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A Qualitative Case Study of Junior Faculty Mentoring Practices at Selected Minority Higher Educational Institutions

Keywords:

*Administration, Higher Education, Professional
Development, Research*

PEER-REFEREED ARTICLE ■ APPLIED RESEARCH PAPER





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A Qualitative Case Study of Junior Faculty Mentoring Practices at Selected Minority Higher Educational Institutions

Dr. Lewis S. Waller, Dr. Musibau A. Shofoluwe

ABSTRACT

A qualitative case study was conducted to investigate the perceptions of new junior tenure-track faculty members regarding mentoring practices at selected minority higher institutions (MHI). The main goal of the study was to assess the existence and nature of mentoring programs at MHI as perceived by the new tenure-track faculty. The primary objective was to identify and understand the nature of experiences that new tenure-track faculty face and the role of mentoring and other supports in their attainment of tenure and promotion. Study respondents were selected from two historically black universities located in the southeastern region of the United States. These respondents were presented with a structured interview protocol consisting of open-ended questionnaire designed to gather all necessary information for this study. Findings of the study show that the views of the respondents were mixed across the two institutions, although certain commonality of opinions was found. Based on these findings, it was recommended that formal mentoring programs be developed at minority higher institutions in order to assist and prepare new tenure-track faculty members for promotion and tenure.

INTRODUCTION

New faculty members join academia every year, either directly after obtaining their doctoral degrees or from other institutions in hope of starting an enriching academic career. Unfortunately, many of them failed to receive their much-desired tenure and/or promotion due to several issues and problems they faced. For instance, many of them had difficulties in adjusting and meeting the requirements and expectations of their respective departments (Lucas & Murry, 2002). Others have left the academia due to stress and other issues involving student management, teaching load, and scholarship expectations (Dyal & Sewell, 2002; Ambrose, Houston, & Norman, 2005). Consequently, their dream of promising academic career becomes an illusion. In order to understand the mentoring-related academic frustrations and concerns often faced by new tenure-track junior faculty at minority higher educational institutions, it is essential to assess their views and the role of mentoring as part

of the overall collegiate professional development process.

Many studies have been conducted in various fields of higher education involving faculty mentoring. Most of these studies have documented the major benefits of mentoring (Hopkins, 2005; Johnson, 2001; Johnson & Harvey, 2002; Moss, Teshima, & Leszcz, 2008; Smith & Zsohar, 2007; Thomas, Willis, & Davis, 2007; Thomas, Hu, Gewin, Bingham & Yanchus, 2005). Few of these studies have focused on faculty at non-minority institutions (Alexander, 2005; Burden, Harrison, & Hodge, 2005; Tillman, 2001). Only few studies have actually focused on faculty at minority higher institutions, such as historically black colleges and universities (HBCU) (Williams & Williams, 2006; Alex-Assensoh, 2003; Allen, Epps, Guillory, Suh & Bonous-Hammarth, 2000; Butner, Burley & Marbley, 2000; Weems, 2003; Williams & Williams, 2006). In higher education, mentoring is an efficient teaching and coaching strategy used to transfer the particular knowledge and skills of the academy to a new faculty member (Lucas & Murry, 2002). Mentoring is defined as the relationship between a more knowledgeable leader and a less qualified individual, often in a new position (Blauvelt & Spath, 2008; Catapano, 2006; Denmark & Podsen, 2000; Menges, 1999; Saarnivaara & Sarja, 2007; St. Clair, 1994). Ambrose, Huston, and Norman (2005) point to three areas in which mentoring is important for the survival of new faculty members, including "mentoring in intellectual activities, professional/career development, and department politics" (p. 815).

