

Attributes of Effective Mentoring Relationships for Novice Faculty Members: Perspectives of Mentors and Mentees

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Context: Although doctoral education provides ample opportunities for skill development, the new faculty member may still require further support and guidance. Mentorship is often the mechanism whereby continued encouragement is provided. Limited understanding exists of the mentoring relationships developed between a new faculty member and a seasoned one.

Objective: To understand the mentoring relationship from the perspectives of new and seasoned faculty members who have engaged in mentoring relationships.

Design: Qualitative study, phenomenology.

Setting: Selected higher education institutions with Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education–accredited programs.

Patients or Other Participants: From the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) Foundation Research Mentor program we successfully recruited 7 mentors (5 male, 2 female) and 7 mentees (2 male, 5 female). We additionally recruited 7 mentors (5 male, 2 female) and 7 mentees (2 male, 5 female) who had not completed the NATA Foundation Research Mentor program.

Main Outcomes Measure(s): We completed semistructured phone interviews following an interview script. Interviews were transcribed and saturation was obtained. Analysis was grounded by the general inductive approach. Peer review and researcher triangulation were completed for trustworthiness.

Results: Two major themes materialized: (1) positive mentoring relationships and (2) challenges. Three primary attributes emerged as necessary for positive mentoring relationships between new and experienced faculty members: (1) active engagement from both mentor and mentee (this theme was furthered divided by the subthemes of reciprocity, motivation, and availability), (2) communication, and (3) similar interests. Mentees' resistance to mentoring and mentors' time constraints emerged as challenges.

Conclusions: Mentoring relationships develop when there is shared interest, ongoing communication, and an investment made by both parties. New faculty members may be resistant to mentoring because of struggles receiving feedback, while experienced faculty may have competing time constraints that limit availability.

Key Words: Professional development, active engagement, feedback

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INTRODUCTION

Mentorship has emerged as an essential aspect of the professional development process for athletic trainers, particularly as they embark on role inductance and transition to clinical practice.¹ Mentoring is beneficial because it provides the individual being mentored the chance to feel connected, assimilated, and eventually legitimized into his or her future role.² The relationships that develop between a mentor and mentee are aimed at improved role understanding, successful role transition, and completion of goals and objectives.³⁻⁵ Socialization into a professional role is often successfully navigated through mentorship and has been well documented as an important element of role learning and role transition,⁶ yet little literature on mentorship exists within athletic training, especially within doctoral education.

As Payne and Berry⁶ suggest, in order for our profession to continue to grow and gain respect, we must help the athletic training educator succeed. Mentoring is a key aspect to this process of supporting the development of new athletic training educators and researchers. Although doctoral education can provide opportunity for skill development, other opportunities are needed postgraduation to help novice educators continue to succeed. Novice faculty, during their formative pretenure years, may find success in integrating with other faculty in their division or working closely with those more experienced than they are, as this will likely provide resources, insights, and support during a stressful period of time.⁷

Borsa⁷ suggests a key element for junior faculty is having a mentor who is able to provide advice and help with decisions related to academic responsibilities. Recent data do suggest that mentoring is occurring within doctoral-level education; however, the depth of this knowledge is insubstantial.³ Hertel et al⁸ suggest mentors play a critical role in doctoral education and determined that program directors believed mentoring doctoral students in research was one of their more important roles. For mentoring to be successful several components must be present, including shared values and personalities, a symbiotic mindset, motivation, and openness to the relationship.^{3,9,10} Despite the availability of information on key attributes for a mentoring relationship to succeed, very little information on the key attributes of the mentoring relationship exists in athletic training, especially in higher education. Because mentoring has been discussed as beneficial for doctoral students as they prepare for academia, we believe it is important to understand it from the athletic training perspective.

Our purpose was to gain a better understanding of the relationship between the faculty mentor and mentee. Specifically, we sought to answer the following questions: (1) what attributes help foster a positive mentoring relationship between the mentor and mentee, and (2) what challenges can be present when developing a mentoring relationship that

is meant to promote role awareness and support novice athletic training faculty's growth within higher education.

METHODS

Research Design

We used a phenomenological qualitative approach¹¹ to gain an understanding of mentoring relationships as they occurred between promising young athletic training investigators/new faculty members and experienced researchers/tenured faculty members. Focusing on the individual experiences of each participant, we believed the qualitative approach would allow us to identify common experiences related to effective mentoring characteristics within these relationships.

