The idea of a mentoring program had been tossed around long before I came onboard, I believe since 2005. A lot of the support for it stemmed from the fact that the Librarians at Texas Tech are on the Tenure Track, and there has been perpetual confusion about the requirements for tenure and promotion there. We wanted to sidestep the perception that we are in competition with each other as faculty members, and foster the view that we are here to help and support each other.

We voted as a faculty in February of 2009 to create a Faculty Mentoring Program, but there were a few dissenting voices. One argument against it was that our organizational environment may not be supportive of a mentoring program. The point was made though, that participation was optional, and the majority voted in support of creating it.
These were the goals of the program: besides the obvious goals of sharing of knowledge and experience with colleagues; the more long term effects of the Mentoring Program that we are aiming for include improving morale, creating faculty synergy, and lowering turnover.

To oversee the program, our Faculty Executive Committee appointed a 3 person committee. At our first meeting I won the coin toss, and was elected chair of the Mentoring Committee. Earnstein Dukes and Jim Brewer are the two librarians who serve with me on the committee. Beginning with the research that had already been done, we looked at programs that have been detailed in published articles. There’s a lot of good literature out there about mentoring programs in libraries. The Association of Research Libraries also has a really great SPEC Kit that surveyed ARL Libraries about formal mentoring programs, found trends, and included a lot of the guiding documents of their programs.

The challenge with any program designed to support individuals is finding the balance between making it formal enough to evaluate, and be able to offer concrete support, but flexible enough to work with each person’s needs. We wanted to keep our program manageable by making it as simple as possible for the first year. For the greatest flexibility, we allowed non-tenured as well as tenured librarians to be mentors. The criteria for mentors were that they had to have passed their 3rd year review. Anyone could be a mentee, or protege as long as they had been a faculty member for at least 6 months. The reason for this time delay is that it takes around 6 months for most people to learn their jobs, and we didn’t want any interference or confusion between a librarian’s relationship with their mentor and that of their supervisor. Although much of the program has centered on tenure requirements, a librarian could choose to focus on any area of their professional life that they wanted to develop. Meaning that tenured faculty members could also be mentored.
Here is our original plan to kick off the program. We held two question and answer meetings in July of 2009, but since busy people are usually hesitant to commit to something when they’re not exactly sure how it will go, or what level of commitment will be involved, we had to do a bit of individual coaxing, as well.
To market the program, we also worked with the Libraries’ Marketing department to create this informational brochure, with a program description, and testimonials about the program. For the first year of course, we couldn’t use quotes specifically about our program, but we got quotes about mentoring in general from those who had participated in our campus student mentoring program. This brochure is also given to interviewed candidates for open positions in the library.
At the informational meetings, we distributed these applications for participation. We call them applications, but really, they are profile forms. Every faculty member was encouraged to participate, so if we could match them, they were part of the program. We also allowed mentors and mentees to request each other on their profile forms, and that has resulted in a couple of very successful pairings. For the rest, the subcommittee relied on a descriptive profile form to best match needs of mentees with mentors’ areas of expertise.

We paired a new librarian interested in developing her leadership skills with an experienced department head; one new librarian requested a particular person who hadn’t achieved tenure yet (she has since), but who she felt could guide her through navigating the workplace and juggling her different responsibilities and ambitions. Another more experienced librarian requested a tenured librarian she had worked with closely years before as a staff person, to help her meet the hurdle of applying for tenure.

We had 33 Librarians at the time, and 21 submitted our profile forms. One of our big fears was that we wouldn’t have enough librarians willing to be mentors, but to our surprise, we had more applications from potential mentors than from mentees. For that reason, we weren’t able to match everyone. We had 9 pairs, with 3 mentors left over.

We considered ways to keep them involved in the program, but in the end we let them know that they would be first in line for matching the next year, and they did come in handy. The second year we initially had more mentee applications, so we called upon those individuals to step in and participate, which they were happy to do. By August 2009, we were ready to begin the program!
Goal setting was the one thing that we made mentees formally responsible for. We collected their goals to give them direction in how to conduct their mentoring relationships, but also as a way of checking up on their progress later in the year.
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This was part of our gathering initial expectations from the participants, as part of our program assessment.

| 1. Gather initial expectations from participants |
| 2. Bimonthly meetings with mentors and mentors separately to check on progress. |
| 3. Mid-year assessment of the program (first year only). |
| 4. Annual evaluation. |
The second part of our planned assessment, bimonthly meetings to check on their progress, was the first thing to be tossed. We decided to hold these meetings only twice a year, in the format of a brown bag discussion at lunchtime. At these meetings we shared ideas, and they really helped to re-orient some of the participants. We held them with the mentees as a group, and the mentors as a group, in order to encourage them to speak more freely. The second year of the program, these meetings were decreased again to just once a year to avoid overkill.

Our bi-monthly meetings, we turned into activities, or discussions that we felt addressed common goals between the mentees. The first year we had a representative from the University Writing Center speak to us about their services, we had a librarian who had served on the Faculty Senate talk about her experience, and we had someone talk about Advising for Student Organizations on campus. This year, actually next week, we’re sponsoring a panel on how to get the most out of professional conferences, and how to become more involved. We wanted to encourage group interaction, so the participants could share and see the perspectives of those at their level, as well as those of their mentors.

