

USU Extension Intentional Mentoring Plan

Introduction

In the past decade, there has been a dramatic shift from the traditional university workplace to one that is mobile, global, and continually evolving. To stay competitive and attract the best and brightest faculty and staff, university faculty development plans and activities must evolve as well—persevering to adapt to current trends and new directions. Successful faculty development initiatives depend on how well faculty career goals are met while focusing on meeting university traditions for teaching, research, extension, and service while supporting faculty as they contribute in a scholarly manner to their colleagues and discipline.

USU Extension will provide an intentional mentoring process to facilitate development of early career faculty or others engaged in a promotion or learning process, by connecting Extension personnel with 6-8 years' experience with new personnel looking to succeed in the tenure track or other promotion process. A cohort of early career faculty will be initiated to meet the social and scholastic needs of new faculty. In recent years, the practice of hiring county Extension employees into a tenure track position is evolving into hiring fewer tenure track faculty and more at the educator, instructor, and coordinator levels. Therefore, mentoring of new employees needs to be nimble and flexible to meet the needs of an individual as the needs of the system adapt and change.

Although having access to a mentor does not guarantee success within the system, pairing new employees with a seasoned or savvy mentor, typically someone post-tenure or with at least 6 years' experience, can help Utah State University (USU) Extension faculty and other non-tenure track personnel learn to handle various situations, enhance their professional development, and avoid potential pitfalls that may derail a career or delay a promotion.

Employee Development Program Design and Goals

The intentional mentoring process will capitalize on the experiences of successful individuals (mentors) who are committed to improving and developing the next generation of Extension leaders.

Core values of intentional mentoring include:

- Cross-disciplinary to avoid building silos.
- Capacity-building to make a stronger, leaner organization.
- Recognize, reward, and celebrate creativity.
- Reflective and collaborative in nature.

Intentional mentoring includes:

- Focusing on attraction rather than retention. If the university adopts principles and practices that attract new employees to the job, then there is no need for a last minute retention scramble.
- Celebrating achievement. Making sure individuals understand how they are making a difference and are recognized for their efforts. (Olsen & Sorcinelli, 1992)
- Developing a culture of innovation by mobilizing university resources to create knowledge allowing Extension employees to achieve unique paths to their desired futures. When innovation is recognized and rewarded, a culture of excellence and success is established.
- Developing a mentoring/employee development system that is based upon “disruptive innovation” that incorporates ideas from one-on-one interactions, shadowing, a selection of training/informational videos, network mentoring, and symposia. (Linda Beane-Katner, 2014)

Achieves the following program outcomes:

- University systems and practices will be identified that attract and support new employees in their quest for excellence and recognition in the pursuit of individual career goals.

- A formal and informal system of recognition for achievement will be identified and implemented to attract early career and advanced career employees including new faculty.
- Provide professional development (PD) activities to help new and experienced Extension employees be successful in grant writing, publication, issues identification, becoming a better presenter, and other (PD) activities for the benefit of the individual, coalitions, partnerships, and the university.

Helps early career Extension employees:

- Identify successful mentoring connections.
- Gain professional support during career development and advancement.
- Develop important relationships and contacts.

For off campus employees, including faculty, educators, staff assistants, and 4-H coordinators, the initial mentoring practice is called “agent-to-agent shadowing.”

Agent-to-agent shadowing

Within the first few weeks for about the first three months of an early career employees’ start date, s/he either choose or are assigned an office or individuals to visit for a day or up to a week with the goal of observing, questioning, and assisting to determine how a county Extension office functions, observe a typical day in the life of an Extension employee, and assist in the preparation and presentation of an event. The early career Extension employee can choose to shadow more than one office or individual during their first three months. In addressing the needs of the “next generation” employee, Beane-Katner (2014), and members of the mentoring visioning committee suggest that placing much of the responsibility for making mentoring happen and choosing mentors is the responsibility of the mentee. One outcome of the shadowing experience is that the new employee has an opportunity to meet other Extension workers and be in a position to suggest names of individuals to partner with for a 1-3 year mentoring experience.

