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## **Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning**

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Caroline P. D'Abate <sup>a</sup>; Erik R. Eddy <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Management and Business, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, USA <sup>b</sup> Marketing and Management Department, Siena College, Loudonville, USA

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## **Mentoring as a learning tool: enhancing the effectiveness of an undergraduate business mentoring program**

Caroline P. D'Abate<sup>a\*</sup> and Erik R. Eddy<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*Department of Management and Business, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, USA;* <sup>b</sup>*Marketing and Management Department, Siena College, Loudonville, USA*

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Mentoring can be used as a pedagogical alternative both to extend and augment the educational experience of business students. This article addresses a gap in the literature regarding the use and effectiveness of mentoring in undergraduate business education by examining improvements to an existing mentoring program. After reviewing the mentoring literature and identifying four critical elements for program success (matching, preparation, interaction and outcome assessment), the researchers used a cohort design and developed a survey to assess baseline participant satisfaction with these elements. Interventions were developed to enhance the mentoring program, and a second cohort allowed the authors to assess the benefits of these interventions. With statistically significant improvements in two out of four program elements (and a third showing marginally significant differences), the results demonstrate that the authors' approach to evaluating and enhancing mentoring program effectiveness is useful in business education.

**Keywords:** mentor; pedagogy; business education; evaluation

Many approaches exist for enhancing the learning of undergraduate business students, including computer simulations, case-based methods and experiential exercises. These types of pedagogical alternatives are used for advancing understanding, offering instruction and demonstrating practical application of key business concepts (Miles, Biggs, & Schubert, 1986; Romme, 2003; Wolfe, 1997). Students of management and business also increasingly rely on such real-world experiences as internships and apprenticeships to supplement their classroom learning (Gabris & Mitchell, 1989; Kenyon, 2005; Knouse, Tanner, & Harris, 1999). Likewise, mentoring can extend and enhance the educational experience by providing connections to the practical world of business.

Mentors are traditionally seen as individuals with advanced experience, knowledge, wisdom, skills and influence who provide support to and promote the career development of their protégés through an interactive relationship (Allen, 2003; Baugh & Fagenson-Eland, 2005; Bozeman & Feeney, 2007; Gibson, 2004; Jacobi, 1991; Kram, 1985a; O'Neill, 2005; Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000; Ragins & Scandura, 1994, 1997; Scandura & Williams, 2001; Sosik & Godshalk, 2005). They help the student 'learn to navigate in the adult world and the world of work' (Kram, 1985a, p. 2) and provide protégés with advice and instruction about jobs; career planning guidance; orientation to an industry; direction regarding interpersonal development; achievement-related help and role modeling; and support,

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\*Corresponding author. Email: [cdabate@skidmore.edu](mailto:cdabate@skidmore.edu)

coaching, encouragement, feedback, and guidance to enhance the learner's growth (Allen & Poteet, 1999; Baugh & Fagenson-Eland, 2005; Gibson, 2004; Hansford, Tennent, & Ehrich, 2002; Jacobi, 1991; Kram, 1985a; Mullen, 1998; Noe, 1988). According to Allen and Poteet (1999), 'the development of mentoring relationships can be a key strategy for enhancing individual growth and learning' in the business world (p. 60). However, Schlee (2000) reports that little research is available on the use of mentoring in business schools and speculates that this paucity may be due to a focus on classroom training rather than the real-world training that can result from mentoring.

Admittedly, because mentoring programs serve a variety of purposes, their characteristics vary greatly. For example, mentoring can be mandatory or voluntary, take place in groups or in pairs, function between peers or hierarchically, transpire within a single organization or across organizations, include multiple mentors, and even occur at a distance (Baugh & Fagenson-Eland, 2005; D'Abate, Eddy, & Tannenbaum, 2003; Karcher, Kuperminc, & Portwood, 2006; Mullen, 2008). In addition, there are numerous benefits to mentored individuals in an academic setting. Mentoring offers students 'a glimpse at life in a business setting' (Schlee, 2000, p. 332), and can reduce stress (Allen, McManus, & Russell, 1999), enhance career success (e.g. productivity), and increase satisfaction (Tannenbaum, Crosby, & Gliner, 2001). In organizational settings, mentored individuals can benefit from faster promotion rates (Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992; Scandura & Schriesheim, 1994); improved career progress (Scandura, 1997); higher compensation (Whitely, Dougherty, & Dreher, 1991); greater job satisfaction (Harris, Winkowski, & Engdahl, 2007); and greater pay satisfaction (Aryee, Wyatt, & Stone, 1996; Murray, 1991). In a rare meta-analysis that compared mentored individuals with non-mentored individuals, Underhill (2006) found that mentoring resulted in statistically significant, positive outcomes. For example, individuals who were mentored had higher levels of organizational commitment, self-esteem, and job satisfaction; better advancement/promotion opportunities; and less work-related stress and work/family conflict. Another study found that mentored young adults were 25% more likely to find full-time employment than their non-mentored counterparts (McDonald, Erickson, Johnson, & Elder, 2007). Of course, it could be argued that these types of benefits vary based on the effectiveness of the mentoring program.

