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To cite this article:

Edwards, B., & Nichols, Q. (2025). The mentorship from senior faculty to junior faculty at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. *International Journal on Social and Education Sciences (IJonSES)*, 7(4), 321-330. <https://doi.org/10.46328/ijonSES.5407>

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Article Info

Article History

Received:

10 February 2025

Accepted:

7 July 2025

Keywords

Mentorship

Junior faculty

Senior faculty

Historically Black Colleges
and Universities

Abstract

An important feature of higher education is the mentorship of junior faculty by senior faculty. Addressing the vital role mentorship plays in an academic institution's survival promotes more opportunities and positive learning experiences. Research shows that mentorship programs for faculty have numerous benefits. Dr. Dessell and others found in their literature review that formal mentoring programs have been associated with faculty member job satisfaction, commitment, reductions in turnover, and productivity. Conversely, faculty mentorship at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) provides emerging research on the importance of recruiting, retaining, and promoting faculty within HBCUs. However, there are benefits of mentorship including professional development, peer mentoring, and psychosocial support. For instance, through their mentors, junior faculty can better become acquainted with the unique needs and strengths of the student body and be introduced to faculty and student resources and protocols. Therefore, this article will present some of the benefits of mentorship as well as the specific issues and aspects of mentorship in HBCUs.

Introduction

According to Conway (2018), mentoring is defined as quality interactions that provide faculty with opportunities for further professional development and networking. In this same context, the mentor can be a person who gives advice, sponsorship, guidance, and assists in the process of tenure and promotion (Sligh DeWalt, 1999; 2000 as cited in Conway, 2018, p. 265). Mentoring faculty is an important aspect at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) (Reddick, 2011; Reddick, 2006). Most of the research on mentoring notes the significance that it plays in the life of any faculty member (Alford & Griffin, 2017; Mullen, 2012; Sligh DeWalt, 1999, 2000 as cited in Conway, 2018, p. 265). Mentoring has a positive impact on the following areas:

- 1) obtaining tenure and promotion;
- 2) research;
- 3) acquisition of pedagogical techniques in the classroom;
- 4) online teaching experience;
- 5) building faculty networks/partnerships;
- 6) creating global connections;

- 7) retention of faculty at HBCUs;
- 8) obtaining grants and funding for projects;
- 9) providing university board members, stakeholders, and citizens with information that uplifts the university and community by way of the interactions with faculty members through research, teaching, service, and grantsmanship; and 10) developing and maintaining partnerships or collaborations (p. 265).

Literature Review

HBCUs hold a distinctive and historically significant position within the landscape of American higher education. Established to provide educational opportunities for African Americans during a time of systemic racial discrimination, these institutions have cultivated unique academic and cultural environments that prioritize the holistic development of their students and faculty (Reddick, 2011; Reddick, 2006). Similarly, HBCUs are broadly defined as accredited institutions established before 1964, whose principal mission is to educate Black Americans (Higher Education Act, 1965 as cited in Diggs et al., 2023). Situated in predominantly Black communities, HBCUs serve Black students who are academically underprepared for college (Albritton, 2012 as cited in Diggs et al., 2023), come from high-poverty, high-stress areas (Gasman, 2009 as cited in Diggs et al., 2023), are first-generation students, and are students who require financial, academic, and personal support (Brooms, 2017; Strayhorn, 2008 as cited in Diggs et al., 2023).

HBCUs have long served as vital institutions for the education and advancement of Black communities. A cornerstone of the success of HBCUs lies in the unique and often familial culture that fosters strong relationships between faculty and students. Within this context, mentorship plays a critical role, particularly for junior faculty, impacting their professional development, scholarly productivity, and ultimately, their retention, tenure and promotion (RTP) (Reddick, 2011; Reddick, 2006).