For new junior faculty members, the first few years are crucial to their career growth and success. New faculty members often start their careers with high expectations, but over a period of time, they become disenchanted and stressed (Boice, 1992). Several studies indicated that where mentoring is absent, new faculty members tend to have problems in their professional careers (Allen & Eby, 2004; Boice, 1992; Boyle & Boice, 1998; Hopkins, 2005). According to Dyal and Sewell (2002), new faculty members usually have problems motivating students, managing the classroom, and developing effective leadership in their courses. Lucas and Murry (2002) also found that new faculty members

often have difficulties in adjusting and meeting the requirements and expectations of their academic departments. Other studies have also shown that new faculty members are discouraged during their first few years of teaching because of teaching load, research expectations, and lack of guidance from their superiors (Eberhard, Reinhardt-Mondragon & Stottlemeyer, 2000; Kirk, 1992; Nursing, 2006; Pierce, 1998; Sorcinelli, 1994). Consequently, they become dissatisfied and seek to leave the academic profession (Ambrose, Huston, & Norman, 2005).

In order to attain tenure and promotion, faculty members are expected to meet academic expectations in the areas of teaching, research publications, writing, and community service (Menges, 1999). These requirements cut across all institutions of higher learning, and for junior faculty to attain them, proper mentoring is necessary. In spite of the significance of these requirements, literature reviews suggest that inadequate attention is often placed on mentoring of new junior faculty members at minority higher institutions. This academic shortcoming often complicates the junior faculty's effort to attain promotion and tenure. Lack of adequate research involving faculty mentoring at MHI also contributes to insufficient data or evidence to document the significance of mentoring at these institutions.

Purpose

This study was conducted with the primary focus of investigating the academic-related mentoring views and perceptions of new tenure-track junior faculty members at selected minority higher institutions. Specifically, the study probed into the mentoring experience of selected faculty members and the nature and role of mentoring in their respective institutions. Further, participants were also questioned on their perceptions of the relevance of the mentoring they have received towards attainment of promotion and tenure. Through this study, the researchers hoped to bridge the knowledge gap that currently exists in minority faculty mentoring research. Further, it is hoped that the findings of this study will shed additional light into how minority higher institutions (specifically HBCU) address mentoring issues with the ultimate goal of improving mentoring and nurturing of junior faculty towards attainment of tenure and promotion.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using a qualitative case study approach. This method was used due to its suitability for learning more about poorly understood situations (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Also, it is the method of choice when the research questions such as those used in this study, address descriptions or explanations and in-depth under-

standing of people and phenomena being sought (Creswell, 2003; Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003; Yin, 2006).

Site and Participants Selection

The study sites were selected based on geographic proximity and convenience of location for the researchers. These institutions vary in size, academic programs offered and research efforts. One of the institutions is classified as "Research Intensive University", and both institutions are located in the Southeastern part of the United States. Educating minority students is one of many significant areas of academic commitment that both institutions promote as top priority.

The participants consisted of six new tenure-track faculty members at two historically black institutions. Half of the participants were women and half were men. All participants reported over three years of service at their respective institutions. Each site was represented by three faculty members, one from each of the colleges of arts and sciences, education, and business. The average age of the participants ranged from 31-60 years with a standard deviation of 40.0. After being presented with the objective of the study, the participants decided to participate in the study and voluntarily agreed to share their experiences, perceptions, needs, and expectations.

Procedure

An interview protocol that included structured and open-ended questions was used to gather information. The first part of the instrument, *New HBCU Faculty Interview Protocol*, was used to collect demographic data by categories. Specifically, respondents were asked to indicate their gender, level of education, age, ethnicity/racial background, and years of teaching experience, among other things. The second part of the interviews contained questions designed to probe deeply for greater understanding of the participants' perceptions of their mentoring experience at their respective institutions.

Following Gall, Gall and Borg's (2003) research technique, the researchers used the interview protocol that allowed the participants to explain their points of view in depth with examples and anecdotes from their working environment. The researchers set up a time and date for one-hour face-to-face interviews with each participant. The interviews took place at the participant's workplace in a private location mutually agreed upon by the participant and researchers. Field notes and observational data of each location were kept by the researchers. Participants were asked for their consent to audio-taping of the interviews as a check for clarity and data interpretation. All study documents were handled securely and were coded randomly,

with a researcher key to study codes used for anonymity and confidentiality. Information gathered from the interviews was later reviewed and analyzed for triangulation as well as cross-checked for interpretation.