Unfortunately, little information is available on the keys to success of mentoring programs or their inner workings (Douglas & McCauley, 1999; Portwood & Granrose, 1986; Saari, Johnson, McLaughlin, & Zimmerle, 1988), particularly in the context of the young person's transition to employment (McDonald et al., 2007). According to Schlee (2000), this gap in the literature is especially visible for mentoring business students in an academic environment, notwithstanding the fact that researchers, scholars, experts, as well as students agree that 'mentoring is a critical component of effective undergraduate education' (Jacobi, 1991, p. 505). Despite beliefs that mentoring impacts how well prepared students are for the real world of business, there is a need for 'concrete measures' of the usefulness of mentoring – assessment is 'key to the successful implementation and continuation of a mentoring program' (Schlee, 2000, p. 334). The goal of this research was to thoroughly explore a functioning mentoring program for undergraduate business students and evaluate the factors that lead to a successful mentoring relationship in an academic setting. Herein, we provide a case study and a model for evaluating mentoring programs for undergraduate business students.

### ***Current research setting and objectives***

As two academics who engage in research on mentoring, we were fortunate to come across a situation in which the faculty coordinator of an undergraduate mentoring program based

in the business department of a four-year liberal arts college in upstate New York was interested in finding ways to make it more successful. The program coordinator had leveraged his experience as an executive at a multinational corporation to develop a mentoring program for undergraduate students that would both supplement and enhance their classroom learning by pairing them with a mentor interested in helping young people studying business build their careers. The initial aims of the mentoring program were to provide students with valuable insight into the real world of business; share stories about the mentors' experiences in the business world; broaden students' perspectives about business and business culture; offer early career guidance and information about how to network; assist students with setting goals; help students develop skills for communicating with superiors, colleagues, and other business persons; and provide guidance on career-related tasks (e.g. interviewing, resume writing).

The program was beginning its second year in 2003 when we became involved as research consultants. Some elements of formal mentoring were in place, but the faculty coordinator sought support in further formalizing the program and also wanted to evaluate its success. The need to assess the program was prompted to some extent by its growth. During its first year (i.e. 2002–03), 13 students and eight mentors participated in the program, and, when we became involved (i.e. during the 2003–04 year), 22 students were paired with 17 mentors (with some mentors taking on more than one protégé). In the third year (2004–05), there were 72 participants: 42 students and 30 mentors. Since we were known to conduct research on issues related to mentoring, the coordinator invited our involvement. Therefore, working with the coordinator of the mentoring program, we were able to conduct a formal investigation (with approval in 2004 from the college's Institutional Review Board) and apply the lessons of the mentoring literature to the department's growing mentoring program.

Our primary goal was to help improve the program in ways that would maximize its benefits to the students and optimize the experiences of the mentors. Our task, therefore, was to:

- (1) review the extant mentoring literature and identify factors that influence the success of mentoring relationships;
- (2) evaluate the current mentoring program against these factors and determine the program's strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement;
- (3) implement modifications to the mentoring program based on our findings; and
- (4) continue to review the mentoring program's improvement and success.

Despite the fact that this program was developed for use with undergraduate business students, the details on program design, implementation, and evaluation we provide can also be applied, where appropriate, to other organizational and academic mentoring programs.

### ***Suggestions for practice from the literature***

Our first task in attempting to enhance the program was to identify factors that influence the success of mentoring relationships in business and academic settings. We began by searching the literature for relevant articles in journals that publish mentoring research (e.g. *Academy of Management Journal*, *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, and *Journal of Vocational Behavior*). We focused our efforts on articles that examined the effectiveness/ineffectiveness and success/failure of mentoring relationships – first reading abstracts and then concentrating on purpose statements,

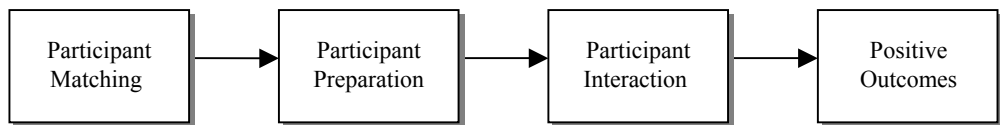


Figure 1. A model of factors that influence the success of mentoring relationships.