Participants

Inclusion Criteria. In seeking to identify commonalities among the various relationships and experiences, we recruited young and experienced individuals in 2 separate groups, the first group from a formal mentoring program and the second group who had experienced more informal mentoring. The first group comprised those who had participated in the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) Foundation Research Mentor cohorts between 2012 and 2014. The NATA Research and Education Foundation developed a research mentor program in 2012. The program is aimed at fostering a collaborative and supportive relationship between a promising investigator and an experienced researcher in an effort to promote role transition.¹² Mentors and mentees work together to set expectations and create goals for the relationship. Suggestions for effective interactions include advice, grant reviewing, and/or research collaboration.¹² We sought to gain perspectives from those who had been involved in formal mentorship (NATA Foundation Research mentor cohorts) and those who had not participated in that formalized mentor program in order to capture a variety of perspectives on mentoring.

Eligibility criteria for a promising faculty member/new investigator to participate in the NATA Research and Education Foundation Research Mentor program include (1) having completed a terminal degree, (2) working in a research capacity, (3) having an academic rank no higher than assistant professor, (4) having first authorship on a research publication, and (5) being a current NATA member and Board of Certification–certified athletic trainer in good standing. The NATA Foundation Research Mentor program seeks volunteers who express interest to act as mentors for the program or recruits individuals who are experts in their field of research to act as program mentors. Mentors who have been faculty members for at least 6 years, are at a rank of associate professor or above (earning tenure), and have been in a position to mentor a promising faculty member/new investigator.

The second group comprised those who met the criteria for participating in the NATA Foundation Research Mentor program but had not completed the program. We used the same eligibility criterion with the second group of mentees and mentors as we did with the first group who formally participated in the Foundation Research Mentor program.

Sample. All previous members of the NATA Foundation Research Mentor program were contacted to participate in the study. We successfully recruited 7 mentors (5 male, 2 female; average age = 42.3 ± 4.6 , average years as certified athletic trainer = 20 ± 4 , average years as athletic training educator = 14 ± 5 , average years as athletic training researcher = 17 ± 4) and 7 mentees (2 male, 5 female; average age = 34.1 ± 3.1 , average years as certified athletic trainer = 12 ± 3 , average years as athletic training educator = 7 ± 3 , average years as athletic training researcher = 8 ± 2). We additionally recruited 7 mentors (5 male, 2 female; average age = 43.9 ± 3.8 , average years as certified athletic trainer = 21 ± 4 , average years as athletic training educator = 16 ± 6 , average years as athletic training researcher = 13 ± 4) and 7 mentees (2 male, 5 female; average age = 34 ± 2.9 , average years credentialed as athletic trainer = 12 ± 3 , average years as athletic training educator = 10 ± 3 , average years as athletic training researcher = 8 ± 4) who had not completed the NATA Foundation Research Mentor program but met the same criteria for inclusion. This group of participants was recruited using the researchers' professional networks and snowball sampling.¹³ Table 1 provides our individual participant demographic data.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

Once informed consent was obtained, a phone interview was scheduled. All participants completed a one-on-one, semi-structured phone interview. Interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes. Each interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim by a professional company. We developed 4 semi-structured interview guides to help us better understand the mentoring experiences of our participants; these are condensed in Table 2. Interview questions were designed in an open-ended and unbiased fashion, and structured as such to allow for discourse between the participant and interviewer.¹⁴ Before data collection we had a peer evaluate our interview guides. Our peer reviewer is a qualitative researcher who is an expert in the field of mentoring. The review allowed us to confirm content. After the peer review, we piloted each of the 4 interview guides as a means to establish flow as well as ensure thoroughness of the guides. Feedback from the pilot testing was used to improve the flow of the questioning as well as identify additional areas that would assist in our understanding of the mentoring relationships. Pilot data were used in the final results presented below.

Data Analysis

After transcription, interview transcripts were sent to each participant for member-checking verification: participants were asked to verify the information they provided as well as clarify areas where the transcription was unclear. We analyzed our data following a general inductive process¹⁴ allowing us to independently describe the most emergent themes as related to our purpose. We reviewed transcripts initially with a holistic lens.¹⁴ The first read allowed us to gain a sense of the overall experiences of our participants. On our

second read, we began to record chunks of data that resonated as common in the transcripts. On each subsequent read, we began to group these chunks of data, labeling them to reflect their meaning. We completed this process until we believed no new data were being identified and the most dominant findings were defined and coded.¹⁴

As previously mentioned, we used a peer review as our first credibility strategy. This was done in 2 stages: (1) review of our interview framework and (2) confirmation of our analyses. Second, we used 2 researchers to complete the general inductive analysis. This allowed us to ensure that our final data presentation was void of researcher bias. Discussion during the multiple-analyst triangulation revealed confirmation of the findings, and no changes were made to the presentation of the data.

