

## Mentorship for Student Success Services

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### **Abstract:**

As a graduate student, I thought of librarian mentorship as a formalized process that typically occurs while the mentee is completing the Master of Library Science degree. I was not assigned a mentor, so I decided to pursue mentorship on my own. This mentoring relationship began informally, but over time, it evolved to be more formal. I thought my mentorship would end once I graduated, but I was pleasantly surprised when my mentoring relationship continued past graduation. My mentor serves as an advocate, counselor, and role model for me. I am now an academic librarian, and my mentor advises me on how to support students and faculty.

Student success endeavors have increasingly become a focus and responsibility of many librarians. I have found myself working with students who are first-generation college students, are at various stages of their academic careers, and are at different levels of proficiency utilizing library resources. In a way, I am mentoring students as my mentor has mentored me. Through working with them, I am learning what they need and how to aid in their collegiate success. Sometimes this success goes beyond academics and crosses over into social needs, as well. Some students need assistance with adjusting to college life both academically and socially. Experienced students seek me out to discuss how various events in their lives are affecting their academics and looking for resources to deal with their trials. As a librarian, I am aware of resources around campus, and I know how to develop relationships with campus resources and to help others do the same. These are skills that are not taught in library school. It takes mentorship and guidance to practically apply what I learned in library school as well as the soft skills needed to grow in my career and to help students to do the same.

**Keywords:** mentoring | student success | librarianship

### **Article:**

**\*\*\*Note: Full text of article below**

## CHAPTER 10

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### *Reflections from a Mentee*

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In *Mentoring Experience of Academic Librarians*, Shin Freeman argues that mentorship in academic libraries comes in multiple forms—traditional or formal mentoring programs that are sponsored by the library, group, reverse, situational, remote, peer, and co-mentoring.<sup>1</sup> In *Getting into the Club*, the authors mention that peer mentoring is being favored to help create a supportive and encouraging environment for early-career librarians.<sup>2</sup> Diane Lorenzetti and Susan Powelson assert that in the last twenty years, more research on mentorship in librarianship has emerged.<sup>3</sup> There are many mentorship programs that serve early career librarians.<sup>4</sup> Mentoring has been used to help on-board and train new employees.<sup>5</sup> John Burke and Beth Tumbleson add that supervision and/or coaching has also been utilized in place of a mentorship program.<sup>6</sup>

There are many elements to a mentoring relationship.<sup>7</sup> Being a mentor involves helping the mentee accomplish goals and advance their career, advocating for the mentee, providing support for psychological development by serving as a role model, and providing confirmation, advice, and friendship.<sup>8</sup>

## *Reflections from a Seasoned Mentor*

When I started working over twenty years ago in an academic library, only a few mentoring programs were being discussed or available. As a servant leader, meaning one who is focused to the concerns and needs of their followers and who also takes care of and cultivates those in the organization, and as someone who has hired and mentored many librarians, it was always important to me to either be a mentor or find a mentor for new hires on every level. I am happy to see that many new hires are asking for this type of relationship so that they have additional support to excel in their careers. All library schools should consider mentoring services as the most frequently requested resource for new graduates.

The challenge is finding enough willing mentors, due to time constraints and efforts needed to do this work properly. This is important because we always look to those who most resemble ourselves for assistance and support. BIPOC librarians need assistance not only to assert ourselves in our students' lives so that they are more successful, but also to give back to others who choose to mentor us so that we, too, can be successful. Librarians believe in the work that they do, and we all want our students, whether or not they are in library school, or at the schools and libraries that we serve, to achieve the goals that they set for their own happiness.

## DEI in Librarianship

### *Reflection from a Mentee*

As a Black woman librarian, I have some unique perspectives and experiences. Along with these come some possible obstacles. It is beneficial to have a mentor who is aware of and sensitive to the fact that I may have some experiences, due to my gender and BIPOC (Black, indigenous, and people of color) identification, that I need assistance with navigating. I work with faculty, staff, and students and need to know how to navigate and conduct myself in the culture of my new workplace environment. I also need to feel comfortable and accepted in my workplace and feel that my differences are seen as an asset and not a deficit. Not only do I need to feel acceptance and belonging, but all students do as well. This cannot be accomplished by one librarian alone. Creating a sense of belonging starts with administration. It is the responsibility of all librarians to create a sense of belonging for both students and librarians. Most librarians are not members of the BIPOC community, so diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts are essential. When I was in library school, I had three BIPOC professors, who, along with my mentor, helped me to see myself in the field of library science and sent the message that I belonged in the field and that I was allowed to take up space. All BIPOC students need to feel this way—part of student success is feeling as though you are a valued member of your academic community. I am a librarian at a minority-serving institution, where I am one of only a few BIPOC librarians. From what I have seen and experienced, this is not uncommon. When I speak to students about their academic success, I encourage them to utilize the reference desk and the liaisons; I know the importance of seeking the help they need. To succeed, students need to know that they belong and that they are properly supported.