measures and findings to ensure that the studies met the needs of our research. The result of this literature search was nearly 200 articles published through 2003 (since we began our consultancy in 2003) and an understanding of the many variables (e.g. gender similarity, communication and leadership behaviors as part of the interaction, interaction frequency, one-time or on-going advice) that could factor into the efficacy of a mentoring relationship. We looked for common themes among these variables in the literature and found that four stood out: participant matching, preparation, interaction, and outcomes (Figure 1).

### ***Participant matching***

How protégés and mentors are paired is an initial concern in most academic and business mentoring programs. The mentoring literature suggests a formal matching process may be less effective than informal matching (Chao et al., 1992; Ragins & Cotton, 1999) and may result in a lack of motivation, poor communication and less openness in the relationship (Fagenson-Eland, Marks, & Amendola, 1997; Mullen, 1994) since the relationship may lack the depth that comes from one built on mutual chemistry (Murray, 1991). In a formal mentoring program, however, matching or assigning protégés to mentors is common practice (Noe, 1988), and, in many situations, the coordinators of formal mentoring programs have no choice but to assign mentoring dyads. Therefore, what become of utmost importance are the criteria for matching (e.g. compatibility, demographic similarity, personality, alignment of interests and values, developmental needs, and offerings) and allowing the participant some input into the match (Allen, Eby, & Lentz, 2006; Dever, Johnson, & Hobbs, 2000; Hale, 2000; Kizilos, 1990; Lankau, Riordan, & Thomas, 2005; Lemel & Sullivan-Catlin, 2000; Mullen, 2008; Murray, 1991; Ragins, 1989; Van Slyke & Van Slyke, 1998; Wilson & Elman, 1990). In fact, mentor-protégé similarity and the interpersonal comfort that comes from a good match have been found to be key predictors of the success of assigned mentoring relationships (Allen, Day, & Lentz, 2005; Ensher & Murphy, 1997).

### ***Participant preparation***

Providing orientation or training (e.g. setting expectations, preparing participants for their new roles) to newly selected participants has been linked to mentoring effectiveness, a shared sense of community, and fewer problems in the relationship (Allen & Poteet, 1999; Gaskill, 1993; Kram, 1986). In fact, ignoring certain training or allowing differences in expectations to persist may contribute to problems in the relationship (Blake-Beard, 2001). Orientation and training programs can reduce resistance to mentoring, dispel stereotypes about mentoring persons of different race or gender, encourage developmental interactions, and promote a culture of learning and mentoring (Burke & McKeen, 1989; Kram, 1986; Lankau et al., 2005); interestingly, positive outcomes such as these often have to do with the quality of training rather than the receipt of training (Allen et al., 2006).

### ***Participant interaction***

An understanding of interaction characteristics is critical, as the relationship of participants has an impact on mentoring success (Bush & Chew, 1999). Regardless of their compatibility (Allen & Poteet, 1999), the time mentors and protégés spend together (Allen et al., 2006; Ensher & Murphy, 1997; Fagenson, 1992, 1994; Lankau et al., 2005), their ability to communicate (Bennetts, 2002; Geiger-DuMond & Boyle, 1995), the extent to which they disclose and share experiences and thoughts with each other (Wanberg, Welsh, & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2007), and their ability to identify and clarify goals (Schlee, 2000) as part of the mentoring interaction have been identified as important factors contributing to a successful relationship.

### ***Outcomes of the relationship***

Through mentoring interactions, the mentor can provide numerous developmental and supportive functions to the protégé. In general, these functions fall into career-related or instrumental and psychosocially oriented factors, but some researchers treat other functions as separate factors (e.g. networking, protection and assistance, coaching, advocacy, transfer of expertise, role modeling; e.g. Fowler & O'Gorman, 2005; Scandura, 1997; Scandura & Ragins, 1993; Scandura & Williams, 2001; Sosik & Godshalk, 2000; Tenenbaum et al., 2001; Turban & Dougherty, 1994). In addition, others suggest that developmental experiences such as mentoring provide broad functions of motivation, learning opportunities, and support (McCauley & Young, 1993). Mentoring can offer individualized counsel, goal-setting assistance, and career coaching (Broadbridge, 1999); the transmission of work-related support, knowledge, and social capital (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007); and may result in better decisions, increased job satisfaction, and more confidence for the protégé (Horgan & Simeon, 1991).

