Black, 2007).

Yet, does what we know about mentoring doctoral students and the outcomes apply to all doctoral students, such as those who enter doctoral programs in applied professional fields? For example, certain doctoral students enter Higher Education Administration with the goal of remaining in applied administrative and practitioner roles in student affairs and progressing to the most senior level of this profession. Does this faculty/student relationship help prepare doctoral students for what they will do professionally?

Research on mentoring in an academic environment shows three primary purposes: (a) to transmit formal disciplinary knowledge and technical skills (Reskin, 1979); (b) to initiate students into the rules, values and ethics of their discipline; and (c) to bolster their protégé's confidence in themselves through encouragement and praise. (Lyons & Scroggins, 1990). This is important to students' socialization, as it helps to provide a sense of identity regarding the role itself and the knowledge and skills to perform in the role effectively.

FOCUS OF THE STUDY

This study focused on the mentoring relationship between faculty mentors and current Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs) who were their former doctoral students. They were studied in order to learn the perceptions of whether the mentoring relationship helped to socialize and prepare students for the role of SSAO. Weidman, Twale and Stein (2001) describe socialization in this way:

It becomes a continuum of experiences, with some experiences being commonly and uniformly felt by students and others perceived differently by students with different characteristics. Each step along the journey has particular significance, becomes a rite of passage, or adds important people and information to the mix.
(p. 5)

Weidman, Twale and Stein (2001) also believe that “socialization in graduate programs is a nonlinear process during which identity and role commitment are developed through experiences with formal and informal university culture as well as personal and professional reference groups outside academe” (p. 36).

This study sought to examine two research questions:

- How do faculty mentors perceive how their mentoring relationship with their former doctoral student protégés helped to socialize them into becoming current senior leaders in Student Affairs?
- How do former doctoral student protégés perceive how their mentoring relationship with their faculty mentor socialized them into becoming current senior leaders in Student Affairs?

METHODOLOGY

The theoretical framework used for this study was based on the mentoring research of Kram (1983, 1985). Kram’s research stated that mentoring is composed of two distinct elements: career functions and psychosocial functions. Career functions include sponsorship, coaching, protection, and providing exposure, visibility, and challenging assignments. Psychosocial functions include role modeling, acceptance and confirmation, counseling and friendship (Chandler & Kram, 2007). Kram’s research further highlighted how relationships and their content vary according to the protégé’s life stage. (Chandler & Kram, 2007, p. 6).

A qualitative approach was used, as qualitative methods best captured the subjects’ experiences of mentoring and being mentored. Rossman and Rallis (1998) state that qualitative research has two unique features. First, the researcher serves as the conduit through which the research occurs and is conducted. Second, the outcome of the research should be learning something new about the social world. This second feature was the primary purpose of this study: to gain insight into perceptions about the career and psychosocial aspects of mentoring higher education administration doctoral students.

Specifically, an empirical phenomenological model was used to carry out this research. “Often through a series of in-depth, exploratory, intensive interviews...the researcher seeks to understand the deep meaning of an individual’s experiences and how he or she articulates those experiences” (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p. 72). According to Moustakas (1994), this involves a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience. This study is also an example of “research that elicits tacit knowledge and subjective understandings and interpretations” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 53).

The subjects interviewed were comprised of five faculty mentors (identified as such by their former doctoral students) and seven of their former doctoral students, who achieved senior leadership positions as SSAO’s (In Table 1, in the table the faculty members’ names are in grey and followed by their former students’ names). These interviews reflected the SSAOs’ and mentors’ perceptions of how psychosocial and career development occurred through mentorship during their doctoral studies and, if at all, how it

prepared them for their current roles. The faculty mentor interviews were conducted in two parts. Part One gathered demographic information and data on the professor's own experience as a teacher and protégé. Part Two addressed the experiences and interactions that led to the protégés' psychosocial and career development, especially the role that mentoring played in preparing the students for senior leadership positions within Student Affairs.

