Librarians: The next generation. Mentorship at the University of Toronto

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Mentoring is to librarianship what chocolate syrup is to ice cream sundaes: a delicious and defining feature. The profession prides itself on initiating its newest members into the fold and a variety of approaches to mentorship for up and coming librarians are underway at the University of Toronto. For example, practicums for library and information science (LIS) students, and a new internship program at the University of Toronto Libraries for top incoming LIS students. These programs are facilitated by the fact that the University of Toronto is home to a top Information school that has been dedicated to training new librarians since 1928. The authors will present their experience working with student librarians at the engineering library, which on several occasions has led to graduate student workers who return for full-time professional positions – a testament to the mutual benefits of the relationship.

The authors will also discuss the ongoing mentoring of the newest engineering librarians on their team. These efforts include invitations to meetings with engineering faculty to facilitate networking, involvement in a variety of decision making processes, and careful training for a host of new responsibilities. The team's more experienced librarians impart their expertise and act as coach and counsellor, providing critique and encouragement as necessary. Priorities also include acculturation and socialization to the library environment. More generally, the University of Toronto intrinsically mentors its librarians by requiring professional development activities as a condition for achieving permanent (tenured) status. The mentoring relationship has proven beneficial for the mentors as well. Knowledge transfer and reflecting on career pathways can provide perspective and motivation for experienced librarians. Additionally, the authors will present on areas for improvement and recommendations for future mentoring initiatives. The discussion will include a review of the research related to mentoring new employees, including findings that show a direct correlation between active mentoring practices and employee retention rates.

1. Introduction

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "mentor" as "a person who acts as guide and adviser to another person, esp. one who is younger and less experienced. Later, more generally: a person who offers support and guidance to another; an experienced and trusted counsellor or friend; a patron, a sponsor"[1]. In their survey of members of one chapter of the Medical Library Association, Kwasik et al (2006) found that 71% of respondents to a survey about mentoring answered yes to the question "do you consider having a mentor or mentors a critical part of your professional experience?"[2]. Ross's (2013) literature review presents a range of reasons for and approaches to mentorship in libraries but supports the commonly held belief that mentoring can contribute positively to the future of the profession[3]. Here we describe some mentoring techniques used in a large academic library system with 44 branches as well as techniques used in one of the system's medium sized libraries. Despite some initial minor disruptions during the setup of these mentoring endeavors, we argue that overall they have had a positive impact on the library system and staff. The methods described below could easily be modified to fit the needs of any size library, whether scaling up for a large institution and creating programs that reach out to many employees or scaling down for individual one-on-one mentoring in a smaller library.

2. Literature review

Mentorship is an integral part of academia. Kirchmeyer (2005) interviewed 145 American academics in the field of accounting and found that mentoring directly correlated with achieving higher rank and salary even when a high number of publications were accounted for[4]. The study is significant because it objectively shows that mentoring affects mentee success from a "political perspective", meaning that the support and advice that a mentor provides contributes to "the protégé's understanding of the social systems and his or her ability to negotiate them"[4]. In other words, "mentors affect the advancement of protégés by developing their social skills, serving as contacts within the social system, and sending signals of ability, reputation, and organizational fit"[4]. However, the author clearly notes that "support for the political perspective need not imply that mentoring is counterproductive to organizational functioning or simply gamesmanship on the part of protégés and [mentors]…For employers mentoring as a means to socialize and retain members and establish organizational fit represents genuine value"[4].

Additionally, mentorship may be a tool to increase employee and knowledge retention. Davidson & Middleton (2007) discuss mentoring as a tool to prevent those with science and technology backgrounds from leaving librarianship[5]. Since the majority of students completing MLS degrees do not have science or engineering backgrounds, as reported by Kim et al (2007)[6], mentoring could also be the answer for recruiting and retaining new librarians who may feel intimidated by the subject area because they do not have a corresponding educational background. Davidson & Middleton surveyed members of a variety of science and engineering library associations and found that attending conferences sponsored by professional associations was the top reason for being a member. Attending conferences presents networking opportunities and these connections allow for "just in time" mentoring for professionals looking for answers related to science and engineering librarianship[5]. Ross (2013) notes the inevitable loss of library leadership when a good percentage of librarians in the baby boom generation retire over the next 10 years[3]. He reviews the literature presenting mentorship as a viable strategy for preparing currently employed librarians and recent library school graduates to take on leadership positions[3].