RESULTS

No group differences were found to exist between the perspectives of mentors and mentees who had completed the NATA Foundation mentor program and those who had not. Data analysis yielded 3 primary attributes necessary for positive mentoring relationships between new and experienced faculty members: (1) Active engagement from both mentor and mentee is needed; this theme is furthered divided by the subthemes of reciprocity, motivation, and availability. (2) Communication is identified as necessary for a successful relationship. (3) Similar interests enabled increased interaction between the mentor and mentee. Both experienced and novice participants were in agreement on the positive aspects. Our analysis also revealed challenges that can occur when developing mentoring relationships. Challenges in mentoring relationships were believed by mentors to be due to mentee resistance, whereas mentees described their mentors' time commitment as the primary obstacle in creating positive mentoring relationships. See the Figure for a graphic display of the findings.

Positive Attributes

Active Engagement. Mentoring relationships were viewed as more effective when the mentor and mentee demonstrated a willingness to engage in the relationship. Novice faculty believe it is important for mentees to take initiative to seek out more information and mentorship to help them become successful. Earnest, a mentee, described the mentee's role saying the mentee should "not [be] afraid to ask questions and find someone who has the ability and the resources to answer them. And also take the initiative to fend for oneself." Likewise, mentors believe the mentee must also be willing to seek them out. As Gavin, a mentor, described,

I want somebody that's going to try to figure it out themselves. I like to work with students and junior faculty members in terms of ideas and let them figure out how to do it and then provide direction or feedback in what they're doing.

Active engagement in the mentoring relationship can then be further explained by reciprocity, motivation, and availability.

Reciprocity in a Mentoring Relationship. Macy, a mentor, described the responsibility of both mentor and mentee saying, "We should be willing to kind of have some

Table 1. Participant Demographics

	Sex	Age	Carnegie Classification at Current Employment ^a	Doctoral Degree	Certified Athletic Trainer, y	Athletic Training Education, y	Athletic Training Research, y
Mentee, NATA							
Foundation program							
Faith	F	37	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs	PhD	15	3	3
Eileen	F	31	Doctoral Universities: Higher Research Activity	PhD	10	8	9
Halle	F	39	Doctoral Universities: Highest Research Activity	PhD	16	11	9
Pam	F	34	Doctoral Universities: Higher Research Activity	PhD	12	3	7
Abe	M	35	Special Focus Four-Year: Medical Schools & Centers	Other	12	10	10
Cade	M	31	Doctoral Universities: Higher Research Activity	PhD	9	4	9
Jade	F	32	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs	EdD	9	7	6
Mentee, no program							
Earnest	M	33	Baccalaureate Colleges: Arts & Sciences Focus	PhD	12	6	2
Rae	F	36	Doctoral Universities: Higher Research Activity	PhD	14	13	8
Abby	F	36	Doctoral Universities: Higher Research Activity	PhD	15	13	7
Gail	F	28	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs	EdD	6	6	5
Gabe	M	35	Doctoral Universities: Moderate Research Activity	EdD	13	10	10
Daisy	F	34	Doctoral Universities: Moderate Research Activity	PhD	12	11	11
Talia	F	36	Doctoral Universities: Highest Research Activity	PhD	14	8	12
Mentor, NATA							
Foundation program							
Hana	F	41	Doctoral Universities: Higher Research Activity	PhD	19	15	15
Tait	M	36	Doctoral Universities: Higher Research Activity	PhD	14	10	11
Calista	F	37	Doctoral Universities: Higher Research Activity	PhD	16	13	15
Salazar	M	45	Baccalaureate Colleges: Arts & Sciences Focus	PhD	20	7	19
Austin	M	44	Doctoral Universities: Highest Research Activity	PhD	22	18	18
Gavin	M	44	Doctoral Universities: Higher Research Activity	PhD	20	15	15
John	M	49	Doctoral Universities: Higher Research Activity	EdD	28	22	24
Mentor, no program							
Macy	F	41	Baccalaureate Colleges: Diverse Fields	EdD	19	17	13
Kevin	M	40	Baccalaureate Colleges: Diverse Fields	PhD	17	15	8
Tabby	F	51	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs	EdD	29	26	10
Tyler	M	46	Doctoral Universities: Highest Research Activity	PhD	24	15	18
Ryan	M	45	Doctoral Universities: Higher Research Activity	PhD	23	17	17
Luke	M	42	Doctoral Universities: Higher Research Activity	PhD	20	15	16
Mason	M	42	Doctoral Universities: Highest Research Activity	PhD	18	7	7

Abbreviation: NATA, National Athletic Trainers' Association.

^a Available through <http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu/index.php>.

Table 2. Interview Questions

Questions	
1.	Do you have any mentors at your current institution? Describe that person.
2.	What attributes do you look for in a possible mentor/mentee?
3.	What attributes do you think are necessary to have a successful mentoring relationship?
4.	Please describe the relationship between you and your mentee/mentor.
5.	Do you face any challenges when navigating your relationships with mentors/mentees?

give and take in that relationship.” The 2-way street of mentorship was explained by Salazar, a mentor:

I think both people have to be willing to kind of commit to the relationship for it to be successful and I think that’s probably true in any mentor-mentee relationship and if you don’t dedicate the time and both people aren’t dedicated to it, and not just setting up the meetings but actually building a relationship.

