Pay it forward: Mentoring doctoral students (by former doctoral students) on their journey from student to faculty member

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Professional preparation	**Saturday, May 31, 2008**	**Workshop/Symposium/Forum (75-minute)**
Session 23	**10:45 AM - 12:00 PM**	**Abstract 174**

Many questions plague graduate students as they begin the transition from doctoral student to faculty member. While current mentors (e.g., advisors and faculty members) and future colleagues are integral to the process, it is also the responsibility of the preceding wave of recent graduates to act as informal guides, assisting students through the transition in an unbiased manner. Areas of particular interest to the soon-to-be professorate include: (a) preparing for the job search and faculty interview, (b) navigating the final stages of the dissertation process, and (c) the transition from student to professor. In addition to these key factors, the individual's integration into a new (a) location, (b) program/department, and (c) institution - including new ideas, ideals, and philosophies - are a vital part of an individual's metamorphosis (Marino & Yost, 1998). While the former tends to be addressed through various internal channels, the latter is often overlooked until the individual joins his or her respective faculty. As such, a panel of junior faculty members with diverse backgrounds and current appointments at various 'types' of academic institutions has been assembled to share their experiences and assist (i.e., mentor) doctoral students along this journey.

As a component of a more holistic approach to individual development, mentoring has been seen in traditional settings (i.e., the business world) for decades; however, it just begun a slow integration into academia. Originally seen as an important tool for development within one's organization (Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978), mentors have been found to (a) encourage the dreams and support the aspirations of their prot,g,s, (b) provide opportunities for their prot,g,s to observe and participate in their work, and (c) help their prot,g,s become aware of the unwritten rules and politics involved in the profession (Bova & Phillips, 1982). According to Fagenson (1989), mentored individuals have reported greater levels of satisfaction, career mobility/opportunity, recognition and higher rates of promotion than individuals that were not mentored, regardless of gender. In higher education, specifically, the tasks required of an individual entering the field (i.e., teaching, research, and service) vary significantly from those undertaken as a student. An appropriately matched mentor/mentee relationship will provide new faculty members with a resource to help navigate the 'academic process' (Marino & Yost, 1998).

The majority of the mentoring that a student receives in most doctoral programs comes in the form of structured research and, under unique circumstances, teaching. However, doctoral students are often shielded from the foundations and political backdrop of a program, department, college, and/or institution. Towards the end of a doctoral program, students are busy revising CV's and teaching portfolios, writing cover letters, and preparing for interviews, as it is currently their 'job' to work towards a career at another institution. However, there are many other variables that a potential new faculty member should consider before accepting a job offer (e.g., negotiating contracts, teaching loads, program philosophies, location, etc.). As such, we consider the role of the informal mentor to be as vital to the development of our future colleagues as formal mentorship programs. Therefore, we believe that newly appointed junior faculty members with recent personal experience to draw from (i.e., similar characteristics to their prot,g,s/mentees; Allen & Eby, 2003), will be an asset in conveying relevant knowledge to current doctoral students. This knowledge will help to facilitate a smooth transition from doctoral student to faculty member.