### ***Method of program evaluation and enhancement***

The four critical elements of successful mentoring programs (participant matching, preparation, interaction, and outcomes) that emerged from the literature were used to evaluate the existing mentoring program and develop interventions to enhance its effectiveness. We next describe this process in some detail.

### ***Survey participants***

Mentors, instead of student protégés, were chosen as the focus of the study for several reasons. Unlike students, who are less aware of the skills and guidance they need to prepare for careers, mentors have a broader sense of the demands of the business world and a greater understanding of the goals and objectives that, if actively pursued, can help students secure jobs and succeed in their careers. According to Allen and Poteet (1999), mentors, given their experience, have more knowledge about how to gain the most from a mentoring relationship than student protégés do. Therefore, mentors were viewed as the more appropriate audience to survey regarding the success of the program. Further, according to Allen and Poteet (1999); Allen, Poteet, and Burroughs (1997); and Burke, McKeen, and McKenna (1993), research on mentoring has emphasized the protégé's perspective, focusing less on the mentor's point of view. Therefore, this study provides insight regarding mentoring program effectiveness from the mentor's perspective.

### *Cohort design*

We (the authors) used a cohort design to gather survey data. As described by Cook and Campbell (1979), this design 'denote[s] groups of respondents who follow each other through formal institutions or informal institutions' (p. 127). In our study, two sets of individuals participating in the mentoring program in subsequent years provided information about their experiences. Quasi-comparability of the two groups was assumed due to the similarity of the groups' background characteristics and organizational history (Cook & Campbell, 1979).

The mentors in Cohort 1 (from the 2003–2004 year) provided baseline information on the program prior to our interventions ( $n = 9$  of 17 mentors responded for a 53% response rate). These mentors provided all measures of effectiveness, as described below, during a single survey session. Next, interventions were developed and implemented in an attempt to enhance program effectiveness. Subsequently, Cohort 2 mentors (from the 2004–05 year) provided data on the effectiveness of these interventions in two separate survey sessions. The first survey, gathered mid-year, focused on matching, orientation and early interaction issues (e.g. setting goals, developing an action plan) and resulted in a response rate of 83% ( $n = 25$  of 30 mentors). The second survey, gathered at year's end, focused on subsequent interaction issues (e.g. sharing experiences, tracking progress) and program outcomes, resulting in a 60% response rate ( $n = 18$  of 30 mentors).

### *Scale development*

Based on our findings from the literature and following the model (Figure 1), we developed multi-item scales to measure the critical elements of successful mentoring programs. A five-point Likert-type scale was used to gather item responses, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

### *Participant matching*

A two-item scale was designed to measure satisfaction with the matching process. Items included 'I am satisfied with the student partner I am matched up with' and 'My student partner and I get along well' resulting in a .66 coefficient alpha estimate of reliability.

### *Participant preparation*

To measure how satisfied participants were with the orientation and training they received to prepare them for the mentoring process, a three-item scale was developed. Items such as 'The goals/objectives of the mentoring program were communicated well', 'I knew what was required of me before I signed on to participate in the program', and 'The orientation session at the beginning of the program prepared me for my role as a mentor' resulted in adequate reliability (.76 coefficient alpha).

### *Participant interaction*

We developed a five-item scale to measure participant satisfaction with interactions (i.e. goal-setting, action plans, communication). Items included 'My student partner and I have developed an action plan', 'My student partner and I have set goals for this relationship', 'I shared my own experiences with my student partner', 'My student partner and I tracked

progress toward the goals we set for his/her development and learning', and 'My student partner and I had open, honest, and confidential communications'. The coefficient alpha estimate of reliability was .80.

### *Outcomes of the relationship*

We assessed the program's ability to reach its stated objectives using a three-item scale including the following items: 'The mentoring program helped my student partner reach his/her objectives', 'The mentoring program is designed to make sure important objectives are met', and 'The mentoring program is successful in meeting its objectives'. These items resulted in a coefficient alpha estimate for reliability of .67.

### *Program evaluation and improvement*

For each of the four elements of the model, the following sections describe (1) each aspect of the mentoring program as it existed prior to our involvement; (2) baseline data results regarding mentor satisfaction collected from Cohort 1 in spring 2004; (3) how we used this data to make program adjustments and improvements; and (4) findings on how our enhancements worked based on data from Cohort 2 in spring 2005.