Rocio Deanna et al. argue that mentoring relationships are essential for the retention, success, and welfare of underrepresented minorities and women in academia.<sup>9</sup> The authors also mention that creating a system of diverse mentors can help to support the achievement of long-term goals, growth, and retention of mentors and mentees, thereby increasing DEI.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, the authors suggest that diverse mentoring is also necessary to help alleviate systemic bias.<sup>11</sup> In addition to supplying professional support, guidance, information, and advice, mentorship provides blueprints for behaviors that are essential to achieving success in librarianship.<sup>12</sup> Successful mentoring necessitates an interpersonal relationship between a mentor and mentee at different career stages, with the possibility of furthering the career of both the mentor and mentee.<sup>13</sup>

Salinas et al. argue that underrepresented groups, including women, encounter many obstacles in their academic careers, due to multiple factors that include: less recognition in publications, fewer citations on papers they author, less research funding, and increased academic and personal responsibilities.<sup>14</sup> It is important to note that in librarianship, women are the majority. Deanna et al. argues that these obstacles lead to bias against minority groups in academia, especially at senior levels, where women and other minoritized groups are underrepresented.<sup>15</sup> Courtney Gasser and Katherine Shaffer call this phenomenon ‘the leaky pipeline.’<sup>16</sup>

Deanna et al. argue that cross-cultural mentorship is very effective when it involves strategies to encourage mentors’ awareness, sensitivity, and commitment to their mentees.<sup>17</sup> They also argue that culturally and socially diverse mentoring will help institutions with DEI efforts and help control bias in academia.<sup>18</sup> DEI is a primary area of commitment for ACRL, ALA, and many individual libraries.<sup>19</sup> As of 2020, for libraries with recorded DEI initiatives, top objectives were:

- (1) encouraging an inclusive environment (89 percent);
- (2) library collections (88 percent);
- (3) access (78 percent);
- (4) bettering workplace culture (73 percent);
- (5) actively hiring a diverse workforce (71 percent); and
- (6) library events and/or programming (69 percent).<sup>20</sup>

Some of the most notable DEI staff retention practices include creating an inclusive culture and working to disassemble organizational systemic racism, as well as establishing mentoring initiatives for newly hired employees and designing action plans to retain minority employees.<sup>21</sup>

## *Reflections from a Seasoned Mentor*

As an African American librarian, I sometimes feel “lost” in the shuffle of our more significant subgroup of librarians of color. It was easy to find mentors at historically Black colleges and universities and more challenging to find those in leadership and executive positions at large research universities and predominantly white institutions; sometimes I felt that I had to prove to potential mentors that I was worth their time. But I did. I developed several rewarding mentorship relationships and earned my seat at the table.

Sometimes this will be easy and sometimes not. But I decided not to give up, and for every no, I would keep asking until I got a yes. I dare not speak for other BIPOC librarians, but I felt that I had to work harder to get what I felt that I needed to support my new position. From my close circle of friends, I have heard the same stories. I want new librarians to understand that you must be vested in the time and effort of your mentor. They are essential and very busy people. They have something that you need. You must continue to be beyond prepared when you set up your mentorship appointments, but you must let them know that you are hungry to learn.

Sadly, sometimes this may not work for BIPOC librarians, but when you find a mentor of color, they will work to bridge the gap for you and usually have many contacts to get you started. You will be known for your work, and it will open doors that may dispel challenges with diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. It won't be an easy road, but it will be one that you can eventually overcome, even on a smaller level, with diligence, wit, intelligence, and the will to succeed in this endeavor. This attitude and drive will further support your success as a student and as a leader to help others.

Now think about the BIPOC student who is moving through the process to become a librarian, seeking assistance from a professional librarian. We pursue those with whom we have commonalities. Mentors and mentees from different backgrounds can learn from each other by understanding the ways that students approach and request assistance and how to best support these interactions.