This study was limited to six participants due to the intricacy involved in getting more subjects to agree to participate in the study. The researchers reached out to several potential subjects, but only six volunteered to participate. Nevertheless, the small number used in this study was not unusual in qualitative limited case studies. Previous qualitative limited case studies involving 2 to 11 participants have been conducted by other researchers (Chinyoka, Mutambara, Lillias, & Chagwinza, 2012; Onguko, Abdalla & Webber, 2012; Bai, Millwater & Hudson, 2012; Bickmore & Dowell, 2011; Willford, 2011). Although it is not uncommon to have a small sample size of participants in a qualitative research, care must be exercised in making a generalized conclusion from the findings of this study. Nevertheless, the results of the study could be used to guide future administrative decisions regarding minority faculty development initiatives. The findings could also be used as a guide for future studies.

Research Questions

Two major research questions guided the conduct of this study:

1. What are the perceptions, needs and expectations of new junior tenure-track faculty from selected minority higher educational institutions with regard to academic mentoring and tenure?
2. What are the differences in perceptions, needs and expectations of new junior tenure-track faculty members from selected minority higher educational institutions?

Data Analysis Procedure

The participants were presented with a set of structured questions carefully developed to garner the information necessary to achieve the goal of the study. The questions contained certain dimensions designed to measure each participant's perceptions. Audio-taped interview responses were transcribed using a word processor. After the responses were transcribed, the data was categorized by grouping them into meaningful categories, identifying their patterns, coding them for identification, and organizing them on the basis of identifiable patterns, as suggested by Leedy & Ormrod (2005). Each pattern was then analyzed and interpreted based on similarities and differences. Descriptive analysis was used to identify the important features that relate to the participants' views. The final stage of data analysis involved an examination of the categories and relationships that emerged

from the interview responses using triangulation procedures.

FINDINGS

As indicated earlier, this study was divided into two parts. Part I focused on collecting biographical information from the participants. Part II focused on the academic needs of study participants. Through a face-to-face interview, the research team asked the participants about their needs and expectations as tenure-track junior faculty members. Based on their responses, *Mentoring and Tenure* expectations emerged as their greatest needs.

Mentoring

As discussed earlier, mentoring has been a subject of discussion among academic researchers. However, most of the studies have been limited to non-minority institutions. In order to assess their opinions, participants were asked to discuss their views on the subject matter. The first study participant (Pseudo-named Jane) whose employment was with the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) explained how important it is to have more than one mentor. Mentors, according to her, must be someone with specialization in the same discipline as the mentee. Further, Jane iterated as follows:

... This person [mentor] provides the educational stimulus necessary to foster communication... It is important to have a mentor who cares about your personal success and welfare, and fosters creativity. This can be the same person or a different person, which sometimes requires two different mentors.

When asked whether she had an assigned mentor, she stated, "We have faculty who would step right in and assist one with anything needed. Basically, it's all informal mentoring. However, I feel like the university should have a formal mentoring program in place." She indicated that new teachers need to ask their mentor how they manage their time and meet professional responsibilities.

The view of the second participant (Pseudo-named Victoria) on the importance of a mentor as a source of faculty support was consistent with Jane's views. Victoria was employed with the School of Education. She reported that a mentor could play a vital role in the growth of new faculty and could also help in the development of their professional skills and self-confidence. She further stated that "some of the needs that we are lacking definitely are [related to having] assigned mentors to assist immediate new faculty members here at the university." Victoria justified her reasons for having the right mentor assigned to new faculty members by saying:

I think one thing we need to look at is making

sure that when we do assign a mentor to junior faculty that we do a perfect match type. Some way, have criteria set up that will identify the best fit for that particular junior faculty... so as not to have that junior faculty become disgusted with the system based upon experiences or the lack of support from a mentor being assigned. So criteria are very important.