### *Participant matching*

Since matching is part of the structured process in a formal mentoring program, we examined how students and mentors were assigned to one another. Prior to our involvement, matching occurred through relatively informal means. The program coordinator reviewed the list of mentors who had signed up to participate and students interested in being mentored. He asked for input from other departmental faculty about which students would be best paired with which mentors based on their knowledge of the participants.

We decided to evaluate the effectiveness of this process by surveying Cohort 1 in spring 2004; the results suggested that participants were extremely satisfied with the matching process ( $M = 4.59$ ,  $SD = .49$ ). In fact, this was the highest rated aspect of the mentoring program before our interventions. Clearly, the matching process seemed to be working well and the findings suggested that the coordinator's knowledge of the participants and judgment about compatibility were essential to good matches. However, as the program coordinator desired continuous improvement, we explored the literature for ways to improve the matching process.

Since the literature suggests that participants be matched according to criteria such as compatibility, personality and work value similarity, and developmental needs and offerings (e.g. Lankau et al., 2005), we decided to add items to the students' and mentors' enrollment forms. The intention of collecting these data (e.g. more detailed biographical information, schedule availability, preferred meeting location, information about prior mentoring relationships, and open- and closed-ended items about reasons for participating and student objectives) was to gather information about the participants to assist the coordinator with making even more compatible matches based on similarity. As he may not always be able to have personal knowledge of all participants, particularly as the program grows in size, this data may become indispensable for matching purposes. In addition, mentors were asked to provide brief biographical statements describing their occupation, their job title, their areas of expertise, and a brief summary of professional experience that might be useful in matching.

One of the authors, acting as a program consultant, assisted the program coordinator with reviewing this information to make compatible matches for the 2004–05 year. In November 2004, surveys were distributed to students in Cohort 2 to assess their satisfaction with the matches that were made using this more detailed biographical data on the participants. The mentors had up to eight weeks to become familiar with their student partners before they responded to these questions. Table 1 indicates that the ratings of satisfaction with matching from Cohort 2 ( $M = 4.65$ ,  $SD = .46$ ) improved slightly from Cohort 1 ( $M = 4.59$ ,  $SD = .49$ ), though not at a statistically significant level.

Despite the lack of statistical significance, we remained confident that we were improving the program for several reasons. Firstly, it is possible that a ceiling effect (Aronson, Ellsworth, Carlsmith, & Gonzales, 1990) had occurred where we had achieved the best possible rating in matching, and regardless of our interventions, further improvements could not be attained. Two, only 22 students were paired with 17 mentors in Cohort 1, but by fall 2004 the program had practically doubled in size to a total of 42 students and 30 mentors in Cohort 2. These numbers suggest that as program size grows, formally matching program participants may become increasingly complicated, making substantial improvements to the matching process more difficult. To combat this, one way we may enhance the program as it grows is to allow students and mentors to self-match. Using pizza or ice cream socials as meet-and-greet sessions, allowing participants to review enrollment forms and mentor bio statements, encouraging them to pick their top three choices for a partner, and then reviewing those choices to make good matches could help maintain satisfaction levels with matching as the number of participants continues to rise.

Participant preparation

Before our involvement, the program coordinator had developed some overview materials to outline the program to participating students and mentors. These brief documents described the program's goals, expectations students could have for their mentors and vice versa, as well as brief suggestions for the first few meetings with the student/mentor. He also held a one-hour orientation session for students who were interested in the mentoring program and then met personally with most to prepare them for what was expected. His intention was to both explain the program to students and clarify that they had to contribute to the mentoring relationship in order to benefit from it. In addition, he spoke face-to-face

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and coefficient alphas for relevant scales.

| Program Element                                  | Coeff. Alpha     | Cohort 1          |     | Cohort 2                       |     |
|--------------------------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|-----|--------------------------------|-----|
|                                                  |                  | Mean              | SD  | Mean                           | SD  |
| Participant Matching                             | .66 ( $n = 41$ ) | 4.59 ( $n = 11$ ) | .49 | 4.65 ( $n = 30$ )              | .46 |
| Participant Preparation                          | .76 ( $n = 26$ ) | 3.70 ( $n = 10$ ) | .53 | 4.33** ( $n = 16$ )            | .54 |
| Participant Interaction                          | .80 ( $n = 28$ ) | 3.51 ( $n = 11$ ) | .71 | 4.02* ( $n = 17$ )             | .55 |
| Positive Outcomes:<br>Meeting Program Objectives | .67 ( $n = 29$ ) | 3.61 ( $n = 11$ ) | .42 | 3.94 <sup>+</sup> ( $n = 18$ ) | .50 |