## **Why Have a Mentor?**

### *Reflections from a Mentee*

When I decided to pursue librarianship as a career, I had no formal experience in the field. I was engaged in a career in higher education administration, with

the majority of my experience being in enrollment management. As an undergraduate student, I worked in various administrative offices around campus so that I could gain experience in higher education administration. This is the same strategy I employed when pursuing librarianship. I also spoke with friends in the field, who impressed upon me that I needed the following: at least two years of experience before entering the field and to speak with as many librarians as possible. I did not know about librarianship mentoring; I just knew that I needed someone to help guide me and stand in the gap between what I was learning in my classes and the realities of librarianship.

With my career in enrollment management, I had to familiarize myself with the resources and services available for student success. Now that I am a librarian, I am one of those academic resources. If the services students need are beyond my purview, I research where and how they can receive the help they need. This is what my mentor does for me. Even though academics are often stressed, when it comes to student success, humanity must not be ignored. Realistically, issues in life will emerge that affect a student's academics. Having someone who supports you while you are navigating the complexities of life can help you plan and stay focused. As a student and librarian, I have had personal tragedies and difficulties occur. My mentor was able to provide me with encouragement and support, which helped me succeed in my studies and during my first year as a librarian, in spite of obstacles and challenges.

Shin Freedman explains that many academic institutions support mentoring, which is a dynamic, progressive, and dedicated relationship between a mentor and mentee, though no consistent method of delivery has been established.<sup>22</sup> Freedman also states that mentoring programs are known to be a source of support for academic librarians throughout transitional times in their careers. Freedman further asserts that over the past thirty years, librarian mentees have benefited from greater job satisfaction, career advancement, increased comprehension and expertise, and advice and guidance.<sup>23</sup>

## *Reflections from a Seasoned Mentor*

Mentoring helped me tremendously! Early in this second career, I decided I needed support as a new librarian. From my work in other areas, I understood firsthand the importance of having a mentor and how that would shape and influence my academic career. Mentoring positively impacted my career and supported me in moving quickly through the ranks of librarian positions, with

more substantial responsibilities that led to the leadership roles I aspired to. One benefit of mentoring is the ability to understand and know about things that new librarians may not have been taught yet in library school. Learning about the type of libraries that exist was exciting; learning about innovative work habits and how to prepare new librarians to support student success was refreshing.

As a BIPOC student in library school at a large predominantly white institution, sometimes the librarians behind the service desk were hesitant to support my questions, not because they didn't want to, but because they had no connection to someone who looked like me. Once I became a professional librarian, I always got a rush when any student approached me when there were others who could provide assistance. It didn't matter that I was a new librarian. How could they know? Students want to be more comfortable utilizing the library and to know that they are being nurtured and encouraged to be inquisitive about the world around them without fear of being judged. Librarians must continue to showcase that libraries are safe places to explore literacy, worldly knowledge, education, and belonging.

Working to prepare students for new employment once they graduated from library school should be included in mentoring programs that either target specific school-related skills (e.g., instructional, research, data and digitization, public or private business, nonprofit, organizational, and those coping with stress or health care issues) or specific outcomes (e.g., enhanced skills, innovation, project management success, etc.). Understanding how to prepare for successful academic performance, being able to more succinctly answer questions during an interview and showcasing how to increase the impact of problem-solving skills and project management are all important. Being able to go beyond the one hundred twenty hours of experiential learning during an internship helps create a positive emotional relationship that may last for years as the mentee moves throughout their career.

## Types of Mentors

### *Reflection from a Mentee*

When I began my career, I had a mentor who served as a guide and counselor while I was not only navigating my new career but also my life. However, my new position also demanded a focus area and classification that I needed additional training and assistance with. So, I applied for a program to receive mentorship

from a fellow STEM librarian who could offer me insight into the nuances of my new position. I also needed mentorship for specific promotion and tenure processes in my library. So I have three mentors. Two are formal and one is informal. Each mentorship relationship has its strengths and unique purposes. Much like mentorship, student success requires a holistic approach. It is not likely that one resource or mentor can provide all of the support that a student or librarian would need.

Lisa Hussey and Jennifer Campbell-Meier found that 60 percent of the library and information science researchers who participated in their survey engaged in supervisory mentoring, which was informal; formal mentorship programs were found to be a less accessible option for academic librarians.<sup>24</sup> Shin Freedman describes supervisory mentorship and traditional mentorship, along with conflict of interest and accountability concerns with supervisory mentorship.<sup>25</sup> Freedman argues that in informal mentorships, it is best for the mentee to be proactive.<sup>26</sup> Diane Lorenzetti and Susan Powelson explain that informal mentorship generally emerges through interpersonal relationships or social networks, which can be an issue for mentees who do not have personal access to viable potential mentors.<sup>27</sup> Annmarie Magurany and Elizabeth Dill argue that it is better to have more than one mentor, as each mentor will be able to share a different, valuable perspective.