Selecting mentors and connecting them with the appropriate mentees that would foster collegial collaboration is vital. Victoria also spoke on the importance of having a collaborative environment in which the faculty can work together. She explained how she has made her colleagues aware of the importance of collaboration and knowledge sharing. She was quick to say that her academic unit now encourages joint research work. Victoria also commented on the lack of training for new junior faculty on advisement and the need to engage in professional development with other faculty members. She expressed that there needs to be a balance in provision of support for new faculty members. She expanded with the following:

The university has a policy; my dean is a powerful dean and he can do a lot of things other people cannot... It is the university policies that need to be addressed, not my individual experiences because my experiences may have been pretty good compared to some others... I think the policies of the universities themselves are not necessarily supportive. I think that the individual department chairs and individual deans, if they have the resources, help you figure out a way to get something done. I do not think that support exists as an institutional structure for everyone. That is where I think a lot of the dissatisfaction comes from.

The third study participant (Pseudo-named Cindy) was employed in the School of Business. Cindy had a different opinion on the need for a mentor. From her perspective, most of the mentoring process was informal in which the mentor and protégée come together impulsively. When asked about a mentor, she replied, "A mentor, me, no. I don't have a mentor. I have buddies. I do have a friend and she's leaving. Is there someone who is guiding me through this process?" From her standpoint, she believes that a mentor is someone who "helps you stay out of trouble and helps you understand the importance of that reputation. I think that is what the mentor does... I think the mentor is important for that, if nothing else." Cindy simply did not share the views of other participants.

The fourth participant (Pseudo-named John) was employed with the College of Arts and Science. John felt that some of his needs were met by having informal mentors, and he stated that he does not have a formal mentor. Compared to the first three faculty interviewed, John appeared to be more

experienced. In his view, faculty members in his department are given some degree of guidance and advice about day-to-day activities and ways to obtain tenure. He indicated that the needs for formal mentoring and training relative to research and understanding of the tenure process were not met.

The fifth participant (Pseudo-named James) was also employed in the School of Business. When asked about his view on having a mentor, he indicated that he had a mentor who was a male. His mentor was a junior faculty member and this appears to be a potential problem. James further expressed his frustration with having junior faculty members as mentors. He said that their "advice is usually taking everything... That becomes a problem." On the other hand, he stated that a senior faculty member might be "more on the lookout" for the things that are more meaningful in regard to obtaining tenure and the necessary things that a new faculty needs to do. Another frustration faced by James was that his assigned mentor was not tenured. He explained:

So how can my mentor help me with my tenure process and give me good advice when my mentor does not have tenure? My mentor is fine with paperwork and helping me with day-to-day stuff which is great. But my concern is that my mentor is not sure if he is going to get tenure... I may be overly optimistic that I am going to get tenure... I am certain.

James indicated that a mentor would be great, but "they can't guarantee anything, though they could help."

The sixth participant (Pseudo-named Paul) was employed in the School of Education. Paul shared with the researcher team that a mentor could provide extended support for new faculty members beyond the basis of research conduct, teaching, and student/classroom management. He believes that a mentor is someone who can help new faculty through information sharing, class lecture observation, collaboration on lesson preparation and other academic discussions. Paul further elaborated as follows:

Well, I think there needs to be a mentor. There needs to be someone to say, Look; did you get your phone? Look; did you get your login? Did you get a parking pass... There needs to be somebody who can do a lot of those things for you, there needs to be a mentorship program... There needs to be a person who is there to ask you 25 questions: Did you get this? Did you get that? And that person needs to know who to call to get to the next step.

When asked if he has ever been assigned a mentor? Paul was quick to respond that he had never asked for a mentor because he felt that the university could not produce one.

From the above response, one could get a sense of the indifference this faculty had for an assigned mentor. Although he recognized the need for a formal mentor, Paul was not interested in asking for one.

Tenure

Tenure as we know it today in most higher educational institutions is a yardstick to measure the faculty's academic worth. By all measures, tenure assures the faculty a permanent employment at the institution as long as the faculty member continues to remain productive. Study participants were asked to share their views on this important subject. Just as in the mentoring interview session, Jane was first allowed to shed light on her perceptions. She stated that tenure means job security and a certain level of respect. When asked to elaborate, she explained that through tenure, one could gain a tremendous amount of knowledge and the ability to do numerous things. She further explained that once she was hired, the Dean of her college explained the tenure process and the types of things that they would be looking for in order for junior faculty to be granted tenure. In addition to that, she stated:

Many of the faculty members in the department of biology have helped me to make sure that I am doing the things that I need to do in order to add to my tenure package so that I will be prepared.