We also encouraged the participants to suggest other, outside get-togethers. One of our pairs planned a couple of lunches where we would just meet as a group at a restaurant and talk about how things were going. But since time was one of the most difficult hurdles to overcome as a mentoring participant, none of the other ideas took flight.

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Assessment was something that wasn’t covered heavily in the literature we read, and so we aimed for a mixture of quantitative and qualitative evaluation of our program. The brown bag discussions were a good part of the qualitative portion. We had the participants fill out surveys at the end of the year, including questions about whether they had completed their goals, and whether they would recommend the program to others.

The feedback was very positive. Most participants reported significant professional growth, satisfaction with the group meetings, and a readiness to encourage others to participate next year. The most prevalent difficulty the participants came across was time constraints.

The best indicator, we felt though, was the number of librarians who renewed their participation, and how many mentor/mentee relationships continued for the second year. 5 of the 9 pairs renewed for the second year, while a few had underestimated the time commitment and chose not to continue.
One unforeseen problem we ran into at the end of the year was defining when it actually ended. We began the program in August, and had treated it as a yearlong program. As the summer approached though, we realized that we needed to make our official report to the library faculty by June, and that we would be busy during the summer planning for the next year. We also knew that many of the participants would need the summertime to focus on their goals, because that's when a lot of them get projects done. What we did was we officially ended the program in May, making it a 9 month program. But we encouraged our mentors and mentees to continue what they were doing through the summer, informally, without the extra support of the committee. That worked well, but the only downside was that we couldn't include in our report the final progress toward their goals for the year.
I’m going to share one success story that resulted from our program. Rob Weiner, our Arts & Humanities Librarian was a librarian for a number of years in the public sector before he started at Texas Tech. He’d already made a name for himself writing and speaking about such topics as The Grateful Dead, film history, and sequential art, and he’s known in the Texas Tech community as “the pop culture guru”. To many of us, he seemed like he was all set, but like many of us, he was mystified by the tenure process and wanted a mentor solely to help navigate him through.

We paired Rob with Susan Hidalgo, head of our Access Services Department, who had served on the Promotion & Tenure committee in the past.
Rob’s first goal is specific, but the second was typical of the mentees to set goals that are rather vague and immeasurable without setting specific milestones.
Rob’s goals for the second year, which he’s still working on, are much more specific and tangible.

1. Turn previous work with mentor into another article
2. Produce a quality dossier for 3rd year review
3. Showcase librarians as “cool/awesome” people and work against stigma surrounding the profession
4. Continue collaborating with faculty on projects for publication and presentation
5. Work on time management and avoid spreading myself too thin.

Rob’s Goals - 2010
Goal #1: Turn previous work with mentor into another article. Now, this previous work he mentions is one of the reasons I chose to feature Rob and Susan. They aren’t the only mentor/mentee pair that has collaborated successfully, but they published an article together that has achieved quite a bit of notoriety, even being written about in the Washington Post.

They created a bibliography entitled “Wanna Be Startin’ Somethin”: Michael Jackson in the Scholarly Literature, after finding that Michael Jackson has been written about in any number of fields, including Engineering, Law, and Chemistry.

This was a project that neither was looking for, but it was suggested to Rob that he should do something on Michael Jackson, and the idea took off only after he started working with Susan on it.

When I talked to Rob and Susan, naturally a lot of their discussion was about the success of this particular project and their collaboration together. This and other collaborative projects that the participants have worked on is an obvious step toward the 3rd goal of the program, which includes improving faculty synergy.
When I asked about their overall experience with the Mentoring Program, Rob said that he appreciated Susan’s open door, and she appreciated Rob’s contagious enthusiasm. They taught a Library Intro course together, and Susan feels like mentoring Rob has really broadened what she is doing, and how much she knows about what her colleagues are doing.

The biggest challenge Rob and Susan faced was the same challenge all the participants faced. **Time.** Meetings were very difficult to schedule and it was frustrating when they had to cancel all the time, but they still connected through email. Over time their meetings became less structured, and they met only when the need arose. Their relationship has also evolved to less of a mentor/mentee relationship to a more collegial relationship.

And what about Rob’s other goals? He’s made significant progress on all of them. He and Susan plan to write another article on their process of collaboration. He successfully passed his 3rd year review just last month. On #3, he’s had positive feedback from students saying they think he has a really cool job.

He is collaborating with faculty on a number of projects, but he’s had to find a balance between this one and #5, avoiding spreading himself too thin. He has a tendency to take on too many projects at once, and Susan has been a real help encouraging him to prioritize his time and say “No” if he needs to.
We’ve had several other successful mentoring pairs in addition to Rob and Susan, and I think that the opportunity to collaborate has been one of the best indicators of success that has come out of our program. Collaboration shows that the mentor and mentee trust each other, and work effectively together. They communicate well, and I think it’s a natural product of the relationship.

One thing we need to continually work against as a committee is the program becoming stagnant. In order to continue fostering the vitality it has introduced in our librarians who are participating, we need to find the right balance in the program between the needs of the more experienced participants, and the brand new librarians that come to our library. We’ve also talked about eventually expanding the program to include our library staff, as well. But the great thing about mentoring is that when you have dedicated mentors and willing and eager mentees, any amount of growth is possible.
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