Gail, a mentee, had a similar reflection for the importance of mentor and mentee to engagement: “I think you need to have willingness of both parties. Both parties need to be willing to make it work and both parties need to be very invested in it.” Similarly, Calista, a mentor, discussed mentee initiative: “For me I want someone that will come to me when they have questions. I don’t want to be the person that always kind of has to find them...both people should be wanting to put the effort in.” Salazar, a mentor, also valued effort in a mentee; when talking about mentoring relationships he said a mentee must be

someone who’s going to put the effort into actually make the relationship work because any relationship is based on mutual ability to fulfill the requirements of that relationship. I think trying to commit to that relationship and then trying to foster that relationship are critical attributes.

Reciprocity was viewed as helpful for cultivating and facilitating an effective mentoring relationship; that is, both

parties needed to demonstrate interest and willingness to engage in the relationship.

Motivation and Initiative in a Mentoring Relationship.

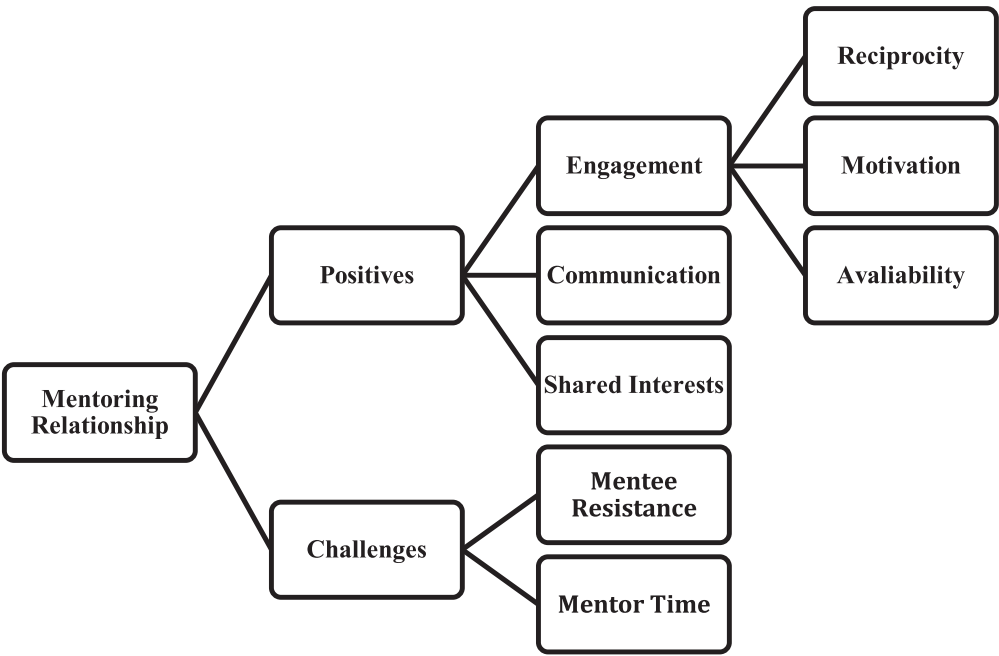
Mentors believed that effective mentee attributes showing engagement included motivation and being open to the process of being mentored; as Gavin, a mentor, stated about mentees, “I’m looking for somebody that’s motivated, a self-starter, who thinks on their own and that they’re just willing to kind of put it out there.” Macy, a mentor, discussed similar mentee attributes, saying, “I think that they have to show a high level of internal motivation. It’s not just motivation but they have to have a high level of inquisitiveness as well.” Both motivation to work on the relationship and the curiosity to seek out the mentor are important characteristics. Mentees also identified their role in seeking out the mentor as crucial; Cade suggested to fellow mentees,

Stay on top of it and keeping your mentor engaged, I really feel like that’s probably falls more on the mentee than the mentor. But just keeping the engagement going I think is challenging, but it’s what we’ve said probably more productive relationship.

Jade, a mentee, also identified the role of the mentee as critical in maintaining involvement with the mentor.

I would say that probably more on the cases of mentee that they need to be willing to take initiative or make sure that

Figure. Mentoring relationships in athletic training faculty in higher education.



they can reach out, they are comfortable reaching out and not being afraid to ask questions and things like that.

Availability for Mentoring. Many participants discussed ways it was important to demonstrate availability for mentoring, such as Mason, a mentor:

I would want to try to portray an openness to being available and being willing to help and wanting to help, whether that is purposeful through statements or whether that's through attitude and how you respond to requests for help.

