

AMBITIOUS STUDENT SEEKS VALUABLE INTERNSHIP: WILL YOU MENTOR ME?

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STARTING NEW RELATIONSHIPS: INTRODUCTION

In your career path, how have mentors helped shape your professional and personal development? Most librarians can point to one or two important people or experiences that were instrumental in guiding their success, especially early in their careers. The librarians at the University of Dubuque's (UD) Charles C. Myers Library feel they have a responsibility to mentor prospective and new librarians, especially those interested in information literacy.

Working in a busy library considered by students, faculty, and administrators to be an integral part of student learning and the campus community, librarians enjoy sharing their experiences. As in many professions, particularly those with a foundation in service, it is important to not only sustain the profession, but also help it grow by nurturing those who are new to the field. Mentoring programs promote mutually-beneficial partnerships. Foundations from the literature and the authors' planning and implementation process for a mentoring program may assist other libraries when undertaking something similar. These suggestions may be incorporated into mentorship practices (formal or informal) in any library instruction program utilizing interns, student workers, paraprofessionals, or professional staff.

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READING ADVICE COLUMNS: WHAT DOES THE LITERATURE SAY?

While recent trends have indicated an increasing focus on the practical aspects of librarianship, the emphasis library information science (LIS) programs have placed on theory over practice has fluctuated over the years (Ball, 2008). Berry (2005) notes a shift in attitudes toward promoting internship experiences within LIS programs, with some professionals recommending for-credit practicums as one component of program accreditation. Ensuring LIS graduates have a wide range of experiences, including information literacy instruction, will not only help them be more prepared for the job search, but also benefit the learning communities they will serve.

Moore, Miller, Pitchford, and Jeng (2007) summarize various mentoring models and provide considerations for both mentors and mentees for successful professional relationships. Mentees should identify professional goals, create a personal development plan, and consider various criteria for identifying potential mentors. Moore, et al. (2007) provide best practices for mentoring to support diversity in the profession.

Most models fall into two categories, formal or informal. Formal mentoring typically includes an experienced mentor partnered with a protégé new to the field. The mentor usually determines the structure and development of the relationship (Buke & Lawrence, 2011). While some may think of formal mentorship as adding an unrealistic time commitment to current responsibilities, formal mentoring programs offered through institutions or associations provide guidance and structure to support mentoring with realistic expectations.

On the other hand, informal mentoring models include goals that may not be explicitly defined. Buke and Lawrence

(2011) identify “accidental mentorship” which develops spontaneously out of need, often between supervisors and library student workers. Informal mentoring relationships can also occur between peers, among groups, and through professional networking (Freedman, 2009). Murphy (2008) discusses reverse mentoring in which new librarians share current ideas from their studies or recent experience. Often informal mentoring happens through casual conversation.

Regardless of the approach, mentoring programs often include a balance of orientation to job tasks and institutional culture, support for advancement, and informal mentoring to support professional development (Lee, 2009). While many libraries use traditional one-on-one models, trends indicate a move toward group-focused models, which may include peer mentoring, mentoring circles, dialogue groups, and others (Bosch, 2010; Murphy, 2008). Henrich and Attebury (2010) discuss communities of practice, which create and share knowledge with a specific goal or purpose in mind. Another unique approach is the Resource Team Model (RTM) at California State University, Long Beach, in which a team of three librarian mentors with various strengths work with one new librarian for six months (Bosch, 2010).

When well-implemented, any mentoring model or combination of models can produce reciprocal benefits (Osif, 2008). Mentees receive valuable experience and job search support, and all involved share professional ideas and reflect upon their beliefs as information literacy educators (Berry, 2005). The library also benefits from having additional temporary staff when an internship is involved (Yontz, 2008). Mentoring programs have the potential to rejuvenate the workforce and enhance organizational efficiency. Improved workplace culture, job performance, and satisfaction result from successful mentoring programs (Freedman, 2009; Henrich & Attebury, 2010).

