

Chapter 7

Academic Mentoring for Undergraduate University Students in South Africa: A Case Study of UKZN Howard College Mentoring Programme

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ABSTRACT

This chapter interrogates the role of opportunities and challenges of an academic mentoring program for undergraduate students at Howard College Campus in the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Such programs target the first-year students especially those from the disadvantaged schooling background. In this chapter, it became apparent that students enrolled and committed to the mentoring program were able to improve their academic performance, made adaptation to university life easily, and increased their self-confidence. Although South Africa has inherited a dysfunctional education system, mentoring program offers a structured support for underground students to cope academically, emotionally, and socially. This chapter reflects the views of mentors employed by the mentoring program. This empirical study has used interviews with 10 mentors employed to facilitate mentoring programs within the Faculty of Humanities.

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INTRODUCTION

Mentorship programs have been reported to hold valuable benefits for both personal and professional development in the institutions of higher learning. Ayinde (2011) posited that mentoring creates a supportive environment that is non-judgmental and non-competitive because it fosters trust, facilitates the sharing of information and bases its foundation on mutual respect. It has been seen to enhance performance and engagement in the workforce as well as promote life-long learning (Burgess, Diggele, & Mellis, 2018). Mentoring has also been used to facilitate multidisciplinary collaboration, therefore promoting learning opportunities (Lunsford et al., 2017). Despite documented favorable outcomes associated with mentorship, very little high-quality evidence has been synthesized to describe current mentorship models, objectives and core components that exist across the spectrum (Nowell et al., 2017). Given the identified gap, this paper intends to review existing mentoring models applied at universities in South Africa, in order to explore and describe the types, core objectives and core components of mentoring that contribute to successful outcomes.

While several studies have been published recently outlining the obvious flaws to mentoring models, based on the lack of consistency and agreement between both researchers and practitioners, regarding the mentoring concept, this area of research is far from being exhausted (Dawson, 2014). Enhanced understanding of mentoring as a concept, especially its core objectives and those components that make it an effective strategy for capacity building, holds the potential to bring added value for mentors and mentees at an operational level (Lunsford et al., 2017). Establishing consensus on what makes mentoring successful, will add to the credibility of the mentorship process and the development of this field of study (Arora & Rangnekar, 2015). It is also seen by the researcher as a means to improving the quality in the delivery of mentoring training for practitioners. This kind of focus will ultimately yield improved research outcomes, especially for the development of suitable mentoring models (Seeto, 2016). Suitability in mentoring models especially relating to cultural and socio-economic context holds potential for even greater gains for mentees and organizations (Beech et al., 2013).

Therefore, this chapter aims to explore the factors that contribute to the success and failures of the undergraduate mentoring program in the Faculty of Humanities, Howard College Campus. The chapter argues that successful undergraduate mentoring program is key in improving academic outcomes, enhanced career satisfaction and improved self-esteem and mental health. In this chapter, mentoring program within the Faculty of Humanities at UKZN is used as a case study to contribute to an improved understanding of the structural formation of mentoring models suitable for students at South African universities. The chapter commences by providing

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