Calista shared that she consistently reminded her mentee that she was available:

I think the biggest thing was just trying to interact. And always make sure that she (mentee) understood that I wasn't too busy so I guess if she needed a question she was more than welcome to either send me an e-mail or we can chat via phone. So I would want to make sure she understood that on my end, the door was open.

Salazar, a mentor, stated the importance of being accessible to the mentee from the start of the relationship:

I think the most important thing is just to make yourself available right at the outset again figure out what the personal needs of the mentee are and then try and make yourself as available as possible to accomplish those things.

The active engagement behavior coming from a mentor, as Salazar discusses, shows the mentee that the mentor is willing to work with and support the mentee and sets the stage for an effective relationship.

Faith, a mentee, indicated she appreciated her mentor's availability, saying, "She was really easy to work with, you know, and available. Sometimes it was an e-mail but we definitely had phone calls and all kinds of things." Similarly, Abby, a mentee, stated that she appreciated her mentor's willingness to engage her in dialogue:

I think for the mentor to sort of seek out the mentee a little bit; not always wait for when the individuals who need help ask for it. A mentor should kind of check in and seek them out a little bit, that is going to be helpful especially in the first early stages.

Many mentees relied upon their mentor to help build the relationship, as Jade described her specific situation:

I really entered the situation very open-minded and I tend to approach situations like that kind of standing back, being a little bit quieter. I could see that if my mentor wasn't such a warm, inviting, approachable person that it could have been a little bit challenging because I wouldn't quite know what to do. But he really reached out and was a welcoming person and made me feel comfortable instantly.

Mentees appreciate the openness and willingness of their mentors to engage them in dialogue and seek them out, particularly at the beginning of the experience.

Communication. Participants viewed effective mentoring relationships as those that included regular communication that was honest and open. Cade shared the importance of this from the mentee's perspective: "I think you have to be able to communicate with the person, I think if you can't have an

open dialogue with someone, like your senior mentor, then that will be a challenging situation."

Calista, a mentor, said she likes a mentee to be

someone that could really be open and honest and be really willing to say what kind of communication they need or what they want or what they don't need or what they don't want. I have no problem with someone saying "I don't need..." I appreciate that kind of open conversation or open honesty.

Both mentors and mentees strive to achieve open communication and rely upon each other to indicate their needs and preferences. Austin, a mentor, described his first meeting with his mentee: "We just kind of talked about what would be a good communication strategy and talked about what types of goals that the mentee wanted to take away from the relationship," and later he continued, "I think that we were able to establish pretty open communication right away." Mentees too appreciated early discussion of communication strategies, as Halle said:

I think having an open and honest conversation between the mentee and mentor about what the expectations are, how we are going to communicate, and how often we are going to communicate.

Developing a communication strategy that is comfortable for both mentor and mentee is paramount, Jade, a mentee, shared:

In general I think you need to have communication and like-minded communication because people communicate in different ways. I also think that we need to be able to trust them, especially when you are talking about tenure and promotion process, it can be risky and vulnerable in a lot of ways. So you need to be able to trust, to open up to someone without it coming back to you later.

Jade indicates above that communication can lead to trust, which is a valuable attribute in mentoring relationships. Developing trust and open communication can facilitate continued interaction within the relationship, Tabby, a mentor, said:

I think there has to be a mutual respect between one and another, and trust. It has to be an open dialogue to be able to feel comfortable getting constructive feedback to be comfortable to hear when you've gone astray and why and how to change that. You have to be open to that, so therefore you have to trust that mentor.

She continued with advice for mentors, saying, "As a mentor, you really need to feel comfortable identifying things that are going well as well, as things that aren't, and bring up in conversations." Eileen, a mentee, also discussed the importance of trusting her mentor as "someone who is going to be honest and let me know you are doing well, no you are not doing well and is not afraid to kind of give you the truth."

Communication can lead to trust, which is important when providing feedback and giving advice.

Shared Interests. Mentoring relationships were viewed as being effective when mentees and mentors had common interests and expectations for the relationship. Commonalities can include similar research agendas, similar personalities, and similar types of university settings. Identifying common-

alities, particularly in research interests, can benefit the mentoring relationship, as Rae, a mentee, shared:

I mean initially kind of what they [the mentor] have done [professionally]. Is where they are somewhere in the vicinity of where you would like to be. So that's one of the things that matters to me initially. If that doesn't match up, then it doesn't matter how you are getting mentored because that goal may not be in the same ballpark. That's one of the first things I look for [in a mentor].

Rae believed that having common goals was part of the formula for a successful mentoring relationship. This viewpoint was echoed by John, a mentor,

The other thing that has been my experience is if the research of both (mentor and mentee) closely aligns with a research agenda, you end up being better prepared in order to address the common challenges associated with the topic, with the method associated with this topic and so your chances of success are elevated.

In describing a formally assigned mentor relationship, Cade said,

The mentor I got is a person that closely related to my research area and a lot of our publications are extremely similar and our topic areas are extremely similar. So it was easy to talk in conversation about our research interest.