Professional growth does not come without occasional challenges. The literature notes the time commitment and effort required can be significant depending upon the model, particularly when initiating and maintaining communication (Freedman, 2009; Henrich & Attebury, 2010). Additional barriers to successful mentoring programs may include potential mismatches between mentors and protégés, lack of commitment from either side, and organizational structures or cultural differences (Freedman, 2009).

WRITING THE PERSONAL AD: MAKING CONNECTIONS

Prior to attending Indiana University (IU) to pursue her MLS, Cara Stone had a strong connection to the Midwest, having grown up in central Iowa and attended a small, private college in the northeast part of the state. Desiring to someday return to Iowa to serve as a librarian, Cara, in her second semester of graduate studies (Spring 2010), sought the guidance of Iowa academic librarians through an informal email mentorship experience. She sent out introductory emails to approximately 20 instruction/reference librarians and received approximately 15 positive responses. Over the next three months the resulting

discussions focused on academic librarianship in liberal arts institutions.

THE FIRST DATE: MEETING IN PERSON

Many of the librarians Cara contacted recommended attending the annual Iowa Library Association/ACRL conference, which Cara attended that spring. There she met several of her email mentors in person. One of them, Becky Canovan, Reference and Instruction Librarian at UD, “adopted” Cara by providing pointers throughout the day and introducing her to the rest of the UD faculty in attendance. Conversations focused on Cara’s interest in public services, and her desire to return to Iowa, potentially for an internship placement for the 2011 spring semester. Mary Anne Knefel, UD Library Director, asked Cara if she would be interested in an internship at UD. After consulting with IU to explore options and policies, and following up with Mary Anne, plans for a semester-long internship fell into place. UD had supported undergraduate internships in the past, but Cara, along with another graduate intern, Jenny Parker, was one of the first two LIS graduate students with whom UD library staff had worked.

Internships at IU place strong emphasis on practical, real-world experience facilitated by a knowledgeable supervisor and are done in a variety of settings, not strictly limited to academic or public libraries. Prior to beginning, the student is interviewed by the supervisor and submits a list of responsibilities to the School of Library and Information Science (SLIS) internship coordinator. For every credit hour earned, SLIS students work 60 on-site hours. Throughout the experience, the student keeps a professional journal and writes one article abstract for every 20 hours of work. Though financial compensation for the intern’s work is not required, it is encouraged (Indiana University, 2011).

Mary Anne determined the best fit for both intern and library would be for Cara to work with Anne Marie Gruber, Assistant Director for Library Instruction and Public Services. Interns would also work closely with other librarians, completing projects outside of public services, shadowing, partnering, and participating on library committees. This approach would model the positive and collaborative library work environment the UD library staff has built. With this in mind, Cara and Anne Marie then began to plan further details of the internship.

PLANNING THE SECOND DATE: SETTING UP THE SUCCESSFUL INTERNSHIP

The most important consideration while planning was ensuring that the institution would provide opportunities to support Cara’s professional goals. At a university serving approximately 1,400 students, Charles C. Myers Library is the hub of the campus, with roughly the equivalent of the entire student body entering daily. UD has a strong information literacy (IL) program which includes over 500 sessions per year taught by five full-time librarians and assisted by interns and paraprofessionals. The program is supported by administration and faculty, and IL is an explicit learning objective of the

university's Core Curriculum, providing Cara with many opportunities to engage with students through library instruction. The program is based on ACRL standards, is connected with course learning objectives and assignments, and is scaffolded throughout the curriculum. The librarians focus on active, hands-on learning and have a robust process to assess students' IL skills. The UD library staff take a constructivist approach to teaching information literacy, and Cara has embraced that as a key part of her role as a librarian.

Budget allocations did not allow for UD to pay the graduate interns. As a result, Cara had to consider moving expenses and the cost of living. As a distance student at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, the other intern, Jenny Parker, currently resides in Dubuque and has a part-time job in the county public library system.

Cara's previous professional experience, including her teaching background, SLIS courses, and student library positions (library instruction and technical services), was considered in the planning process. Anne Marie and Cara determined internship expectations via email and phone. In addition to gaining broader experience with planning and teaching IL sessions, Cara was also interested in being involved in program-level conversations and working with emerging technologies.