HBCU faculty members are expected to produce quality professional experiences comparable to other majority White institutions, but HBCU faculty may lack fundamental training and resource support. The inherent financial plight of HBCUs, lower allocations of government funding and alumni support, force faculty to creatively secure funding to obtain necessary professional development opportunities needed to combat faculty and student attrition. This is especially the case during times of crisis where funding and infrastructural support are scant at best. Moreover, HBCUs still serve as a beacon of opportunities to a diverse faculty body. According to Sligh DeWalt (2000 as cited in Conway, 2018), the number of mentors and the role of the mentor has a great influence on the professional development of faculty. Mentoring can provide interactions with seasoned faculty in discipline specific areas which allows the faculty member to obtain the necessary publications (e.g., top tier publications in discipline areas) and noteworthy experiences that can lead to many other promotions academically (p. 265).

Likewise, mentorship in higher education has grown as a mechanism to 1) retain and graduate students and 2) retain and develop highly effective faculty. The nurturing environment of HBCUs suggests a natural affinity to excel in mentoring both students and faculty. However, methodizing the standards for mentoring requires more academic inquiry into how HBCU faculty are mentored and trained to provide the expected life-changing

experiences for students. To this end, mentoring expectations are not customary areas of emphasis in accreditation in higher education (Diggs et al., 2023, pp. 462-463).

Mentoring involves guidance in areas such as accountability, strategies for navigating the university culture, work/life balance, research endeavors, and preparation for RTP. Mentorship definitions and expectations are often related to either a positive previous mentoring experience or the lack thereof (Eberman et al., 2011, Price & Cotten, 2006). Mentors may include more senior faculty members, both internal/external to the university, who guide teaching philosophies, manage the expectations for teaching, research, and service, and the identification of professional development opportunities. Mentorship is multifaceted and, based on what the faculty member needs, will determine who is an appropriate mentor (Booker, 2023; Mazerolle et al., 2018). For example, in connection with developing a research agenda, seeking coauthor opportunities, managing students/classrooms, and navigating the culture of both the department and university. Self-care is important for both parties in the mentoring relationship, particularly in identifying strategies for work/life balance. Mentorship is important for establishing effective time management methods, sustaining productivity, and prioritizing responsibilities to align with RTP expectations (Woo et al., 2019; Golden et al., 2017).

HBCUs have consistent budget constraints that limit professional development opportunities and their ability to facilitate a robust research agenda. It is well documented that HBCUs are underfunded and under-resourced. However, what became apparent in the authors' autoethnographic reflections was a shared understanding that the lack of investment to ensure the success of faculty impacts the faculty's ability to develop students holistically. Moreover, the lack of investment in faculty was perceived as representing a decreased valuing of faculty (Diggs et al., 2023, pp. 472-473).

Also, there is a prevailing perception that HBCUs lack formalized systems, protocols, or expectations for mentoring faculty and often function in processes that are ad hoc, external, or designed by the individual faculty member. Moreover, resources are scarce for faculty professional development and training, as well as current technology to enhance course delivery and the learning environment (Conway, 2018; Carey & Weissman, 2010). There is, however, both an expected and an implied expectation that faculty mentor students. This mentoring is largely accomplished during academic advisement but often extends to the student's personal and professional endeavors. Overall, there was a shared experience with a lack of available resources for mentoring, though it was noted that more (albeit limited) resources are sometimes provided to facilitate faculty mentoring of students, such as advising or absence reports. Mentoring is critical to the success of faculty, particularly in their personal and professional development (Chadiha et al., 2014; Borus, 2016).

Faculty need consistent engagement, accountability, and resources from either a Center of Teaching and Learning and/or a Faculty Resource Center. However, not all institutions have the same level of institutional support (Borus, 2016; Barr et al., 2024). Across the board, the authors noted that in their previous experiences, non-HBCU schools provided more resources for faculty development which was beneficial to their personal and professional development. In contrast, the lack of HBCU institutional resources stunted progress and development as faculty (Diggs et al., 2023, p. 473).

