Changing the Mentorship Paradigm: Survey Data and Interpretations from Forensic Anthropology Practitioners

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INTRODUCTION
This poster presents survey-based data on current perceptions of the roles of mentors and protégés within the field of forensic anthropology. It is hoped that these data will inform future mentor-protégé interactions and guide forensic scientists to focus on the positive influence that mentorship can have on not only protégés’ careers, but also on the personal development of the mentor and the overall wellbeing of the field.

HISTORY OF THE MENTORSHIP CONCEPT
The concept of mentorship originated in ancient Greek mythology and referred to a relationship between a knowledgeable person (mentor) and a less-experienced person (protégé). The term "mentor" gained traction in the late 17th and early 18th centuries after its popularization by French educator François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon in depicting the mythical character of "Mentor" as a wise and supportive advisor. Robert E. Rogers’ work on forensic anthropology used mentorship as the personal transmission of knowledge to a protégé, which can be conceptualized as the informal transmission of knowledge over a sustained period of time and in a domain in which the mentor and protege have unequal knowledge. However, that mentorship and protégé are interdependent, and both must be involved in the relationship and must share a common purpose. The concept of mentorship can be extended to include social interactions, such as mentorship between a mentor and mentee, a mentor and a mentor, and a mentor and a protégé. The concept of mentorship can also be extended to include social interactions, such as mentorship between a mentor and a protégé, a mentor and a mentor, and a mentor and a protégé.

TRADITIONALLY, MENTORS AS SEEN
Traditionally, mentors are seen as older, wiser advisors who provide counsel to younger, less-experienced individuals in their professional or social sphere. The role of the mentor is to provide guidance and support, and to help the protégé develop their skills and abilities. However, anyone with greater knowledge in a specific domain who exerts a positive influence on another individual’s professional or social development can be considered a mentor — regardless of age or experience. This presentation contains a definition of mentorship, which describes the mentor as someone who shares their knowledge and experience with another individual in a supportive and mutually beneficial manner.

MATERIALS & METHODS
This research explores how the roles of mentors and protégés are perceived throughout the diverse academic and applied contexts in the field of forensic anthropology. All users of the AAFS Anthropology Section listers received a link to an anonymous, IRTI-approved Qualtrics survey. Instructions encouraged participants to share the survey links with other practitioners of varying skill and experience levels, including students and other non-members. Convening participants answered 25 multiple-choice and 12 open-ended questions regarding their demographic information, opinions about mentorship, and experiences as both mentors and protégés.

Most respondents and mentees were under 50 years of age: 75% of respondents identified as women, 83% as "white," 82% perceived their primary mentors as men, 100% perceived at least one mentor to be "white.

Mentorship: the person-to-person transmission of knowledge in a domain where one person has more experience than the other.

Respondents valued peer (68%) as well as advisor mentors (86%).

Peers were also the most common category of protégé (75%).

"Mentorship should go beyond advising. It involves leading by example, providing tailored guidance, professional support, and a genuine interest in the well-being of the protégé. These can exist in peer mentorship as well as traditional mentorships." — Anonymous Respondent

"We need to foster a better mentor-protégé environment in our field— it feels unnecessarily competitive at times." — Anonymous Respondent

Forensic anthropology mentorship focuses on career/professionalism. Respondents wished for more mentorship in social interactions/issues, though most were satisfied overall with their mentorship experiences.

RESULTS

Importance of Mentorship in Forensic Anthropology
Respondents were nearly unanimous regarding the importance of mentorship in forensic anthropology (96% "definitely," or "probably"), and many felt that being mentored directly contributed to their career success (92% "definitely," or "probably"). Nearly all respondents had benefited from multiple mentors (99% "definitely" or "probably"). Many had also mentored multiple protégés (92% "definitely" or "probably").

Mentor and Protégé Demographics
A greater percentage of respondents reported being mentored by a thesis/dissertation advisor (80%). However, many respondents also reported peers as an important category of mentor (84%), and peers were the most commonly reported category of protégé (75%). Respondents perceived their primary mentor’s gender as male (82%), and 100% had mentors they perceived to be "white." European mentors were more than 50 years of age (70% or young than 50 years (48%), and they are male due to multiple mentors.

CAREER vs. SOCIAL MENTORSHIPS
Most respondents had received mentorship in career-related areas than they had in social interactions and social issues (e.g., 95% technical skill; 83% academic; 80% career path; 76% professional; vs. 57% "Networking" and 21% minority representation). Likewise, when asked which mentor(s) in which they desired additional mentorship, more respondents chose social categories (26% social interactions; 23% social issues) than career-related categories (15% career path; 7% technical skill; 5% professionalism; 2% academics). Nearly unanimous respondents (96%) implied that they had provided their own protégés with more mentorship in navigating social issues.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

This study indicates that the traditional mentorship paradigm is evolving. In forensic anthropology, mentorship programs can either consist of vertical-level interactions, or can include horizontal or horizontal interactions. Mentoring study sample was necessary, as forensic anthropology mentors are frequently under 50 years of age; however, while most respondents were women, mentors remain primarily men. There also seems to be a gender skew, as women are generally the social/ethnic diversity of mentors and role models. While most forensic anthropologists are satisfied with the mentorship they have received and provided, the future of mentorship in the field could benefit from the inclusion of increased guidance in social interactions, social/ethnic diversity of mentors and role models, and professionalism — especially by and for socially/environmentally diverse individuals.

If our future reflects our past, then we must honor the long-valed (and still valuable) role of the traditional mentor, while emphasizing the non-traditional mentorship behaviors that can enhance the careers and lives of both trainees and experienced practitioners.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS & NOTES

Many thanks to the respondents who participated in this survey! For detailed information on survey responses, please scan the QR code to the left, or email allysha.winburn@unf.edu.

REFERENCES


QR Code goes here. If link to any academic.edu site, which it have document with images/resources.