When asked about her expectations of tenure, she replied that tenure is a good motivator if "faculty members are given a clear picture of what is expected of them for tenure". She further stated, "I think it could be a very positive process, but it has to be a clear, very clear picture about what's required."

Victoria was also asked to shed light on her views about tenure processes and requirements at her institution. She explained that within three years, one is expected to begin tenure track if one is not already on tenure track. When asked to explain further what she meant, she stated:

In three to five years we should be developing, doing some things to get us tenured. For example; publication, research, as well as excellence in teaching, and grants writing... We should at least have submitted something for funding.

She also explained that part of the tenure process includes an annual performance review with the department chair and the faculty member. This review is conducted to ensure that the faculty member is on track with the expectations that were discussed early in the semester. Such expectations include submission of an academic plan for the year and submission of documented evidence to support attainment of what is included in the plan. As a whole, Victoria felt that tenure is a great idea.

However, she thought that if tenure is going to be used as a tool for keeping faculty on track, then "more resources and time should be placed into this type of idea, ensuring that all faculty members receive appropriate mentoring towards tenure."

From a different viewpoint, Victoria believes that not everyone should be granted tenure. She argued that some faculty members do not deserve tenure due to their poor teaching performance, regardless of their research and grants writing skills. She continued by sharing the following:

They [Faculty] may have tenure based upon the fact that they do research, bring in grant money, but they're lacking in so many other areas. I guess within higher education and academia, tenure is always going to be there. I don't ever foresee that as being dropped.

Victoria's view was shared by Cindy who was quick to state that her institution failed to properly explain the tenure process to her. She felt that it would have been beneficial if her college dean had explained the tenure process to her during her orientation. She said, "They think it's just one of those things that one should know... I think tenure is job security and that you have just as much academic freedom before tenure as you do after." She thought that many faculty members believe once a person gets tenure, he or she has academic freedom. Her observation of tenure over the last few years is that, "if people like you, they will do what they can to keep you... However, if they do not like you, they will come up with a reason to get rid of you." She further elaborated on what her perceptions of tenure were and provided this analysis:

So it is really not about academic freedom, it's not about... did you do something... is your research so egregiously weird that you are outside the bounds of reality? No, people do not really care, they do care about whether or not you are politically acceptable, you are socially acceptable, your teaching is good enough, did they like you or not, are you a good colleague, do you fit?

Cindy believes that it would be more productive to have long-term contracts rather than having tenure. She spoke about getting rid of tenure due to the fact that faculty members "just coast along once they receive their tenure". She felt that very little accountability exists after that.

John had a positive view about tenure. He affirmed that tenure does mean a lot to him. From his previous job, he claimed that several tenure-track faculty members were dismissed because they failed to support or agree with the academic directions of the university's leadership. He stated, "So obviously tenure is not a security blanket. Basically tenure should relieve the anxiety of the faculty member about whether or not they are going to be employed

in the short term or even medium term.” He further affirmed that the tenure process was not specifically explained to him because “they are in the middle of redefining their tenure process; so they could not tell me generally what they thought the tenure process would be.” From his understanding, tenure was being defined by a process that is “more defined by time and services; defined by department as opposed to trying to create a rigid university structure.” John further expressed his disappointment with his department chair because of the brief discussions he received about tenure. He felt that the tenure process should have been reviewed in depth.

When presented with the same tenure-related question, James expressed his views differently from other participants. He believes that having tenure is not a guarantee of a job. According to him, many individuals appear to misunderstand what tenure really implies. “If there are difficulties at the university in area of finance, downsizing or if you do something wrong you can be let go,” he explained. He stated that in his previous jobs, faculty members were fired because they would not work, plagiarized or simply being belligerent toward the supervisor. “You let go of people on the tenure track ahead of people who are tenured”, he said. Regarding the nature and relevance of assistance he received when in the tenure process, James indicated that he only received few instructions on how to set up his portfolio for tenure. Again, this assertion is consistent with other participants’ views about inadequate instruction on tenure process.