## *Reflection from a Seasoned Mentor*

When seeking mentorship, I have found that it is important to assess what you need from a mentor and from the mentorship experience overall. When assessing this need, you may find that having more than one mentor makes sense. You may even find that having multiple mentors is something that has happened because of circumstance. As a new or burgeoning librarian, the first type of mentorship you may decide to seek is that of a guide for your overall career. This person can help you to navigate your area of librarianship, offer advice in terms of organizations to join, how to prioritize your work-life balance, and how to maneuver in the culture of your library.

As you grow in your career and begin to gain your footing, you may also find that you need guidance in a specific discipline related to your position. For this, you may decide to seek an additional mentor who can assist with navigating a discipline-specific part of your position. This mentor can also assist with information regarding related to professional organizations and resources, shadowing

opportunities, and other related forms of assistance to help increase your level of comfort and sense of competence in your job. All of this information and preparation will support our assistance of the students we serve.

## Qualities of a “Good” Mentor

### *Reflection from a Mentee*

A good mentor is able to meet the needs of their mentee. As I am navigating my new career, I need a mentor to help me acclimate to the field, create work-life balance, self-advocate, set healthy boundaries, and to teach me about the aspects of librarianship that I did not learn in library school. I need more interpersonal assistance at this stage in my career, so a good mentor would be willing and able to provide this for me.

I have noticed that many students also need interpersonal assistance to be successful. This can be especially true if they are new to college, don't have the personal support they need, or are returning to college after several years of being out of school. Taking into account their personal issues, I can show them strategies for how to be academically successful. Even though I cannot provide counseling or social services resources, I know how to direct them to those services if needed and to assist them academically. When I began my graduate studies, my mentor assisted me with getting into the rhythm of juggling school with work and my personal life and responsibilities. It was difficult, and not without some growing pains, but I had to learn to show myself compassion and kindness as I was getting used to my new, temporary reality. Eventually, the students I work with will graduate, but until they do, I can help them navigate their academics.

The ideal mentor should be encouraging, positive, and approachable; have great communication skills and a desire to work with those with diverse backgrounds; and be able to multitask and assist new librarians with developing their career path.<sup>28</sup> A mentor should also be trustworthy, nonjudgmental, and supportive and be able to provide wisdom and insight concerning into organizational and professional culture.<sup>29</sup> It is also important for a mentor to be able to provide social support. In a new position, there can be a period of loneliness and isolation. When you have a mentor, they are a source of support, connection, and inclusion in librarianship that can help you adjust to your new working environment. Academic librarianship can be complicated, especially for those new to the field.<sup>30</sup> It is helpful to have a mentor who can provide direction regarding endeavors such

as publishing, special projects, and promotion and tenure.<sup>31</sup> It is also helpful when a mentor shares their professional experiences, and guides the mentee in contemplating their goals, career decisions, and practices.<sup>32</sup> Harrington and Marshall suggest that library colleagues would make the best mentors for academic librarians.<sup>33</sup> Library administrators typically do not offer enough consistent support for mentoring programs, and a supervisor acting as a mentor can cause a lot of tension between the roles of mentor and evaluator.<sup>34</sup> However, this tension is less prevalent in institutions that have a more interpersonal library culture.<sup>35</sup>

## *Reflections from a Seasoned Mentor*

Those interested in mentoring should first determine the time and consideration available for this distinguished task. While one may be interested, some professional development may be needed, and there could be a cost attached to keeping your skill sets fresh and updated. Those interested in mentoring should look at crucial skill sets required for academic librarians and partner those skills with an area of librarianship.

Other necessary skills include identifying and overcoming imposter syndrome and stereotype threat, understanding your own bias, and how to handle micro-aggressions so that you can more easily work with students and support their success no matter where they come from. For example, as a mentor, I had to improve my listening skills. I needed to have patience and understanding so that I could understand the challenges facing my mentee. As a new librarian, I had to create a village of mentors who provided guidance in several areas where I felt that I needed extra support. To this day, all are still with me and continue to be energized as my career grows under their tutelage.

## **Qualities of a “Good” Mentee** *Reflection from a Mentee*

As a mentee, I feel it is my job to make mentoring me as easy as possible. Ultimately, my success has to come from the hard work that I put into learning my position and the tenacity I show by approaching my mentors with as clear a vision as possible. After all, a mentor is meant to support a mentee, not to be the only party putting in effort to sustain the relationship. Most likely, the mentor is quite busy working on advancing their own career, so the mentee needs to be proactive when it comes to planning interactions, completing tasks, and communicating.