Internships and Practicums

One type of mentoring practice that supports intentional mentoring is the mentoring of potential Extension faculty e.g., college interns and those completing a practicum, paraprofessionals, and volunteers. Also, graduate students with an interest in learning about Extension careers could be directed to an on-campus or off-campus practicum experience. Recognizing that planning, organizing, and facilitating successful Extension programs can be an overwhelming challenge, those interested in learning more about Extension as a career are paired with experienced Extension personnel in an actual Extension office either on or off campus for an intern or intern type experience. New Extension employees who have been mentored previous to securing a job are more equipped to take on the challenge. Mentoring potential faculty is a form of recruitment which needs to be a priority. (Christensen, Roberts, Jewkes, MacArthur, Garcia, 2014)

Cohort Mentoring

Mentoring takes time, effort and the desire to help where and when needed. Linda Beane-Katner in her article *Anchoring a Mentoring Network in a New Faculty Development Program (2014)*, describes the formation of mentoring networks composed of people in their first three years that lasts for one year. The mentoring network shifts from mentoring to faculty development with an emphasis on opportunity; the opportunity to learn together for mutual benefit as individuals and peer groups. Mentoring networks will take advantage of meeting together when Extension gets together as a group, i.e. annual conference, workshops, region meetings, in-service training, etc. Mentoring networks would be a good time for county hires to interact with campus specialists. The network provides a variety of learning opportunities, i.e., videos, seminars, observations, social media, technology and one-on-one meetings making up a variety of methods and events from which an early career employee can choose. During network mentoring individuals could connect with others to work on development and completion of a “complete circle program”. The “complete circle program” addresses many facets of Extension programming by

identifying and addressing the identified needs of counties while working in tandem with university issues and expectations which includes scholarship. The complete circle indicates that a program has been formulated based upon identification of local issues followed by fund development if necessary, identification and engagement of strategic partners, classes taught or activities initiated capped by program evaluation which leads to a sharing of findings through professional presentations and publications. Also, a mentoring network can plan for reverse mentoring implying that senior employees can periodically be invited to join the group providing an opportunity for the new employees to question and learn from experience and senior employees can learn from the “next-generation tech natives.”

It is important that the Mentoring Coordinator facilitate and create opportunities for network mentoring through the learning opportunities mentioned above. Ideally, a mentoring coordinator would plan mentoring events in conjunction with annual conference, various in-service trainings, association conferences and meetings, or other times when Extension employees meet as a group. **The literature states that new faculty benefit greatly from supportive environments that limit academic and social isolation. New faculty rank collegiality as a high priority but are most often disappointed when unable to achieve the desired association. Perhaps the diverse nature of departments makes it difficult for new faculty to find the peer relationship they are seeking. It seems that support from colleagues leads to improved work satisfaction over time (Sorcinelli, 1992). Meeting together fact-to-face in addition to meeting through technology builds the social networks that enhance collegiality as well as limits social isolation.**

Mentoring Leadership

Leadership of the Utah Intentional Mentoring program will give direction to the mentoring and retention (building upon factors that attract employees to the position) of early career employees with the goals and initiative to follow through and touch bases with mentors and mentees, to make sure that formal and informal mentoring is happening to “keep the ball in the air”. The mentoring needs for on-campus faculty and off-campus employees are somewhat different. On-campus hires are more frequent and the start date is consistently July 1 of the documented year. Whereas, the hiring of new off-campus employees can occur any time during the year. Also, in recent years when hiring off-campus employees, the trend is to advertise for and hire non-tenure track employees at the county level. For county based tenure track employees, the intentional mentoring model would include a promotion and tenure emphasis.

Since the model for on-campus faculty and off-campus employees is somewhat different, it is recommended that an on-campus coordinator, appointed by the vice president for Extension, work with the two region directors in the establishment of a mentoring advisory board. The board would consist of the on-campus coordinator and two region directors with two on-campus representatives and three off-campus representatives. The role of the advisory board is to support and give direction to the intentional mentoring program. The on-campus and off-campus representatives to the board makes sure the needs of faculty and staff are being addressed and met and mentors are following through with their mentoring commitment. Board members could be assigned to act as contacts for specific mentoring pairs to facilitate interactions between pairs if needed and necessary. Also, the board would be a problem solving body to identify and bring to upper administration issues, problems and misconceptions needing to be addressed. Another role of the mentoring advisory board would be to sponsor and plan network mentoring activities that focus upon seminars as an extension of coordinated mentoring activities such as specific workshops or other presentations offered through technology. The term of office would be two years. In the first year, one on-campus representative and one off-campus representative would serve for three years to preserve institutional memory and add consistency to the advisory board.