Mentorship benefits both the mentor and the mentee. In a survey of former practicum students, Ferrer-Vincent & Sobel (2011) reported that several former students found strong formal or informal mentorship through the Auraria Library practicum program and that this was a major advantage of the experience[7]. Additionally, Ferrer-Vincent & Sobel found that the librarians' who supervised the practicum students reported that the "fresh perspective" of the students provided a benefit to the mentors as well[7]. Hallam & Newton-Smith (2006) showed that mentors felt a sense of job satisfaction at being recognized by their mentees for their expertise [8]. Another advantage for mentors is in workload reduction. Some effort up front, grooming new librarians to take on more responsibility, introducing them to faculty, and passing on teaching duties, means a bit of relief for often overworked librarians.

Rather than simply setting up a mentoring program, Martorana et al (2004) describe how librarians at University of California-Santa Barbara (UCSB) created a series of forums to

"initiate collegial discussion" about various aspects of mentoring[9]. The series, called "You and Your Career: A series on Mentoring and Professional Development", included seven talks and conversations related to mentoring and the mentoring relationship[9]. Instead of taking the benefits of mentoring as a given, UCSB librarians engaged in thoughtful dialogue about the possible advantages. Several sessions also provided a forum for librarians achieving success in specific areas (e.g. professional association leadership, grant writing, research) to discuss their achievements thereby positioning themselves as possible mentors in these areas. UCSB's methods not only gave librarians a forum to critically evaluate the purpose and outcomes of mentoring but also promoted a "culture of mentoring" within their organization[9].

To support research and scholarly output, librarians at Oregon State University established the "Library Faculty Association (LFA)" with the explicit purpose of supporting a "culture of scholarship" among library faculty who are expected to publish and conduct research[10]. The LFA provides a "variety of venues in which library faculty discuss research-in-progress and present completed projects to colleagues"[10]. Sapon-White et al distributed a survey to LFA members to assess the association and its activities and found that the majority of respondents thought that the LFA had contributed to creating a scholarly environment for Oregon State University librarians[10].

Despite the significant body of literature that exists on the benefits of mentoring there is still much to be learned. Kirchmeyer's (2005) findings show that more research is required to understand how exactly mentorship benefits mentees, mentors and their institutions[4].

Here we discuss the approach to mentoring at the University of Toronto Libraries (UTL) as well as the specific mentoring efforts at the University of Toronto's Engineering & Computer Science Library (ECSL). These approaches include the mentoring of graduate students currently completing master of information degrees. This mentoring occurs in several forms including that for graduate student library assistants (GSLAs) hired to provide reference help at the library, an elite group of GSLAs in a novel internship program aimed specifically at enhancing mentorship of upcoming librarians, and the mentoring of practicum students. We will also discuss the mentoring of new librarians by experienced librarians within UTL, including the creation of the "Mentoring Interest Group", mentoring for permanent status and promotion, mentoring contract librarians and the impact of direct mentoring in a medium sized library from the head librarian. Future mentoring initiatives currently in the planning stages at ECSL for the engineering librarian community at large will also be explored.

3. Mentoring at University of Toronto Libraries and the Engineering & Computer Science Library

3.1 The University of Toronto and the Engineering & Computer Science Library

The University of Toronto (U of T) consistently ranks among the top universities around the world. The U of T faculty are widely recognized for their teaching strengths and commitment to graduate supervision. The UTL system is the largest academic library in Canada and is ranked third among peer institutions in North America, behind just Harvard and Yale. The system consists of 44 libraries located on four university campuses. The ECSL is located on the main,

St George, campus, and is the second largest science library at U of T. ECSL's 4 librarians and its 4.6 full time equivalent technicians and casual student staff support two significant groups. The Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering consistently ranks as the top Canadian engineering school and among the worlds' best engineering schools, while our Department of Computer Science is ranked among the top ten computer science departments in the world. Together these two user communities number at almost 9000 students and over 250 faculty.