TABLE 1
PARTICIPANTS' DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Name	Role	Length of Role	Race	Gender	Institution	Type	Location
Dr. John Christian	Professor/ Faculty Mentor	33 years	White	Male	Red Valley University	Private	Midwest
Dr. Grant MacAtee	SSAO/Former Doctoral Student	9 years	White	Male	State College University	State	Northeast
Dr. Sarah Brown	Associate Professor/ Program Director/ Faculty Mentor	14 years	White	Female	Christo Rey University	Private Religiously Affiliated	New England
Dr. Sal Colavita	SSAO/Former Doctoral Student	6 years	White	Male	Salvation College	Private Small Religiously Affiliated	New England
Dr. Susan James	SSAO/Former Doctoral Student	6 weeks	White	Female	Triduum College	Private Religiously Affiliated	Northeast
Dr. Ellen Foster	SSAO/Former Doctoral Student	6 years	White	Female	Magellan College	Private	Northeast
Dr. Mark Southern	Retired Professor/ Former Program Director/Faculty Mentor	30 years	White	Male	Red Valley University	Private	Midwest
Dr. Ann O'Hara	SSAO/Former Doctoral Student	7 years	White	Female	Andersenville College	Private Religiously Affiliated	Midwest
Dr. Jane Sutton	SSAO/Former Doctoral Student	5 years	White	Female	Middle State University	Public Large	Midwest
Dr. Daisy Ramirez	Associate Professor/ Department Chair/ Faculty Mentor	12 years	Latina	Female	Christo Rey University	Private Religiously Affiliated	New England
Dr. Jack Bryant	SSAO/Former Doctoral Student	4 years	White	Male	Edsel University	Private	New England
Dr. Adam Mathis	Retired Professor/Faculty Mentor	25 years	White	Male	Conowingo State University	Large Public	Midwest
Dr. Evelyn Freeman	SSAO/Former Doctoral Student	7 years	African American	Female	The Urban University	Large Public	Mid Atlantic

In the SSAO interviews, Part One consisted of gathering demographic information and data on the protégé's own experience as a doctoral student. In Part Two, participants discussed the experiences and interactions that led to their psychosocial and career development that led to understanding the role that mentoring played in preparing them for senior leadership positions within Student Affairs. The data from the mentors and protégés were then analyzed for their content similarities and differences both within and across groups.

The SSAOs interviewed were those serving in four-year colleges and universities and varying in age, race and gender to provide as diverse a sample as possible. They held doctorates in either Student Affairs or Higher Education Administration with a focus on Student Affairs. An additional criterion of their participation was that they were able to identify faculty mentors from their respective doctoral programs and provide contact information for those mentors. When possible, interviews took place on the home campus of each participant; otherwise a phone interview was conducted.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The data was transcribed and then coded using Hyper RESEARCH. This was done to identify themes or trends across the interviews and to reflect similarities and differences with both the faculty mentors and the former protégés. To analyze the transcribed data, a modified van Kaam method for analysis developed by Moustakas (1994) was used.

In looking at the first research question, the five faculty mentors generally viewed their mentoring relationships with doctoral students as ones that supported conducting research and completing the dissertation. Specific examples include mentors providing philosophical frameworks for the ways in which students approached their dissertations, guidance for students' writing and revision, and new frames of reference through which their students viewed an institution of higher education.

In addition, mentors saw themselves as sounding boards and colleagues. They helped students make meaning of prior professional experiences, discern initial career options just after the doctoral program or many years after, and consider issues of work/life balance. In these conversations, mentors helped students examine their priorities, both personally and professionally.

One interesting finding was that faculty mentors did not perceive themselves as providing specific preparation for the role of SSAO. In their conversations, mentors and protégés did not discuss the day-to-day functions of the position, how to oversee multiple Student Affairs offices, or how to manage resources, both human and fiscal. Mentors perceived that these discussions did not take place because either the students generally demonstrated prior knowledge of these skills or the mentors referred their students to other faculty members who had much more knowledge and experience with the SSAO position. However, mentors did discuss senior university leadership in general and the culture, mission and values of the institution at which students were considering an SSAO position.