1. Sample size varied due to incomplete responses, some mentors having more than one student protégé, and different response rates on Cohort 2's midyear and year-end surveys. Sample sizes are indicated in parentheses.  
2. All responses on a five-point scale with 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree.  
3. \*\* Cohort 2 was statistically different from Cohort 1 at  $p < .01$  level; \* Cohort 2 was statistically different from Cohort 1 at  $p < .05$  level; + the differences between Cohort 2 and Cohort 1 were suggestive of statistical significance ( $p < .10$ ).  
4. Coefficient alphas based on data from both Cohort 1 and Cohort 2.

or over the phone with mentors about the program's goals and their role in the mentoring relationship after giving them a one-page summary of the program. Ultimately, he was able to personalize these conversations to the orientation and training needs of each individual.

Spring 2004 data from Cohort 1 suggested that mentor satisfaction with the preparation they received was not one of the strong points of the program ( $M = 3.70$ ,  $SD = .53$ ). The literature suggests that providing orientation or training at the outset is tied to the effectiveness and success of mentoring relationships (Allen & Poteet, 1999; Bendixen-Noe, 1999; Gaskill, 1993; Kram, 1986; Schlee, 2000), so our interventions began in the summer of 2004. We started by taking what was already developed and simply made it more structured, concise and formal. Logos were added to the orientation documents, a one-page handout was developed for recruiting and describing the program to prospective mentors, and the guides were converted into formal handbooks designed specifically for mentors and students. Exercises and activities for the mentor and student to engage in during their meetings were expanded upon and described more thoroughly, roles and responsibilities of the parties were more clearly defined, a letter from the program coordinator was included to illustrate the top-down sponsorship of the program, a mission statement for the program was developed, and general information derived from the literature on what mentoring is and how it is used was added. The new handbooks were then bound for ease of use and formality. Many of the ideas for new handbook items were obtained from the students and mentors themselves, which enabled us to improve the program according to participants' recommendations. These handbooks were used in the program's orientation for the 2004–05 year. In addition, one of the authors attended the students' orientation and provided clarification, when needed, on the program's goals and purposes and the participants' roles.

The results of these changes were promising. In November 2004, data were collected from Cohort 2 mentors regarding their satisfaction with the orientation, training, and preparation they received. Again, mentors had as much as eight weeks to reflect on the preparation they received since beginning their mentoring relationships before they completed the survey. Findings detailed in Table 1 suggest that we made major strides in preparing the mentoring program participants. Cohort 2 ( $M = 4.33$ ,  $SD = .54$ ) reported statistically higher levels of satisfaction with orientation, training, and preparation than Cohort 1 ( $M = 3.70$ ),  $t(24) = -2.91$ ,  $p = .008$  (two-tailed). These results suggest that our enhancements worked quite well. Continuing to gain participant input and continuously improving the orientation and training materials and process helped us both maintain and enrich this stage of the mentoring experience for program participants.

### *Participant interaction*

Before we became involved in the mentoring program, the interaction of participants was recognized through occasional lunch meetings and phone conversations with mentors and social gatherings with students. When asked about the interactions they were experiencing, Cohort 1 mentor responses raised some concerns ( $M = 3.51$ ,  $SD = .71$ ). In fact, this was the lowest rated of all survey measures. Since the literature suggests that there is a need to examine the characteristics of the interaction (e.g. how much time participants spend together, how they communicate, the extent to which they share experiences) to enhance mentoring success (Bennetts, 2002; Ensher & Murphy, 1997; Fagenson, 1992, 1994; Geiger-DuMond & Boyle, 1995; Lankau et al., 2005; Wanberg et al., 2007), we decided to incorporate these lessons into the mentoring program for 2004–05.

We added suggestions for frequency of interaction to the student and mentor handbooks, we talked about it in orientation sessions, and it became a topic in casual conversations and

at social gatherings with students. We provided tips for communicating and interacting in the handbooks and in the orientation session, with particular emphasis on setting goals, on openness in sharing experiences, and on communicating honestly with one another. In addition, we incorporated these interaction-related issues into the statement of commitment signed by participants. For example, the mentors committed to actively listen to and provide guidance to the students and to support the students in achieving their goals.