Jack, a mentor, felt comparably to Cade, saying that having research interests in common led to a successful relationship:

It all was based around that initial research and I think having that as the basis of the relationship gave us a level of focus on which to have a common ground and allowed us to develop some stuff and understanding of one another, what the strengths were, what the weaknesses were. We learned how to kind of structure that relationship.

The commonalities created a sense of comfort and provided an easy inroad to begin working together.

In addition to research interests aligning, many participants also identified that similar personalities can be helpful in sustaining an effective mentoring relationship. This was described by 2 mentees. Abby said she felt the following was helpful: "I think similar interests, similar philosophies and ideas in terms of what your attributes are, what you are teaching." Eileen mentioned, "I was looking for somebody that you could kind of relate to, you had similar interests." Mentors also realized the value of having similar personality types. Ryan stated that when building a mentoring relationship, "I think that it would have to be the right personality match." Similarly, Mason said,

I think some correlation of personality type is obviously helpful. Some people, you just don't mesh well with and other people you can get along with quite well. So, having some similarity of personality type, maybe how you approach problems in general and things like that I think is valuable to the process.

Tait recognized the importance of personalities' alignment by discussing a problematic situation:

A big thing with mentorship, at any level, is that (for example) a doctoral student may take a wonderful mentor but sometimes just this personality conflict that comes in play

that no matter how good a scholar they are or how much you want to work with them, it [personality] really limits that relationship.

Mason, a mentor, also identified the importance of personality matching, saying,

I have worked with people who probably the personalities aren't as matched as with other people and so they don't understand your approach to a problem or you don't understand their approach to the problem. That becomes a challenge.

Having some type of similarity seems to enhance the bond between mentor and mentee. Research and personality were not the only areas where similarities could be found for our participants. Institution type also was viewed as important, as discussed by Abe, a mentee:

One of the things I was looking for in terms of mentors is someone who is very structured and organized and [mentor] from [mentor's institution] kind of having that [similar] background, I think we both connected on that attribute.

The importance of institutional type was also rooted in comparable values and expectations, as related service initiatives can assist in relationship building, as described by Hana, a mentor:

Just in terms of values, you can be matched with a person at a different type of institution if you have something in common. Maybe their thing is service and you have a certain type of service that you do and so you can bond over the service aspect of it, be on the same page with that.

The shared interests were research based as well as personality driven, but interestingly, institution type also could help facilitate a successful relationship.

Challenges

Mentee Resistance. Mentors identified that difficulties arise in the relationship when the mentee is not open to receiving mentorship. Ryan described the challenges mentors face when the mentee is not receptive: "I can think [of] some cases with the challenges being receptivity to feedback. Some people think about it as criticism and some people think of it as constructive feedback of the process."

Situations of a mentee not being receptive to a mentor's effort were challenging to mentors. Recounting a challenging situation with a formally assigned mentee, Hana said,

I was assigned a new faculty member [mentee] but the new faculty member really didn't want anyone's advice to be honest with you. I would try to interact with that person and ask if they need any help. When the it came time for abstracts I would say is there anything I can read through, anything that can look at for you? I was just pretty much consistently told no I'm fine, I'm fine.

Luke discussed working with mentees who may need or want mentorship but don't want to be perceived negatively for reaching out to a mentor:

Some may feel like they want to do it on their own and they feel like it is a sign of weakness that they are accepting help from others. I have seen that, so sometimes it is a little hard to

get in, crack the nut, you know, "I can do it on my own, I can do it on my own, I don't need such and such resource."

Ryan suggested such an attitude is due to the competitiveness and environment of higher education:

I think a lot of faculty do better with the more informal [mentoring] because a lot of people in higher education are rather independent people. We don't want to be told what to do. We want to do our own thing.

Ultimately, though, as Tait stated, there are limitations in the abilities of mentors to help all mentees.

So I am here to provide you advice and to try to give you any context that you might need but ultimately it is their decision and you know I am not going to hold it against them if they go against my advice.

Time Constraints. Mentees described the largest barrier to effective mentoring was the time allocated to the relationship by the mentor. As Halle said,

I think you need to have the time to really be present in a mentoring role. I think sometimes what happens is the people that they make mentors are sometimes already completely overwhelmed and so they might have some great qualities that they could help you with, but if they don't have the time to do that, then that could be really unfortunate.

Likewise, Cade, a mentee, said,

I think the person has to be interested in mentoring. If they're not really interested in mentoring you then I think—you're probably not going to get the feedback from that person you're looking for.

Jade also believed in the importance of a mentor's time: "I think that people need to have the willingness and time to participate." Mentors, too, realized their role in setting aside time for the mentee. Salazar stated,

So I think the ability to set the time aside to make sure that the time is allocated in that maybe you developed goals and objectives, and moving forward from time to time reassess where you're at and if you need to make adjustments. But I think the ability on both sides to make the commitment to the time and to be available is critical.

