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COMMUNITY OF PEER MENTORS ©: A NEW MODEL FOR PEER MENTORING IN DOCTORAL EDUCATION

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Abstract: Many issues complicate establishing faculty/student mentoring relationships, including how faculty members and graduate students can engage in mentoring in these challenging times of limited funding for higher education. This roundtable paper briefly examines mentoring models in higher education and proposes a new model, *Community of Peer Mentors* ©.

Learning to successfully negotiate academic culture is made difficult and multifaceted by the larger complex political and economic world in which higher education institutions function. As state budgets are reduced and institutions of higher education experience significant funding cuts, universities are not always replacing retiring faculty members and hiring new tenure-track faculty (Berdahl, Gumport, & Altbach, 2011; Cohen & Kisker, 2010). The result is that many faculty members are faced with increased workloads, including amplified teaching loads (Newman, Couturier, & Scurry, 2004), while also supporting numerous doctoral and graduate students through advising, mentoring, and assisting with their dissertations. In addition, due to tight budgets, universities may have little interest in investing funds to support formal or university sanctioned mentoring programs for both graduate students and new faculty members (Mullen, Fish, & Hutinger 2010; Hansman, 2012a).

Mullen (2003) suggests that many faculty members never experienced mentoring themselves in their own lives as they became members of academe, so they may be reluctant or uncomfortable serving as mentors to junior faculty or doctoral students. Despite this reluctance, however, “mentoring relationships potentially can empower both mentors and protégés, and good mentoring relationships may be essential to doctoral students and junior faculty members learning the cultures of academe (Hansman, 2002) in order to be successful in their academic careers.

It is clear that many new academicians and graduate students wish to engage in mentoring relationships with more experienced faculty members to prepare them for their future roles in higher education or other professions (Mullen, 2003; Hansman, 2012a; 2012b). Many issues confound establishing mentoring relationships, and paramount among them is how faculty members and graduate students engage in mentoring relationships in these challenging times of limited funding for higher education. Further, if faculty members are unavailable for mentoring students, what creative and innovative models can assist the formation of and maintenance of one-to-one and peer mentoring relationships in academe? In addition, how can mentoring models and research guide higher education faculty and administrators in planning for successful mentoring experiences for graduate students and faculty members? How can faculty members learn to become better mentors to both new faculty members and doctoral students? This roundtable explores these questions, as well as the lack of knowledge and understanding of peer mentoring programs and models to prepare those new to or unfamiliar with higher education to learn the institutional culture and skills necessary to become successful faculty members. A supplementary purpose of this research is to explore a newly developed model for engendering supportive mentoring relationships that can empower peer learning, *Community of Peer Mentors* ©.

Drawing from the peer mentoring models and concepts of O’Neil and Marsick, (2007), Mullen (2003), Mullen, Fish, and Hutinger (2010), and Henrich and Attebury (2010), as well as Wenger’s (1998) and others notions of Communities of Practice (CoPs), *Community of Peer Mentors* © (Hansman 2012b) is a developing model for peer mentoring for doctoral or other graduate students. This mentoring model is similar to, yet different from, the CoP life-cycle and consists of five points or stages: Forming, Connecting, Engaging, Concluding and New Beginnings, and Enduring Networks. *Community of Peer Mentors* can not only provide doctoral students with some much needed peer mentoring throughout their doctoral programs, but through its points and stages, the model trains and empowers doctoral students as future faculty members to become supportive mentors to others collaboration through dynamic dialogue, active learning, mutually constructed goals, and continuing development for both mentors and protégés. Through supportive one-to-one and peer mentoring relationships, protégés can gain insider knowledge and perspectives of organizational culture. Future research and development should focus on mentoring models that can train mentors, empowering protégés while developing a new generation of faculty member mentors.

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