We also realized it was necessary to make the setting and tracking of goals a priority for mentoring interactions. Therefore, mentors were asked to identify their student partner's personal objectives to ensure that the pair communicated about the central goals of the relationship. Additionally, students were asked to identify their personal objectives for the program on their enrollment form, again on a survey in late fall, and finally at year's end – the belief was that doing so would make them more aware of the importance of setting goals and tracking progress. The results of student-mentor interactions since our interventions indicate that improvements had been made (see Table 1). Cohort 2 ( $M = 4.02$ ,  $SD = .55$ ) reported statistically higher ratings of satisfaction with mentoring interactions than Cohort 1 ( $M = 3.51$ ),  $t(26) = -2.15$ ,  $p = .041$  (two-tailed). Such a change in ratings suggests that our interventions as researchers effectively enhanced the mentoring interactions of the participants.

### *Outcomes of the relationship*

Prior to our involvement, the program coordinator had created a one-page feedback survey. It asked students to rate the mentoring program's effectiveness at meeting student needs (e.g. coaching received, real-world insights, skill building, development opportunities, networking tips, business contacts, learning experience, formal action plans, follow-up discussions, job-finding skills, assistance). In addition, it asked the protégés to rate the program's key mentoring elements (e.g. communicating objectives, preparing participants for their roles, responding to questions or problems, supporting program participants). It also asked about the setting of realistic goals, feedback received from the mentor, sharing of experiences, and trust. Besides obtaining feedback from the mentor, we recognized that a feedback survey needed to be based on clear objectives for the program.

Since the objectives of each individual mentoring program determine the desired outcomes (which can vary tremendously), it made sense that the program's purpose should also determine how the program is evaluated. However, we realized that the objectives of this program were broad and the current form of evaluation did not completely fit clear program objectives. By engaging in discussions with the program coordinator, reviewing the data on the program's feedback forms he had created, and referring to the goals and functions of mentoring from the literature, we identified three key program objectives to be followed in the future. These were to (1) develop business knowledge and foster application (i.e. give insight to the value of education and its practical application; broaden students' perspectives and understanding of business; expose students to the business world's practices, people, and culture), (2) assist in career development (i.e. engage in career planning; develop interviewing, networking, job search, and/or resume-writing skills; provide advice and guidance on career issues), and (3) provide psychosocial support (i.e. clarify the student's identity; enhance feelings of self-competence; increase students' self-awareness and self-confidence; give advice and guidance).

We began emphasizing these objectives at various places in the program through participant handbooks, exercises and activities, discussions, and enrollment forms. We also focused on the specific objectives of individual students by asking them and their mentors

to record their goals and track their progress over the course of the mentoring relationship. With such increased emphasis on program objectives, we gathered data to assess whether the program was resulting in more positive outcomes for program participants.

Spring 2004 data from Cohort 1 suggested that the program's ability to meet its objectives was, in fact, lacking before our interventions ( $M = 3.61$ ,  $SD = .42$ ). In response to these findings, we focused on ensuring that the program's purposes were clear and that they were addressed over the course of the mentoring relationship. These efforts were previously described. The general idea was that keeping these in the forefront of participants' minds would lead to more action on their parts related to these outcomes. The results, summarized in Table 1, were positive. Cohort 2 ( $M = 3.94$ ,  $SD = .50$ ) reported higher ratings of satisfaction with mentoring interactions than Cohort 1 ( $M = 3.61$ ),  $t(27) = -1.87$ ,  $p = .072$  (two-tailed) – this was suggestive of statistical significance ( $p < .10$ ).

## Discussion

Certainly, mentoring has been lauded for its ability to enhance the learning of students in effective, skill-based, and cognitive ways (Hezlett, 2005). It has been shown to be an effective developmental tool in educational institutions (Mehlman & Glickauf-Hughes, 1994; Mullen, 2008; Soucy & Larose, 2000), helping students build a link between academic life and life after college, showing students that the business world includes people who are interested in fostering their development, providing networking opportunities, and helping students develop the skills they will need in the real world (Barker & Pitts, 1997; Schlee, 2000). The current research sought to address a gap in the literature on mentoring in academic settings (Girves, Zepeda, & Gwathmey, 2005; Schlee, 2000), particularly as students transition to the adult world of work (McDonald et al., 2007), by contributing a case study on mentoring as a pedagogical tool to enhance student education in business.

Drawing upon the mentoring literature, we identified critical factors that augment mentoring program success and developed scales to assess participant satisfaction with these factors. Based on these results, we developed factor-specific interventions to improve program functioning for this business department's mentoring program. The results from our post-intervention cohort are positive, with two out of the four program elements achieving statistically significant improvements and a third showing marginally significant differences. Since mentoring program coordinators struggle with finding ways to 'structure mentoring relationships to maximize their effectiveness' (Sosik & Godshalk, 2005, p. 39), these findings are particularly useful.