When responding to similar questions, Paul said that tenure was “kind of a pretty mist to him at first” with no clear understanding of its meaning and the process involved. At the time he was hired to coordinate a new program, Paul asserted that no one was available in his area to provide information on how to obtain tenure. As a program coordinator, he had the opportunity to draft and implement a new tenure policy with the assistance of some experienced faculty. The tenure policy then becomes available to all new faculty members. Contrary to other participants, Paul appeared to be more knowledgeable of the tenure process as he continued to explain what new faculty members need to do to attain tenure. He discussed obstacles to attaining tenure including excessive teaching and advising loads. He also felt that HBCUs were “evolving from a traditional teaching college situation to more of a research emphasis... and I think this is a natural progression for a lot of colleges at this time.” Paul was also concerned with the fact that numerous faculty members who qualify as mentors obtained their tenure based on totally different standards compared to what is currently used for the new faculty. Nevertheless, Paul believes that academic and policy improvements are part of the job; thus, nothing can be done to undo the past.

DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of new junior tenure-track faculty members at selected minority higher educational institutions regarding academic mentoring practices. Additionally, the researchers were also interested in finding out the role of mentoring in the pursuit of tenure. New junior faculty members enter higher education with high expectations that include career mobility and tenure attainment. As it turns out, many of these faculty members often become discouraged because of the academic requirements that include teaching, research, grants writing, and community services. Lack of support from the institution and/or the academic units often diminishes the faculty’s hope of attaining tenure as well (Dyal & Sewell, 2002; Ambrose, Huston & Norman, 2005; Nursing, 2006; Kirk, 1992; Pierce, 1998).

Although several research studies have been conducted in the areas of junior faculty mentoring in higher education, only few of these studies actually focused exclusively on minority higher institutions (Alexander, 2005; Burden, Harrison, & Hodge, 2005; Tillman, 2001). The limited research data about mentoring practices at minority higher educational institutions make it difficult to understand the extent of the problems being faced by the junior tenure-track faculty members at these institutions. The success of new junior faculty members depends on the level of training, knowledge and guidance received from their academic units, as well as from their assigned mentors. Success is also achieved when the faculty member masters the art of managing students effectively, interacting with colleagues, and meeting tenure requirements. Thus, mentoring activities must be structured to provide enriching experiences for junior faculty members, with the ultimate goal of attaining tenure.

From this study, the researchers discovered that new junior faculty members were cognizant of the tenure requirements. However, they expressed mixed feelings about what to do to obtain tenure. Undoubtedly, they believed that tenure was a “great idea”, but they felt that more time and resources are needed to prepare them for the process. Based on the information collected from the research subjects, there were differences in the tenure process across various divisions in the institutions. This discrepancy is not unusual as many institutions and their academic divisions use different criteria to evaluate their faculty for tenure and promotion. What appears to be problematic is where the mentoring faculty members were not tenured themselves. It is inconceivable to imagine how a non-tenured faculty could be assigned to a new faculty member as a mentor. Where such practice is adopted, faculty members seeking tenure may fail because of misguided information. While the con-

tribution of the mentor cannot be overemphasized, the mentor's role should not replace the advice of the department head.

All of the new junior faculty members interviewed in this study indicated the need for mentoring and suggested that formal mentoring programs should be developed at their respective institutions. Furthermore, these faculty members also believed that attaining tenure is an important professional goal; however, the tenure process could be difficult to negotiate without support and clear guidelines from colleagues who have already completed the tenure process. These beliefs were supported by findings of research studies conducted at predominantly white institutions (Eberhard, Reinhardt-Mondragon, & Stottlemeyer 2000; Clark 2005; and Gaskin, Lumpkin, & Tennant, 2003). Clearly, faculty mentoring programs could help new junior faculty members in their teaching, research and scholarly activities, with potential to assist them attain tenure.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this case study clearly support the findings of previous studies which showed that mentoring plays an important role in the efforts of junior faculty to attain tenure. This study revealed that new faculty members need mentors who are knowledgeable about mentoring process and faculty member who could assist them in their efforts to obtain tenure. Most of the study participants indicated that they did not have a formal mentor assigned to them. The absence of formal mentor often complicates the faculty's effort to prepare for tenure. For one participant who reported having a formal mentor, the assigned mentor was not tenured and this participant was not sure if his mentor would be tenured. From the responses garnered from the study participants, it could be argued that in order to be successful in the academia, proper mentoring must be provided to junior faculty members. The findings also revealed positive collaborative working environment of the participants. Many participants had department chairs and/or colleagues who collaborated with them and provided significant amount of information about the university guidelines and expectations.