Successful Faculty Mentoring

Research suggests that faculty handbooks at accredited HBCUs rarely mention a requirement to mentor junior faculty as they navigate through faculty ranks, which can create retention challenges. However, Watson (2007 as cited in Diggs et al., 2023, p. 465) discussed three stages of mentorship that help faculty meet academic requirements and develop support networks. At each stage, Watson (2007 as cited in Diggs et al., 2023, p. 465) demonstrates the relational dynamics between the mentor and mentee—hierarchical years, junior/senior colleagues, and the trusted sage years. The hierarchical years define the student-to-faculty mentoring relationship, where the hierarchical structure strongly resembles that of an academic coach who supports students. At this stage, faculty must exhibit genuineness, be knowledgeable about the program, create a climate of trust and connectedness, and model personal and professional ethics (Fedynich, 2011 as cited in Diggs et al., 2023, p. 465).

The next stage is a more informal development of mentorship but could be a formal structure via academic policies. The junior/senior faculty relationship evolves around professional commonalities and similar personalities where the senior faculty (mentor) provides support. Mentors introduce junior faculty (mentees) to their social networks and increase the mentees' visibility in academia. Mentors may also help guide mentees' career progression toward retention, tenure, and promotion (RTP) (Fleming et al., 2015; Wolfe Poel & Arroyos-Jurado, 2018 as cited in Diggs et al., 2023, p. 465). The final stage, trusted sage years, occurs when hierarchical boundaries are eliminated, the mentor becomes a lifelong, trusted friend, while the mentee assumes the mentor role for students and/or junior faculty. Watson (2007 as cited in Diggs et al., 2023, p. 465) described mentoring as a cyclical process operating within institutional and interpersonal structures that can transform into trusted partnering relationships.

Benefits of Mentoring

Additionally, HCBUs can be proactive by providing certain opportunities such as:

- 1) providing formal mentoring;
- 2) mentoring faculty who are junior and seasoned faculty;
- 3) actively providing funding that enhances faculty members' chances to attend conferences, seminars, and workshops,
- 4) providing recognition ceremonies at the beginning and end of the year of the academic terms noting faculty members' accomplishments;
- 5) creating a bi-annual newsletter combining the faculty members' accomplishments; and
- 6) channeling funds that can promote the goals and objectives of a mentoring program.

When these steps are taken to broaden the lives of faculty, faculty can develop a newfound perspective by knowing that they are given the same experiences as other faculty, which can be very important to not experience situations in which there are "the haves and the have nots." Mullen (2012 as cited in Conway, 2018, p. 265) noted that mentoring must be structured at times to ensure faculty receive the necessary resources to be successful. Furthermore, Alford and Griffin (2017 as cited in Conway, 2018, p. 265) noted valuable questions that must be answered, for example, "Does my institution value mentoring?"

Furthermore, mentors give insight into the unwritten and vague norms in academia and help mentees navigate into higher social networks (Portillo, 2007 as cited in Diggs et al., 2023, p. 464). Mostly, mentors take a particular interest in their mentee's professional and personal development and assist in socialization into academia's discipline, culture, and career (Benavides, 2018; Watson, 2007 as cited in Diggs et al., 2023, p. 464). Mentoring is an engaging relationship-building process developed through multiple encounters, trust, and reliability. Mentorship in academia takes on two forms: mentoring for student success and mentoring for faculty success, specifically referring to junior-faculty success.

Significance of Mentorship for Junior Faculty at HBCUs

Mentorship, in its broadest sense, is an empowering and transformative relationship where an experienced individual guides and supports a less experienced individual in their professional and personal growth (Ragins et al., 2000). For junior faculty, this guidance is paramount as they transition from doctoral students or postdoctoral researchers to independent scholars, instructors, and members of the academy of university professors. At HBCUs, the significance of mentorship is amplified by several factors that shape the unique experiences of faculty members.

Firstly, HBCUs often cultivate a "familial" or communal atmosphere, where faculty-student interactions are deeply valued and extended beyond the classroom (Reddick, 2006; Reddick, 2011). This ethos naturally extends to faculty-to-faculty relationships, creating an environment where senior scholars often feel a strong sense of responsibility to nurture their junior colleagues. This informal, yet deeply ingrained, cultural expectation of "paying it forward" is a hallmark of many HBCUs (Marshall et al., 2016; Reddick, 2011; Johnson et al., 2023).