The second research question focused on the perceptions of eight former doctoral students and their preparation for their current roles. The interviews revealed that some students were supported by their program directors (and their future mentors) during the application process to specific doctoral programs that met their needs and career goals. Some students were also helped by their faculty mentors during the program to network with national Student Affairs professional organizations, while others were challenged to think about their abilities and explore possible career options. The SSAOs also viewed their mentors as people in whom they could confide about both personal and professional challenges and from whom they gained personal, professional, and intellectual confidence.

In terms of their professional development, the SSAOs perceived that they were prepared for their current roles, specifically by their mentors and generally by their doctoral programs. This was an interesting finding, as it contradicted the perception that their mentors generally held. In analyzing the SSAO responses, it became clear that the career preparation may not have been in the specific area of what an SSAO does day to day, but the mentors planted seeds regarding the political environment of senior leadership that directly affected the day-to-day role. In addition, some students had the opportunity to serve in assistantships such as Graduate Assistant, Assistant to the Senior Vice President for Finance,

or Assistant to the President. Through these experiences, they gained valuable insight into the academic subcultures outside of Student Affairs. These students commented on how their experiences provided a larger picture of higher education as an enterprise.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The goal of this study was to investigate the perceptions that mentors and SSAOs have about mentoring and the professional development of SSAOs. The results revealed that this group of SSAO participants actually entered their doctoral programs with fairly clear ideas of what the role of SSAO encompassed. More importantly, the results also revealed that although Higher Education Administration is an applied field, the SSAO's had little opportunity to apply their theory, knowledge, and experience in actual senior student affairs situations during the course of their doctoral programs.

Based on these results, four recommendations would improve the practical career preparation for students in doctoral programs in Higher Education Administration/Student Development.

Provide More Mentors from the Field

Because not all mentors in this study were familiar with the role of the SSAO, it may be generalizable that other faculty in other similar programs may not be familiar with the role either. Given this, doctoral programs may benefit from providing more than one faculty mentor for each doctoral student. This model builds upon the research of Parks (2000), which supports mentoring communities or multiple mentors allowing students to receive mentoring from different sources and perspectives. In addition to faculty mentors, doctoral students would also be paired up with a Mentor of Practice. This mentor would be an alumnus/a from their doctoral program who serves as an SSAO and with whom doctoral students can have direct conversations. Students could also speak with their Mentor of Practice about how theory does (or does not) coincide when working with students and managing staff.

Senior leaders other than SSAOs could also serve as mentors. They would help provide multiple lenses through which doctoral students could view institutional issues, understand the perspectives of other constituencies within the university, and address problems and issues from a multi-disciplinary approach. This would also allow for practical interactions with SSAOs and other senior leaders about day-to-day functions, about how the role affects family and personal lives, and discussions about future career options.

Increase Apprenticeship Experiences

A second implication of this research is the lack of practical experiences in learning about the day-to-day life of an SSAO, even though many students had positive experiences within the doctoral program. This situation could be addressed by creating a required apprenticeship experience for all Higher Education Administration/Student Affairs doctoral programs consisting of a semester apprenticeship with a practicing SSAO.

Walker et al. (2008) view mentoring between faculty members and doctoral students through the lens of an apprenticeship:

Apprenticeship should, in our view, be understood more broadly as a theory of learning and a set of practices that are widely relevant. Seen this way, apprenticeship can and should inform and strengthen all aspects of the doctoral program, whether during advanced classes, in the course of working in the lab, while teaching undergraduates, during seminars, while having conferences in an office, or in hallway conversationsApprenticeship pedagogies demand purposeful participation by both students and faculty. (p. 91)

Given this perspective, Walker et al. also believe that students should have opportunities to connect with multiple mentors during their experience:

The traditional apprenticeship model is typically conceived as a pairing of two individuals, but the multifaceted, integrative learning expected of today's PhDs requires growth on a number of dimensions...Today's students are thus best served by having several intellectual mentors. (p. 94)

This type of experience is already a common practice in master's programs in Higher Education Administration/Student Affairs and would add an important experiential learning component to doctoral students' overall educational experience and career development. Like teaching assistantships for doctoral students preparing to enter the professoriate, this type of internship for doctoral students would introduce students to the practical work of an SSAO and allow them to apply theory to practice before their first official SSAO position. This experience should occur toward the end of the students' coursework phase, as it will help students put their newly learned theory and former experiences into practice. This apprenticeship experience would also help inform the dissertation process, as the topic might be based on a relevant issue the student encountered during the apprenticeship.