He continued giving advice to potential mentors, saying,

I think sometimes it's hard because people are busy, I think people want to do it but I would discourage people if they think they're too busy to actually commit the time that the mentee might want or need.

Likewise, John shared that sometimes his schedule did not allow enough time for the mentee.

I was so busy at that time that this became a real difficulty for me you know and so I did the best I could and I am not sure if that person got the most out of it that they could have out of the relationship but you also can't be all things to all people.

Salazar mentioned that sometimes the time restrictions of both parties can hinder the relationship:

I think the reason mentoring relationships fail is because people on either side either don't follow through or they don't schedule time to dedicate to the mentoring and on paper it looks like you have a mentor but nothing is really occurring beyond that.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of our study was to gain a better understanding of the components of a mentoring relationship from the perspectives of both mentor and mentee. Most studies examining mentoring do so from one perspective only; our study was able to triangulate the findings from mentors and mentees. Our results demonstrate that mentorship relationships are facilitated by active engagement, communication, and shared interests; these findings are analogous to those of previous research looking at mentoring within higher education and doctoral education.^{3,15,16} Challenges can also occur, including mentees' resistance and the time constraints of the mentor; similar results have been found in athletic training and academic medicine.^{15,17–19}

Positive Attributes

The 3 attributes necessary for positive mentoring relationships between new and experienced faculty members were active engagement, communication, and sharing similar interests. In a systematic review of mentoring in academic medicine, Sambunjak et al²⁰ found desired characteristics in mentoring relationships included mentees who take initiative and mentors who are honest and understanding of the mentee's needs. This mirrors the findings presented here. Mentees desire a mentor who is supportive, communicative, and trustworthy while providing guidance and skill development.²¹

Others have found an educational dimension is necessary within mentoring, which allows the mentor to engage the mentee in development of knowledge and skills by providing feedback and encouraging professional discourse.²² Brainstorming, feedback, and serving as a role model have been found as important aspects of mentoring relationships.²¹ Additionally, Sambunjak et al²⁰ found that mentoring relationships can be enhanced if expectations and communication are clear from the start and if the mentor and mentee are able to identify similarities in each other.

In a recent survey of preceptors, Nottingham et al²³ found several characteristics of effective mentoring relationships. These included the demonstration of commitment by both mentor and mentee along with effective interpersonal communication during their mentoring relationships. These results mirror the data presented here regarding the importance of openness and willingness to actively participate in the mentoring relationship and the critical nature of communication in facilitating an effective connection between mentor and mentee. Mentoring relationships are founded on professional attributes rather than demographic characteristics.²¹ For preceptors and athletic training students the educational, motivational, and relational attributes of a mentoring relationship were found to be of most of value.²¹ This indicates both preceptors and athletic training students value the professional and interpersonal attributes possessed by their mentors. Nottingham et al²³ determined that preceptors

believed one of the most important qualifications for serving in the role of preceptor is willingness, or commitment to mentoring students, a similar finding to what we found in the mentors and mentees in our study.

In a comparison of male and female doctoral students, it was determined that they value similar qualities in a mentor.¹⁶ Research suggests mentoring relationships impact doctoral student retention, future career opportunities, and successful completion of the student's dissertation.¹⁶ The results discovered here show that similar research interest can stimulate mentoring relationships, which in turn can stimulate scholarly productivity. It is possible that mentors of new faculty, when placed with mentees who share their research agenda, could facilitate similar outcomes in higher education if mentoring relationships are pursued.

It has previously been found that seeking guidance from mentors strongly benefits women athletic trainers in their pursuit of leadership positions.²⁴ In the prior study women felt mentors were needed to bolster their professional advancement and discussed the importance of having mentors in their higher education process who assisted them in the development of career goals and in overcoming barriers. The female athletic trainers in that study indicated they had maintained their mentor-mentee relationships through their education and into the beginning of their careers as their mentors continued to assist their professional development.^{23,24} As mentoring relationships evolve in athletic trainers, it is likely the same occurs for athletic training faculty: the development of such relationships for novice faculty members will increase their professional development.

Many of our findings echo those of Barnes and Austin¹⁷ in their study of doctoral student advising; they identified the role of the advisor as providing assistance, collaboration, and mentoring while being supportive and accessible. The characteristics of support and access as well as collaboration on items of similar interest were also identified in our population of mentees and mentors. Further, the authors contend a part of the responsibility for effective advisor-advisee relationships falls on the advisee to seek guidance and establish their expectations.¹⁷ In our population this was identified as mutual engagement, whereby both mentors and mentees indicated openness and willingness to be involved and committed to the mentoring relationship, resulting in a stronger connection. Thus, it seems there are many similarities between the role of doctoral advisor and that of mentor to new faculty members.

