ABSTRACT: Using Survey Data to Design Mentoring Programs in a Large Academic Health Center

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Mentoring is a proven approach to enhance faculty development, rejuvenation, and career success. How can a small central Office of Faculty Affairs (OFA) direct mentoring resources strategically across a large and diverse academic health center, such as the University of Massachusetts Medical School, which employs approximately 1800 faculty?

Our strategy is twofold. First, to leverage our identified mentoring resources by forming partnerships with departments and other academic units, while targeting specific groups directly through our own OFA programs. Second, to use current data on our mentoring environment to drive the allocation of these resources. A third element is the concept that mentoring within an academic health center touches multiple groups: not just faculty but also students and trainees in a continuum of mentoring across the stages of academic development.

We incorporated these principles in a multi-step implementation plan. First, we established a Mentoring Advisory Board, a diverse group of senior leaders, each with major responsibilities for directing mentoring for particular populations of mentees: students (medical, graduate, nursing), trainees (residents, fellows, postdocs) and faculty. The Board is chaired by the Joy McCann Professor for Women in Medicine (JA). Second, this board advised on the design of a survey that assessed both the state of mentoring, as well as the needs for mentoring within the institution. A total of 778 faculty responded to the survey (43% response rate) provided robust and detailed data. Third, we used the results of this survey to identify mentoring needs and to target mentoring programs appropriately.

A general finding of the survey was that there were more faculty responding "yes" or "maybe" to a question asking if they needed mentoring, than those stating that they were receiving guidance. This difference, which we call the "mentoring gap", is increased in women and minority faculty, suggesting opportunities for targeted programs. Based on data from the survey, we are currently implementing facilitated peer mentoring programs for women faculty at different career stages, including women on the tenure track, women ready for promotion to Associate Professor and newly promoted Associate Professors. Similarly, the responses of minority faculty showed a need for specific programs that would increase networking and decrease isolation.

But these targeted programs only address the mentoring needs of a few faculty. How do we reach the vast majority? Our strategy is to enhance mentoring within departments, on the principle that "mentoring begins at home". The survey responses are widely different for faculty in each of the 24 academic departments, suggesting that some departments have robust mentoring programs, whereas others represent opportunities for future development. Using the results of the survey, plus the demographic profiles of each department, we have selected a small group of departments to pilot the creation of mentoring programs to meet the needs and culture of each department.

We believe that our strategy illustrates principles that are broadly applicable: to consider mentoring as an institution-wide opportunity; to leverage the resources of a central office by partnering with units across the institution; and to direct programs appropriately by using detailed information about the status and needs for mentoring.

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