Secondly, junior faculty, particularly those from underrepresented groups, often face unique challenges in navigating the "hidden curriculum" of academia such as the unwritten rules, expectations, and political dynamics that are critical for a successful career in the academy (Jones et al., 2009; Hawkins, 2024; Barr et al., 2024; Chadiha et al., 2014; Miller & Noland, 2003). Senior faculty mentorship at HBCUs can provide invaluable insights into institutional culture because of their institutional knowledge as well as provide valuable insights regarding departmental politics, and the specific nuances of the RTP process with their particular institutions. This guidance and mentorship can prove to be very helpful for junior faculty, avoiding pitfalls and strategically positioning themselves for advancement.

Thirdly, mentorship at HBCUs often encompasses more than just professional development. Given the shared experiences of many faculty members within the HBCU context, mentors frequently provide psychosocial support, helping junior faculty cope with the demands of academic life, work-life balance, and potential biases they may encounter (Eberman et al., 2011; Golden et al., 2017; Jacob et al., 2023). This holistic approach to mentorship significantly contributes to the well-being and retention of junior faculty (Dobie et al., 2010; Eberman et al., 2011; Booker, 2023; Miller & Noland, 2003). Finally, mentorship at HBCUs is crucial for fostering a sense of belonging and community, which is particularly important for faculty of color who may feel isolated in other academic settings (Reddick, 2006; Alexander & Moore, 2008; Ismail et al., 2012; Maglalang et al., 2022). Strong

mentoring relationships can mitigate feelings of alienation, build confidence, and encourage junior faculty to persevere through the demanding early career stages (Berhane et al., 2023; Ismail et al., 2012; Maglalang et al., 2022).

Who Is Given Mentorship Responsibilities?

The assignment of mentorship responsibilities at HBCUs is often a blend of formal institutional initiatives and informal, organic relationships. While specific policies may exist for matching mentees with mentors, the reality is that many impactful mentoring relationships emerge naturally from shared academic interests, cultural understanding, and a genuine desire to support junior colleagues (Dobie et al., 2010; Golden et al., 2017; Jacob et al., 2023). Typically, those given mentorship responsibilities are:

1. Tenured and Senior Faculty: This is the most common group. Tenured faculty possess the institutional knowledge, academic experience, and professional networks necessary to guide junior colleagues through the complexities of academic life. They have successfully navigated the RTP process themselves and can offer invaluable insights into what it takes to succeed at their particular institution. Their experience in research, teaching, and service makes them ideal role models.

2. Faculty with Strong Publication and Grant Records: Senior faculty who have demonstrated consistent success in scholarly productivity are often sought out as mentors, particularly for junior faculty focused on research. They can guide mentees on developing research agendas, writing competitive grant proposals, and publishing in reputable journals.

3. Faculty with a Strong Service Record: Senior faculty who are actively involved in departmental, collegiate, and university-wide committees and initiatives can provide guidance on navigating institutional politics and contributing meaningfully to service. This is particularly important at HBCUs where faculty often carry a heavier service load due to smaller faculty sizes and a strong commitment to community engagement.

4. Culturally Competent and Empathetic Faculty: Given the unique cultural context of HBCUs, senior faculty who demonstrate cultural competence and empathy are often highly effective mentors. They can understand and address the specific challenges and aspirations of junior faculty of color, fostering a sense of belonging and trust. Mentorship is about giving back and paying it forward. It's a thread that ties generations together and ensures a legacy of support. This sentiment is particularly resonant within HBCUs (Reddick, 2011; Reddick, 2006).

5. Informal Leaders and "Go-To" Faculty: Beyond formal appointments, many senior faculty members become informal mentors due to their reputation for being supportive, knowledgeable, and approachable. Junior faculty often seek out these individuals for advice and guidance, creating organic mentoring relationships that are not formally assigned but are nonetheless highly impactful.