Suggestions for a Successful Mentoring Experience

The probationary years for new faculty are stressful yet vitally important to future professional development and success. However, understanding the challenges and stresses of new faculty can provide a framework for shepherding early career faculty through the system. The strong influence a mentor has on a mentee has the ability to impact the system in negative and positive ways. Therefore, it is essential that all mentors possess the following qualifications:

- Understanding of and commitment to the mission of Utah State University Extension.
- Appropriate subject matter expertise, or the ability and willingness to refer the mentee to others within the system for additional support and information (Cohort Mentoring).
- Effective skills in program development, marketing, and delivery of Extension programs to diverse audiences.
- Knowledge of policies and procedures of Utah State University Extension system.
- Effective listening skills and desire to promote mentee creativity and skill development.

To be effective mentors need to understand the following suggested by Kutilek and Earnest (2001):

- Frequent reviews of work are important. Early career employees need to know what they are doing right and especially need to know what they need to do to improve.
- Faculty need support and recognition by colleagues and administration. The development of positive relationships within departments leading to social support is important especially at tenure time.
- New faculty expect recognition and support from senior faculty. However, the reality of the situation seems to be that many new faculty have more regular contact and support from outside their university than from senior faculty within departments. New faculty need a mentor to help them understand what to do and how much is enough.
- Junior faculty seek and find social support from junior colleagues but look to senior faculty for advice about seeking external funding and review of journal articles. The reality is that junior faculty reported that most of the time senior faculty could not be relied upon to provide the sought after advice in a timely manner.
- The bottom line is that Extension and universities in general need to grow an environment in which expectations and development of new faculty can flourish. This environment needs to pay attention to social support as well as the academic support for new faculty and the development of a collegial atmosphere.

Research indicates that the most successful mentoring relationships are those which are initiated as early as possible in the mentee's employment. In addition, a mutual commitment to meet regularly is important since success is related to time spent together (Mincemoyer & Thomson 1998). The mentoring coordinator in consultation with the Region Director or person in an equivalent position and the mentee will assign a mentor. The following suggestions should help a mentor begin the mentoring relationship:

- The mentoring coordinator and Region Director will jointly write a letter of introduction and commitment to the assigned mentee (attachment 1).
- The mentor will call the mentee to initiate the relationship and ask the mentee to complete the Mentee Needs Assessment and Biographical Sketch (attachments 2 & 3) and return to the mentor before the first formal meeting.
- It is the responsibility of the mentor to set up the first meeting within one month (or as soon as possible) between the mentor and mentee. A meeting can be accomplished face-to-face, IVC, teleconference or by other means.
- Mentors will be assigned from the same Extension region and with geographic proximity whenever possible, unless a mentor is identified in another geographic region of the state for the benefit of the mentee and the system.
- It is suggested that the intentional mentoring program continue for no less than one year or ideally three years or through the third year review process. A minimum of three face to face visits should occur between the mentor and mentee within the first year. It is anticipated that most of the face to face

meetings will take advantage of times when Extension meets together as a group, i.e. Annual Conference, Region Staff Meetings, in-service trainings, workshops, professional conferences and meetings, etc.

- Mentors will not be in the mentee's chain of command that is contributing to the mentee's performance appraisal, or as a member of the mentee's promotion and tenure committee.
- The USU intentional mentor program operates with a **no fault** philosophy that allows mentors and mentees to request changes or reassignments without fear of repercussions. The mentor or mentee may request a change or release from assignment by contacting the appropriate Region Director, mentoring coordinator, or other person in an equivalent position.

Responsibilities of the Mentor

Mentors should be prepared to devote time and energy to the relationship. The most important factor in mentoring is the mentor's willingness to give time and attention to the mentee. Mentors accept great responsibility in this close, trusting relationship. Pitfalls can be avoided by honest, open communication that establishes ground rules and clarifies the concerns of the new mentee.

The following are some things the mentor should DO in the mentoring relationship:

- Review the Mentee Biographical Sketch to learn more about his/her interests and background.
- Take responsibility to initiate the relationship.
- Foster creativity and independence.
- Be a good listener.
- Maintain confidentiality.
- Give constructive feedback.
- Meet at scheduled times.
- Share the organization's mission, vision, value and culture.
- Help the mentee to develop goals, access resources and build a professional network.
- Offer to share resources, expertise and experiences.
- Remember there is most often more than one way to reach a goal. Support the mentee to the best of your ability, but remember the program success or failure of the mentee is their responsibility.