Supporting a broad range of teaching and research needs from undergraduate to world-renown research leaders demands a significant skillset from librarians. During times of staff change and renewal, knowledge transfer and development of talent is especially crucial. As Guise has found in her study of Canadian academic libraries, many institutions have been finding succession planning a challenging process[11]. Much tacit knowledge is not being passed from one generation of librarians to the next through formal training due to understaffing and the need to staff just to keep our doors open. Mentoring opportunities at both beginning and more advanced career levels can help with knowledge transfer. UTL is well-situated for supporting rich mentoring relationships as one of the largest academic library systems in North America connected to one of the largest and best information schools in Canada.

3.2 Mentoring master of information students

Over the years, UTL has fostered the development of the newest information professionals by hiring master of information students, almost exclusively, for reference and research help positions at many of its libraries. These students are drawn from the University of Toronto's Faculty of Information or "iSchool", which offers master and PhD degrees in information, among other options. In the Central Libraries system, which includes ECSL, these GSLA positions provide valuable work experience but also create the opportunity for mentoring to naturally occur. At ECSL, GSLAs go through rigorous training on subject-specific reference resources for all areas of engineering and computer science. Relevant databases, standards sources, handbooks and patent searching are among the topics covered in the initial training. GSLAs also receive extensive training on library services and resources that are common to all libraries, such as procedures and policies for interlibrary loan, holds, and circulation policies, which can become quite complicated in a system of 44 libraries.

Once they have mastered the core functions of their position (reference services), GSLAs are given additional opportunities to be mentored in areas that will help them to develop relevant skills and experience. Creating LibGuides and online learning objects such as videos and Articulate Storyline modules, are examples of hands-on opportunities that the GSLAs are given, which allows them to develop deliverable products while working under the mentorship of a librarian. Besides the practical and technical skills the students learn by using these products, deeper mentoring on information literacy instruction, pedagogy and best practices can also take place. Other initiatives that GSLAs have taken on include a literature search to inform a research data management survey and projects to move low use items to off-site storage. These initiatives contribute in a positive way to the library, but also allow the GSLAs to work with a mentor on developing their knowledge and skills.

To further develop the next generation of professionals, UTL and the iSchool partnered to offer an internship program for high-achieving students, which started in the fall of 2014. Called the Toronto Academic Librarianship Internship (TALint) program, several UTL branches hire master of information students to work at the reference desk or in other capacities, as before, but with an increased focus on mentoring and enrichment via activities such as job shadowing, special projects, and networking. As with all new programs there were challenges including a frustration over the reduction in work hours available to other graduate student employees and concern over the number of hours expected of the TALint students in addition to their heavy school work load. Yet, overall the program has been a success. ECSL employs one such TALint student and has benefitted from the relationship. Currently, ECSL's TALint student is evaluating reference desk statistics and qualitative information recorded after reference interactions to help improve reference services.

Practicums are also frequently completed at UTL branches by iSchool students. Recently, ECSL librarians had the opportunity to work with two practicum students, one who completed a special project evaluating UTL's use of LibGuides and one who created an online information literacy tutorial. The latter project also resulted in a conference presentation, which the practicum student took part in along with ECSL librarians. The practicum student mentoring experience was mutually beneficial. For the students it meant being mentored and gaining practical experience in academic librarianship. For the librarians, it meant not only getting much needed help with completing important projects but it also gave them the opportunity to be mentors, to gain experience as guides to the next wave of professionals.