I work with mostly undergraduate students, so I do not expect them to be as organized or proactive as I have learned to be. It's not that I have lowered expectations for them, I just know that it took me time and experience to learn what I now know about navigating academic success. So I do my best to meet my students where they are and help them improve their research and critical thinking skills. Ideally, they would approach me with what they do not know. However, this does not always happen. One way I reach students is through course instruction (either single sessions or being embedded in their course); during these instruction sessions, I implore students to make an appointment with me to discuss their academic needs. I also encounter students in need of assistance through the library's online chat service and at the reference desk. I also communicate with academic departments to remind them of the library's services and to encourage them to request instructional sessions and to refer their students to me for research consultations.

I have come to realize that I will need to be consistently proactive if I want to provide the best support possible to students, just as I am proactive when interacting with my mentors. The same skills I have learned to utilize to be a good mentee are the same that are necessary to help students with their academic success. To keep this from becoming overwhelming, I do my best to devote specific times of the day to focus on outreach. When I am completing any endeavor, I try to focus solely on one thing at a time.

To make a mentoring relationship successful, there needs to be effort, skill, and training on the part of the mentee.<sup>36</sup> Simply showing up to receive mentorship is not sufficient. The following are tips for mentees from Mandi Goodset's "A Short Guide to Being Mentored":

1. **Commitment:** Committing to mentorship includes devoting time and effort to the relationship and its objectives.
2. **Planning:** It is essential to set specific goals for the mentorship relationship.
3. **Preparation:** As a mentee, it is essential to come to each mentoring meeting with questions, scenarios, challenges, and updates to share with your mentor.
4. **Listening:** Effective mentors can offer great advice, even if it's not what the mentee wants to hear. Keep an open mind to their insight, even when it conflicts with the course of action the mentee wants to take. This can be a great source of value in your mentorship relationship.
5. **Collaboration:** Mentoring relationships that center on a mutual project tend to be more meaningful.

6. Researching: Librarians do not instinctively know how to be good mentees or mentors. Researching how to approach the mentorship process should lead to a more fruitful, accomplished, and significant experience.<sup>37</sup>

## *Reflection from a Seasoned Mentor*

Those who want to become excellent mentors should cultivate patience, compassion, social awareness, exceptional communication skills, and active listening skills. In addition, mentors must be dependable and adaptable and able to provide corrective feedback to guide mentees to be growth focused in their careers. Look for these qualities!

As an academic librarian who had worked in the community and technical college system for almost eighteen years, it was refreshing to find my own mentor when I began working at a four-year institution. I needed more support to understand the requirements for my tenure-track position. I needed assistance navigating the reappointment, promotion, and tenure review process and help understanding how to maneuver publishing and scholarly efforts. Whether your students are in community college or PhD programs, they will come to you for support of their success. If you do a fantastic job, they will continue to return.

## *Reflection from a Mentee*

It's important to remember that your mentor has a primary job to attend to in addition to being your mentor. You will need to plan how often you will meet and what will be discussed during the meeting in advance, with a goal of maximizing the impact of the time you spend together. The library profession can be demanding and nuanced, so learning to effectively manage your time is a skill you will need to acquire. As a librarian, it can be easy to get wrapped up in my daily endeavors, and I have to make time for working with students because I recognize that building relationships with students is instrumental in helping them succeed. It is also important to help students manage their expectations of me. I set up my calendar to accurately reflect my availability, and I set boundaries to ensure that I do not exceed my bandwidth and can offer the best quality assistance possible. Burnout is real, and being a mentor/resource takes a lot of time and dedication. I set boundaries so that I can be at my best for myself and for my students.

## *Reflection from a Seasoned Mentor*

It was essential to mentor other librarians and make space for building relationships in my life. I understood that a significant time commitment requiring patience, dedication, and understanding was vital. Once I had that academic library skillset to support several occupational and professional areas as a director and dean, working with others became even more critical because I had access to many different facets of librarianship that students and new librarians wanted to access and understand.

Please remember that relevant education, work experience, and leadership backgrounds are essential, as are contacts in and connections with professional organizations and networks. Sometimes it is helpful or even necessary for a mentor to have worked in a specialized occupation or in several areas of the professional field. Being able to support and give guidance for case studies and overcoming challenges is also encouraging. These same skills will also allow you to speak to others that you serve in the role of librarian, which will also boost and support student success.

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