Time management was also found to be a major obstacle to some of the junior faculty members as they struggle to juggle many academic requirements. Lack of adequate information in the areas of research, publications, and community services were also expressed as concerns by the study subjects. Many believed that they did not receive adequate support from their colleagues in these areas. The study participants expected an academic environment where they could collaborate with their colleagues and learn how to conduct research and publish their findings. They expected this

opportunity to be made available to them at the onset of their employment. Overall, the needs and expectations of the study participants were not uniform across their respective academic units and institutions; nevertheless, their perceptions revealed a strong need for academic guidance and formal mentoring process.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Despite the limited number of participants in this study, the findings have implications for both new junior faculty members and minority institutions of higher learning as a whole. The majority of the study participants reported that informal mentoring occurred at their respective institutions. It is imperative that a formalized and consistent mentoring be instituted at minority higher educational institutions to enhance the overall professional development of new junior faculty members. Although only one participant had an untenured faculty as a mentor, the implication of this practice is significant. For mentoring to be effective and helpful to junior faculty members, the assigned mentor must be a tenured faculty who has gone through the tenure process. Achinstein and Barrett (2004) suggested that a mentor could be a professional leader who can help the mentee become exceptional in teaching, critical thinking, interpersonal skills and learning.

The study findings were also consistent with other findings that showed that mentoring of junior faculty members was important in the early years of their professional growth because it allows them to learn how to network with others and to better understand their roles and work responsibilities (Blixen, Papp, Hull, Rudick & Bramstedt, 2007). One implication of this is that junior faculty members would learn early in their career what is needed to succeed in attaining tenure and promotion. Therefore, it is imperative for upper administration to mandate academic divisions to develop a structured mentoring program for their junior faculty members. Every new faculty member must be made aware of this development opportunity. Junior faculty members require academic professional experiences that prepare them for long-term success. Thus, effective mentoring will ensure their understanding of the tenure and promotion process.

Lack of adequate time for academic responsibilities was cited as a major obstacle by some of the study participants as they struggled to balance their teaching and other scholarly activities. To help junior faculty members cope with this issue, it is imperative that academic unit chair be considerate in assigning teaching loads as well as committee assignments. Consistent guidance must also be provided in all areas of academic endeavors. Furthermore, one-on-one mentoring would enable

the junior faculty members become accomplished scholars that could ultimately transpire their academic units as well as their institutions to national prominence. These assertions paralleled that of Solem and Foote (2006) who claimed that, "there are subjective factors that promote the abilities of new faculty, among the most important being a supportive department chairperson and a department culture defined by strong, ambient collegiality" (p. 229-230).

Because of the perceived high expectations of new faculty members at academic institutions that are classified as doctoral research or high research intensive, new junior faculty members must be cognizant of their academic unit requirements for both tenure and promotion early in their career. It is also suggested that junior faculty members take

the first initiative to investigate the academic culture of their departments. This must begin when the faculty member is invited for campus interview for the position he or she is seeking. During the interview, appropriate questions must be asked relative to mentoring, and tenure and promotion requirements. Advance knowledge of this information will enable the new faculty member to prepare for the task ahead. Finally, new junior faculty members should define their research interest early in their academic career. The notion that the first semester is an exploration, soul-searching period should be dismissed. The key to academic success for young faculty members is to get busy their first semester, while at the same time learning about the departmental culture.

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