Increase Faculty Awareness of Mentoring

The third issue this study raised is that faculty mentors were not fully aware of the impact they had upon their students regarding preparation for the SSAO role and leadership. In the interviews, faculty mentors said that they mainly received feedback from their students on their role as director in helping the student finish the dissertation process and not on things learned relating to the SSAO position. Perhaps one reason is that students are not aware of the mentor's role in their career development until they have been in the role for some years and can reflect back on the mentoring experience and share those reflections anecdotally with the mentor.

It would be helpful for faculty to hear from their former students in a formal and systemic way so they understand how they affected the students' career preparation process. One way to gather this feedback would be for the doctoral program to issue a survey to those alumni/alumnae who have been SSAOs for a certain number of years. This would create data on the role of faculty mentors in the area of career aspects of mentoring. The data would also provide more material for further research and allow institutions to document the effectiveness of their faculty and the impact of the doctoral program.

This finding indicates that doctoral program faculty should be better educated on the impact of their role as faculty mentors. As each cohort is selected and oriented into its own doctoral experience, faculty would be oriented prior to the cohort's arrival about the importance and impact of faculty, in particular the psychosocial development that occurs over the course of the doctoral student mentoring experience. This would provide a more complete context regarding the role of the faculty mentor.

Increase Post-Graduate Communities of Practice

As noted earlier, many of the mentoring relationships were well developed in the psychosocial area and continued after the doctoral program experience. There were SSAOs who mentioned the importance of writing as an outcome of their programs. They also mentioned that they wished to continue their scholarly work with their mentor, yet due to job responsibilities, they found this to be nearly impossible. One last recommendation would be for professional organizations such as the National Association of Student Affairs Professionals (NASPA) and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) to provide funding for mentors and their former protégés to continue their scholarly work that began in the doctoral program setting. This would increase the number of senior leaders who would contribute research to the field. It would also allow a senior practitioner's voice to be heard from the field to provide additional, and perhaps contrasting, perspectives to research that is being conducted by faculty.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study focused solely on doctoral students in Higher Education Administration programs and how the faculty mentors in those programs prepared students for the role of senior leadership. This focus is

critical because it may provide insights into the level of significance that faculty mentoring holds in the socialization process of students into the role of SSAO and whether or not faculty mentors view this as a responsibility. Mentoring benefits for protégés include more rapid career advancement, higher rates of compensation, greater career opportunity, and enhanced professional identity (Fagenson, 1989; Fagenson-Eland, Marks, & Amendola, 1997; Kram, 1988; Wilde & Schau, 1991). Insights into the mentor-protégé relationship can prove to be very valuable, as it provides guidance for faculty and helps them to understand the impact of their relationships with doctoral students during this critical period in their education.

In addition, this study examined the relevance of research and theory on doctoral students who enter applied fields of study. This study investigated the perceptions of the effects of faculty mentoring on a former doctoral student's professional identity as an SSAO and their job performance. The intention is that the results will contribute to that body of knowledge.

The results of this study will add to the growing knowledge about improving the quality of doctoral education. Over the last twenty years, various policy discussions have addressed the quality of doctoral education in the United States and how well these programs prepare students to enter the workforce. This study adds more data to those discussions, specifically regarding the entry of doctoral students into roles of senior leadership in Higher Education Administration.

Another merit of this study is that its findings may provide a practical and effective mentoring model. This model may be used to inform institutional policy regarding the purpose and structure of future mentoring programs for doctoral students, as "policy studies provide information that helps governmental, institutional, or organizational authorities develop programs or make policy decisions" (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, pp. 17-18). By providing a more practical model, students have a deeper experience of connecting theory and practice in preparation for their future roles as SSAOs.

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