3.3 Mentoring new librarians

While UTL currently does not have a formal mentorship program for appointed employees, the policies and procedures around attaining permanent status (aka tenure) and promotion intrinsically provide a kind of mentoring by encouraging ongoing professional development and engagement. Aside from performing the requirements of the job successfully and contributing to scholarly communication, UTL librarians are also judged on "professional achievement and activities; service to the Library and the University; and a clear promise of continuing effectiveness and development"[12]. We argue that the latter three categories of evaluation are the organization's way of indirectly mentoring librarians. Librarians contribute on committees and special projects within the institution, volunteer for professional organizations and other associations outside the university and take courses, attend conferences and engage in other professional development activities to obtain new skills and for intellectual growth. Knowing that these activities will be evaluated as part of the permanent status process encourages librarians, to contribute to the institution, the wider professional community and to grow intellectually. In other words, UTL's guidelines for promotion encourage those activities and behaviors that a mentor might. Furthermore, participation in many of these activities is an effective way for librarians to meet potential mentors outside their institution or outside their regular work sphere. As discussed above, UCSB librarians also explored this way of thinking about the review process as a form of mentoring in one of their seven forums on mentorship. An internal panel of speakers explained how open communication with a supervisor throughout the review cycle can be a mentoring opportunity[9].

Permanent status stream (aka tenure track) librarians can benefit from additional mentoring to help navigate the permanent status process. Librarians at Oakland University's Kresge Library formed a mentoring group specifically for this purpose: the "Untenured Librarians Club" described by Keyse et al (2003)[13]. This informal peer mentoring group met regularly to share and bond over experiences, frustrations, successes and failures along the tenure track. At the time of preparing this paper, UTL's deputy chief librarian decided to create a mentoring opportunity specifically focused on the permanent status process and the first gathering of the current permanent status stream librarian cohort has been scheduled to take place in the near future. The informal meeting will be an opportunity to share ideas and difficulties related to the permanent status process.

As a way to enhance the informal mentoring opportunities available at UTL, Allison Bell, a science librarian at UTL, created the Mentoring Interest Group (MIG), with a focus on peer and group mentoring rather than the traditional senior-junior dichotomous relationship. The group meets monthly and is open to any librarian who would like to discuss mentoring issues and develop ways to promote mentoring at UTL. MIG coordinates professional development events such as "brown bag lunches" where librarians and other library staff are encouraged to bring their lunch and enjoy a talk on a given topic, such as the panel discussion on "getting published in the library field". Currently, the group is focusing on supporting research endeavors as this is an area where UTL librarians have identified a need for mentorship. MIG has lobbied the administration to sanction dedicated time for research related activities, and has organized events where librarians can share their ideas for research projects in order to connect with other librarians with similar research interests. The administration is in support of these endeavors and has authorized the creation of a "study hall" program, wherein dedicated time is set aside every two weeks so librarians can gather in a shared space to conduct quiet research. In response to the need for mentorship for academic librarians who are expected to contribute to library and information research, Jacobs & Berg created the Librarians Research Institute sponsored by Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL) in 2012[14]. It is an annual 4 day institute dedicated to helping librarians develop research programs and collaborate with researching colleagues. UTL supports this initiative by sponsoring one librarian to attend each year.

One difficulty to consider is the fact that many new librarians are subject to working on contract for many years after graduating from library school. Budgetary restrictions and limited resources make it difficult for institutions, especially publicly funded ones like the University of Toronto, to create or even maintain permanent stream positions. As Knight (2013) notes, recruiting, training and retaining new employees is a very expensive endeavor for any institution[15]. Mentoring, or "on-boarding" as Knight calls it, is a way for budget conscious employers to prevent wasting time, effort, and money by socializing new employees, and making sure they understand their role and value in the organization thereby reducing the chances of an untimely departure from the position[15]. Since it is likely that a well acculturated contract librarian will have greater success at winning a competition for a more permanent position, UTL can consider any mentoring efforts valuable activities to promote.