Avoid these pitfalls:

- Don't give advice unless asked.
- Don't take responsibility for your mentee's program or duties.
- Don't complain about your own problems.
- Don't do your mentee's work for them.

Responsibilities of a Mentee

A mentee will find that a supportive mentoring experience will benefit a new employee in learning about their new position and Utah State University Extension. A mentor is supportive, but not a supervisor. A mentee needs to make sure that mentor advice and instruction is clear and a mentee should be encouraged to ask for assistance when needed.

Mentee responsibilities include:

- Assume personal responsibility for your professional growth.
- Listen and consider alternatives.

- Maintain confidentiality.
- Accept constructive feedback willingly.
- Be willing to take risks, be open to new ideas.
- Maintain a positive attitude.
- Demonstrate initiative.
- Respect your mentors' time.
- Notify your mentors of problems, concerns or questions.
- Remember, there is more than one way to reach a goal.

Avoid these pitfalls:

- Don't rely on your mentors as your only source of information.
- Don't expect your mentors to give you all of the answers-think of your mentors as suggesting alternatives.
- Don't ask your mentors to do your work for you.
- Don't cancel meetings at the last minute.

References

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Kutilek, L.M. & Earnest, G.W. (2001). Supporting professional growth through mentoring and coaching. *Journal of Extension* [On-line].39, (4). Available : <http://www.joe.org/joe/2001august/rb1.php>

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Sample letter

The following letter is a sample that a mentor and Region Director might send to the new employee as a way of initiating a relationship.

First Name, Last Name

Extension Office Address

Somewhere, Utah 0000

Dear _____ (Mentee)

Congratulations on your appointment with Utah State University Extension in _____ County. I am pleased I have been selected as your mentor. This is an exciting opportunity for us to form a working relationship that will provide a positive professional, educational, and personal support system for you.

Enclosed you will find a Mentee Needs Assessment and a Mentor/Mentee Biographical Sketch. Please complete and return to my office before our first meeting.

During our time together, we'll examine Utah State University Extension's philosophy, goals and values; identify resources and resource persons; and share skills, knowledge and ideas pertaining to your career in Extension. We'll also have time to discuss any concerns or questions you may have. We should plan at least three face to face visits throughout the year, keeping in regular contact by phone or email.

I would like to meet with you sometime this month. Here are some dates that I have available: _____ . Please check your calendar and let me know a date that is convenient for you. I look forward to working with you this year.

Sincerely,

Mentor

Cc: Region Director

Attachment 2

Mentor/Mentee Biographical Sketch

Purpose: To provide basic information to facilitate the development of a positive relationship. This biographical sketch can be filled out by both the mentor and mentee and shared with each other. (All personal information is voluntary)

Name: _____ Position Title/Rank _____

Address _____ EMAIL: _____

Phone: _____

1. My most valuable strengths are:

2. (Mentee Only) Topics I would like to discuss with my mentor include:

3. My hobbies/leisure interests:

4. About my family

5. Community activities:

6. The reason I am excited about a career in Extension:

Attachment 3

Mentee Needs Assessment

Complete this before the initial meeting with your mentor. Send it and the biographical information to your mentor(s) before the first meeting. This is a discussion tool only, not an assessment to be used for evaluation purposes.

Rank from 1-7
1=greatest need to discuss
7= low priority topic

Communications

- Writing newsletters _____
- Interacting with media _____
- Radio/TV presentation skills _____
- Interpersonal skills _____
- Managing conflict _____
- Computer skills/web development _____

Program Development

- Understanding the program planning process _____
- Developing position descriptions _____
- Needs assessment strategies _____
- Marketing programs _____
- Program evaluation _____
- Managing and acquiring resources for programs _____
- Working with advisory committees _____
- Available specialist support _____
- Communicating program results to clientele _____
- Area and sub-regional programming _____
- Organizing and conducting a county fair _____

Personal Effectiveness

- Working effectively and time management _____
- Flexibility and maintaining a schedule _____
- Balancing personal and professional life _____
- Developing oneself _____

Career and Recognition

- Professional associations _____
- Awards and recognition _____
- Career ladder/dossier _____
- Performance review preparation _____

Organizational Structure and Culture

- Extension organization-regional/state _____
- Informal/unwritten rules _____
- Extension language _____
- Building relationships and networking _____
- Cultural competence/diversity _____

Other Needs

What are the most important things you would like to get from this relationship?

Preferred method of learning?
(i.e. self directed, auditory, experiential, shadowing/observing)