Examples of Assignment

A. Formal Mentoring Programs: Many HBCUs have implemented formal mentoring programs for junior faculty. These programs may involve a structured matching process, where new faculty are paired with senior faculty mentors based on discipline, research interests, or shared demographic characteristics. For example, a new assistant professor in the humanities might be paired with a tenured professor in a related field. These programs often include guidelines for regular meetings, discussion topics, and clear expectations for both mentor and mentee (Reddick, 2011).

B. Departmental Mentoring Committees: Some departments establish mentoring committees for each junior faculty member. These committees, typically composed of two or three senior faculty members, provide ongoing support and guidance throughout the pre-tenure period. The committee members advise on research, teaching, service, and the preparation of the RTP dossier.

C. Ad-hoc Mentorship: Despite formal programs, a significant portion of mentorship at HBCUs occurs through ad-hoc, informal relationships. A junior faculty member might approach a senior colleague whose work they admire, or a senior faculty member might take a particular interest in a promising junior scholar. These relationships are often driven by mutual respect and a shared commitment to the institution's mission.

D. Peer Mentoring: While not strictly senior-to-junior, peer mentoring among junior faculty members is also common and valuable. Faculty members at similar career stages can provide mutual support, share experiences, and collaborate on projects. This is particularly useful for discussing challenges and finding solutions together.

E. Women Faculty Networks: Several HBCUs have established networks specifically for women faculty, recognizing the unique challenges they may face. These networks often facilitate mentoring relationships, providing a "forum for professional problem solving among women academic leaders."

Conclusion

Mentorship is not merely an optional add-on but an intrinsic and indispensable component of junior faculty success, retention, tenure, and promotion at HBCUs. The unique cultural context of HBCUs, characterized by a commitment to holistic development and a familial atmosphere, naturally fosters environments where senior faculty often feel a deep responsibility to nurture the next generation of scholars. Mentoring is essential for the retention and success of both students and faculty. Yet, mentorship and mentoring become an issue of equity where those with the resources (financial, human, etc.) receive and provide better mentoring. Inarguably,

HBCUs are underfunded and under-resourced, impacting their ability to provide mentoring resources to faculty who are then less prepared to act as holistic mentors to their students. Along the vein of you cannot teach what

you do not know, the mentoring faculty provide to students will be based on their own experiences with being mentored. In this study, the authors determine that how faculty perceive their role as mentors is strongly influenced by past mentoring experiences, how roles and responsibilities are defined, and how these roles and responsibilities are supported and measured for RTP. Many times, especially among women of color (WOC) and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), the mentoring received is one of conformity and assimilation, to fit in the standard norms.

Similarly, Hooks (1994) described the requirement of assimilation as a form of oppression in education. HBCU faculty are expected to meet students where they are; however, HBCU faculty are not given the same concessions. Instead, faculty, by right of having a doctoral degree, are expected to be able to perform for the student's best interest, without proper resources, training, or support. This is not sustainable and instead contributes to burnout, especially for WOC who have an unfair burden to bear.

Mentoring is more than quantitative accounts of time allocations but rather embedded within a broader holistic approach to the graduate experience for students and career trajectory for junior faculty. This is hard to quantify within the metrics of traditional RTP standards. Until the academy aligns itself with an evaluation model that values/expects mentoring as a visible academic service, women and minorities will continue to be situated within institutional contexts of inauthentic evaluations of the value of their work.

Future research needs to explore the absence of women, especially WOC, in the academy, which has deleterious implications on the efficacy of mentoring and preparation of female and minority graduate students who will pursue academic careers. HBCUs should be on the front lines championing the examination of new and emerging phenomena and spearheading the discovery of new methodologies and strategies for intervention. Unfortunately, this has not been the case resulting in a continued exodus of women from academia, which will continue until their success is valued as much as student success (Diggs et al., 2023, pp. 476-477).

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