The current acting head of ECSL is contributing to grooming the leaders of the future by providing leadership opportunities to all three ECSL librarians. Each librarian has direct supervisory responsibilities for at least one library technician. In addition, one of the librarians is

the direct supervisor for the group of undergraduate students employed at the library who take care of circulation duties and collection maintenance; and another librarian is the direct supervisor to the GSLAs who provide reference and research services. Gaining supervisory experience at this mid-size library is an opportunity not always afforded librarians employed at the larger UTL branches. A steady transition in the department towards more collaborative planning has also provided mentoring opportunities as newer librarians are encouraged to provide greater input into budgetary planning and goal setting. Increased information sharing through weekly librarian meetings and collaboration in large undertakings such as ECSL's Personal Librarian project and a survey of faculty data management practices has also opened up opportunities for newer librarians to take on leadership roles within a supportive environment. Furthermore, to have "on the job" leadership training while being mentored under the experienced, careful eye of their own leader and mentor means that areas of weakness and difficulty can be readily addressed. Due to this experience, it is clear that ECSL librarians will be well prepared to take on leadership roles for the wider UTL community when the time and need arises. As Hall-Ellis acknowledges, mentoring, coaching and professional development all empower movement up career ladders as part of succession planning and management[16].

ECSL has been working at a changing and sometimes reduced staff complement for several years now so making the mentoring effort has been a major priority since the addition of the newest librarians. The more experienced librarians invited the newer librarians to meetings with engineering and computer science faculty and transferred teaching opportunities despite years of curriculum mapping and relationship building. These new connections provided to the new librarians may be helpful in creating further connections in the future.

3.4 Future mentoring possibilities for engineering librarians

ECSL librarians are planning to initiate more opportunities for engineering librarians to connect with the possible side effect of creating mentorship opportunities. For example, ECSL librarians are working to organize an "engineering librarian boot camp" within the next year. The boot camp format, modeled after the science boot camps that have sprung up across North America over the last couple of years, will provide intensive workshops in various foundational aspects of engineering (e.g. engineering design, engineering communications). The workshops will be instructed by engineering faculty, to help engineering librarians develop and maintain subject specialization. By bringing engineering librarians from across the region together, this type of event could foster mentoring relationships as well as professional development and learning opportunities.

4. Discussion

Successful mentoring of students at ECSL is reflected in the current librarian staffing complement of the library. Three of the four librarians currently employed at ECSL were student employees while completing their master of information degrees at the iSchool. While this fact demonstrates the benefits of the relationship between the iSchool and UTL, it also shows the power of mentorship. ECSL understands the value of mentorship in academia as in Kirchmeyer's study discussed above[4]. By mentoring student employees ECSL reaps the rewards once those employees return as librarians with not only a strong skill set related to engineering

librarianship but also with a full understanding of the library's social systems and other organizational norms.

ECSL librarians find that mentoring initiatives benefit the mentor in a variety of ways. Showing a new employee the ropes, giving advice and guidance can provide perspective to the more experienced employee and a chance to reflect on their career. These findings correlate with Lacy and Copeland's (2013) conclusions[17]. The authors found that mentors believed the relationship helped them "strengthen their commitment to the profession; achieve a better understanding of their own work; and keep more current than usual within their areas of practice"[17]. This is true for the ESCL librarians, who, by giving back in the form of mentoring, feel a stronger tie to the profession, and feel able to shape the future of the profession by influencing the thinking and behavior of these students. The act of explaining how or why a particular task is done gives the ECSL librarians a better understanding of that task, and it gives the opportunity to think critically about whether or not it is really necessary. Current awareness of developments in librarianship and education is always an important part of an academic librarian's job. Keeping current is even more important while mentoring students who can benefit from new developments relevant to their positions at the library. However, students can help librarians keep up to date as well. Students often discuss innovations with librarians and ask questions about developments they hear about at school. In these ways, the mentoring relationship helps the professional development of students and librarians equally.

5. Conclusion

Mentoring at UTL and ECSL includes mentoring of students enrolled in a master of information degree program, and mentoring of new librarians by more experienced librarians. Students are mentored through developing innovative projects under the supervision of librarians who provide positive reinforcement and suggestions for project improvement. Experienced librarians have developed the MIG, created job performance measures that encourage new librarians to seek out mentors, and invited new librarians to take on supervisory duties and share contacts. For ECSL librarians, mentorship is proving a successful strategy for professional development, job performance, and future leadership potential.

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