We concentrated our interventions as research consultants on participant matching, preparation for the mentoring relationship, improving the interactions of participants, and identifying and assessing the attainment of program outcomes. By focusing our interventions on improving matching and participant preparation, we hoped we would help participants set better goals, communicate more effectively, attain objectives, improve mentoring interactions, and be more satisfied with the mentoring program. Our findings suggest that the interventions did, indeed, have the desired effect.

Clearly, there are some limitations to this research. One, the results are based on data from 53% of mentors in Cohort 1 and 83% and 60% of mentors in Cohort 2 (from a mid-year and a year-end survey). These response rates suggest the possibility of non-response error in the data, particularly if those mentors who did not respond felt differently about the program's success than the mentors who did respond. However, measures were taken to increase the response rate, including follow-up emails, phone calls, and repeated requests for completed surveys.

In addition, while the literature has cited the need for more understanding of the mentor's perspective, the reciprocal nature of mentoring (Ensher, Thomas, & Murphy, 2001) suggests that feedback should be obtained from both participants. In the current study, we provided pre- versus post-intervention comparisons of program success from the mentor's point of view. However, gathering protégé input could provide additional insight into how the program is working; furthermore, collecting data from multiple sources such as the mentor and the protégé would provide an estimate of inter-rater reliability and increased validity of future findings.

Practitioners and researchers should also recognize that, although implementing a mentoring program is a good first step, it is not enough to ensure success. Even the most well intentioned programs may 'attempt to bridge the gap between academic training and students' successful entry into the business world' (Schlee, 2000, p. 333), but without knowing how well the mentoring programs are enhancing the education of our students, their utility is unclear. Consequently, academic and business organizations that are committed to their mentoring programs must regularly and systematically evaluate specific facets of the program and determine if the program is achieving its goals. As Kram (1985b) notes, program evaluation demonstrates that mentoring is (or is not) having the desired impact and identifies areas for continuous improvement. Therefore, perhaps the most important outcome of this assessment effort is the authors' establishment of a three-step, ongoing evaluation plan.

First, prior to program kickoff, mentoring program coordinators collect biographical data from participants for matching purposes and explicit statements of their goals and commitment to the mentoring process. From an evaluation standpoint, this information identifies student objectives that they should attain by participating in the program. Handbooks are then provided to prepare participants for their roles, and once the mentoring relationship is established, the program coordinator relies on the handbooks to support the ongoing interaction. Mentors are also provided with others' bio statements so they can use one another as a resource as needed. To evaluate the matching and preparation of participants, an 'early feedback form' is distributed. It is necessary to evaluate participants' satisfaction with their orientation and training, as well as their satisfaction with the individual they were matched with, close in time to those program activities rather than waiting until year's end when participants might have difficulty with recall.

Finally, year-end evaluations are used to gather feedback on the interactions that occurred and the outcomes of the program. The purpose of this plan is to continually assess program functioning and identify areas in need of improvement as quickly as possible. As Hansford and colleagues (2002) note: 'To maximize the potential benefits for all involved, mentoring programs should be subjected to continued appraisal and refinement' (p. 114). The ongoing improvement effort we propose should help ensure a successful mentoring program, particularly in an educational environment.

## Conclusion

Continual data collection, feedback, and analysis are required on our part to remain aware of the program's success at this college and attentive to its changing needs. However, the steps we have taken to improve the program are already showing success and eliciting increasingly positive reactions from participants. Since a sound evaluation effort is essential in ensuring the success of any mentoring program, our hope is that others who coordinate mentoring programs can generalize from what we have learned by applying the lessons of this mentoring program to their own mentoring activities as a means to enrich education for students of business and other disciplines.

### Author note

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### Notes on contributors

Caroline P. D'Abate is an assistant professor of Management and Business at Skidmore College where she teaches organizational behavior, human resource management, introductory business, and in the College's first-year experience program. Her research on employee development and mentoring, the relationship between work/nonwork life realms, personal business on-the-job, careers and diversity, and other topics has been published in journals and book chapters and been presented at national and international conferences. She holds a PhD in Organizational Studies from the School of Business, University at Albany, State University of New York.

Erik R. Eddy is an assistant professor of Management at Siena College in Loudonville, New York where he teaches strategic management, human resources management, and organizational development and change. He has presented at national conferences, published in journals, and written book chapters on such topics as continuous learning, mentoring, job design, training, work-life balance, and quality management. He holds a Masters in Business Administration (M.B.A.) and a Masters in Organization Development (M.O.D.) from Bowling Green State University, and a PhD in Organizational Studies from the School of Business, University at Albany, State University of New York.

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