Challenges

Participants described facing challenges in mentoring relationships when a mentee demonstrated resistance to accepting mentoring and when the mentor lacked a commitment of time and energy. Indeed, time constraints have been an area where athletic trainers have particularly found challenges. Graduate assistant athletic trainers identified that time constraints and workload have prevented them from receiving support from their supervisors, which limited mentoring opportunities.¹ Time management was found to be a barrier in transitioning to practice for newly credentialed athletic trainers and emerged as a barrier to forming mentoring relationships in that population as well.¹⁹ Time was also reported as a barrier

for the implementation of evidence-based practice in athletic training.²⁵ All of this serves to show that an athletic trainer's time is limited, and with multiple constraints and responsibilities it is apparent that mentors can feel overloaded and mentoring relationships can be affected negatively, as was the case with our population.

Barriers to effective mentoring in academic medicine^{20,26} are identical to those found here, whereby the mentee must be receptive and open to making changes according to the mentor's feedback and the mentor must devote time and energy to the relationship. Similarly, athletic training students identified prerequisites for effective mentoring relationships including mentor accessibility and initiative of both mentor and mentee.²² This was the case with our population as mentees' resistance or lack of initiative and mentors' time commitment were the 2 biggest challenges identified.

Kashiwagi et al²⁶ suggested that when mentors' and mentees' values were aligned they protected time for the mentoring relationship, allowing it to flourish. Our population identified shared interests as an attribute of effective mentoring, but that did not seem to mediate the time constraints felt by mentors. Mentor accountability²⁷ and time constraints²⁸ have been identified in nursing as barriers to successful mentoring. Nurse mentors identified the importance of managing their time and reported that setting effective timelines for goal achievement allowed successful navigation of expectations.²⁷ Similar to setting timelines, having written agreements in place resulted in greater accountability among mentors and mentees and increased their commitment to the relationship as well as understanding their roles and requirements.²⁶ Another suggestion for increasing mentor commitment and involvement, specifically in formal mentorship groups, was by providing funding through stipends or compensation through continuing education credits.²⁶ Interestingly, the NATA Foundation mentors, who made up half of our mentor population for this study, did not mention a desire for compensation, though they receive none as a part of the program. A lack of funding for mentor training programs has been identified as a barrier to effective mentoring creation in nursing as well.²⁸

LIMITATIONS

We sampled a small cohort of faculty members who met our inclusion criteria. This was purposeful to focus on a known formal mentoring cohort in athletic training, but does limit our transferability. We believe our findings shed some important information on mentoring relationships in athletic training, but recognize the need for more research in the areas of institutional type, type of mentoring relationship (formal versus informal), and ways to overcome barriers to mentoring. We also were examining mentoring from a holistic lens, and we did not make any attempt to examine formal mentorship between institution type or faculty roles (tenure versus nontenure).

Our mentors were not asked to directly describe the time commitment they felt their mentees required. The level of a mentor's commitment was identified by mentees as a primary challenge in effective mentoring relationships; therefore, understanding more about a mentor's perception of commitment might have further illuminated the findings. Mentees were not asked about their level of desire for a mentor or for

their motivations in seeking a mentor. The NATA Foundation mentor program focuses on supporting new researchers rather than the global aspects of mentoring in multiple roles. The development of mentoring relationships may vary based on the primary responsibilities of the mentee and in their role in higher education.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The formal pairing of participants in the NATA Foundation cohorts is based upon research interest; future studies could expand to other mentoring groups or directly determine other types of relationship building, both formal and informal. Mentoring relationships grow and change over time; longitudinal studies incorporating mentors and mentees may elicit greater detail on the metamorphosis of the mentoring relationship. The development of a mixed-methods study with the inclusion of a quantitative survey, such as the Athletic Training Students Perceptions of Mentoring Effectiveness,²⁹ in concert with the qualitative interviews would provide participants with an opportunity to rate specific roles and characteristics common in mentoring and might be able to expand upon the results presented here. Future studies could include the incorporation of other allied health divisions to triangulate the experiences of athletic training faculty members. Schlosser et al¹⁸ propose that advisor-advisee relationships may be impacted by racial and cultural differences. This has not been explored within the athletic training literature, but with the growing need for doctorally trained faculty members, this is an avenue that could impact our field and would expand the depth of our knowledge in mentoring relationships.

CONCLUSION

The results of our study shed light on the importance of active engagement through reciprocity, motivation, and availability of both mentor and mentee to commit to the mentoring process. Additionally, elements of communication and identifying areas of commonality will enhance the mentor-mentee relationship. This information supports the use of mentorship for promising faculty members, as it can positively affect faculty success and possibly student learning outcomes and patient care.

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