Anne Marie assisted Cara with exploring housing options, resulting in Cara renting the guest room in Anne Marie's home. Once Cara arrived in Dubuque, Anne Marie helped her move in and navigate new places both on and off campus. Together they discussed campus and community culture, and Anne Marie encouraged Cara to become involved in social/educational events on campus.

GOING STEADY: MENTORSHIP IN ACTION

UD librarians structured the graduate student internship as if Cara were a new instruction librarian, beginning with orientation, instruction observation, and job shadowing early in the term. These activities were modeled from the schedule used to orient the most recently-hired librarian to the university and the library. Anne Marie and Cara determined possible projects and created a realistic professional environment, including working on multiple projects at once. Anne Marie emphasized vocational development rather than checking finite projects off a list. Library staff and interns alike were intentional about allowing time for building relationships through conversations with staff, faculty, and students.

Librarians, particularly those at smaller institutions, wear many hats. UD was a place to gain realistic experience, giving Cara opportunities to assist when she saw varied needs in the library. In addition to accomplishing established internship goals, she performed a wide range of tasks such as setting up laptops for large IL sessions, checking on the occasional no-show class across campus, and double-staffing at reference when it was particularly busy.

MENTORS ARE FROM MARS, MENTEES ARE FROM VENUS: CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

UD library staff members recognize that the experiences interns have may not necessarily reflect the approaches other institutions take, particularly regarding the information literacy program. Librarians at UD also define reference services broadly, often assisting students with tasks that go beyond basic research skills, including crafting thesis statements, creating outlines, and proofreading papers. The librarians have a strong rapport with students, with many patrons seeking guidance for a wide range of academic and nonacademic endeavors. Having previous library experience, both at another liberal arts college and at a large public university, helped Cara recognize how much libraries can vary.

Time is always a concern when considering added job responsibilities and the demanding schedule of instruction sessions, reference work, committee meetings, and other special projects that arise. For some interns and supervisors, a weekly or bi-weekly meeting may be ideal. Due to time constraints, aside from a required final evaluation, Anne Marie and Cara did not formally schedule internship discussions. Reflection was included informally throughout the internship as well as at home. Cara used the IU journaling requirement to supplement in-person reflective conversations. While not ideal, this combination of formal evaluation and information reflection may be a more realistic view of entry-level professional positions at institutions that may not have formalized mentorship programs.

There were some questions among UD library staff about how open they should be about institutional challenges and culture. For example, future changes in curriculum may not be common knowledge on campus, but the library's information literacy committee may be discussing how to respond to those changes. Library staff and interns use their judgment about what is appropriate to share, with an emphasis on transparency and positivity. Some mentoring relationships may encounter road blocks due to personal conflicts, differences in professional goals, or miscommunication. While the authors did not experience such conflicts, they recognize these issues and understand such barriers to professional growth should be addressed.

As the semester progressed, unexpected opportunities arose that benefited both the intern and the institution. With flexibility in both schedule and project goals, the internship focused on the learning and professional development process, as opposed to a check-list wherein the intern completes only certain tasks. The mentoring experience was crafted to accurately reflect the nature of the profession, focusing on information literacy, service, and involvement.

For libraries without nearby library schools, mentoring may be done via distance using a variety of synchronous or asynchronous technologies, such as email, instant messaging, Skype, and Second Life (Gieskes, 2010). With the growth of distance education LIS programs, there may also be graduate students seeking nearby professional opportunities. Working with these students and institutions may lead to future partnerships.

HAPPILY EVER AFTER: CONCLUSION

With an increased emphasis on LIS internships and mentoring in general, libraries may consider incorporating formal or informal mentoring programs. Nontraditional models, such as group or reverse mentoring, may provide substantial benefits for all parties involved. Deliberate steps should be taken in order to plan a successful mentoring relationship. Creating an open and collaborative environment will provide the protégé with a realistic and practical view of the profession. The authors hope their experiences and the literature may provide a foundation for developing or improving mentoring programs for student assistants, paraprofessionals, interns, and new librarians. Moore et al. (2007) suggest that once mentees' careers are successfully established, they have an obligation to then become mentors and give back to the profession.

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