

BUSTING 5 MYTHS

About Mentoring in Academic Libraries

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Study

Method: survey of over 350 librarians + 6 interviews

Findings:

- Of the 154 respondents from the United States, 97% were librarians working in an academic library. 60% of respondents indicated that their library did not have a formal or informal mentoring program beyond new librarian training.

- Of those librarians who identified as new librarians (either with previous professional experience or without), 36% had a formal or informal mentoring program offered at their library.
- However, of those 63 participants who did have a mentoring program of some kind (including experienced and inexperienced librarians), 87% participated in the program.
- Looking at the specific areas involved in the mentoring programs of respondents, most focus on promotion and tenure (74%).

MYTH #1: Anyone can be a good mentor.

FACT: The best mentors are both supportive and are willing to tell mentees things they don't want to hear.

"The literature really supports someone who is not in a 'go to,' 'what kind of form do I fill out?' kind of role, but really mentoring the person about how not to get yourself into hot water, how do you choose what activities do you want to do."

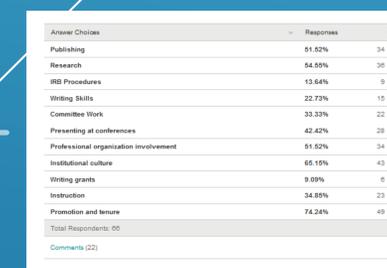
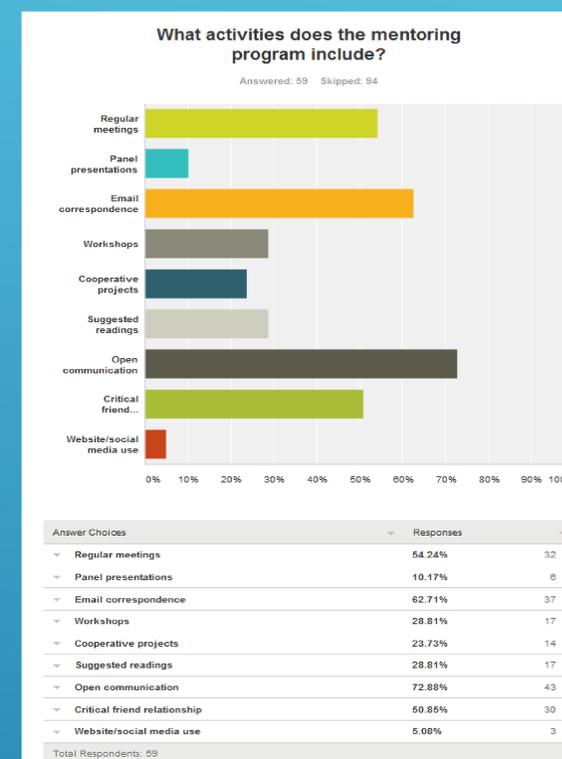
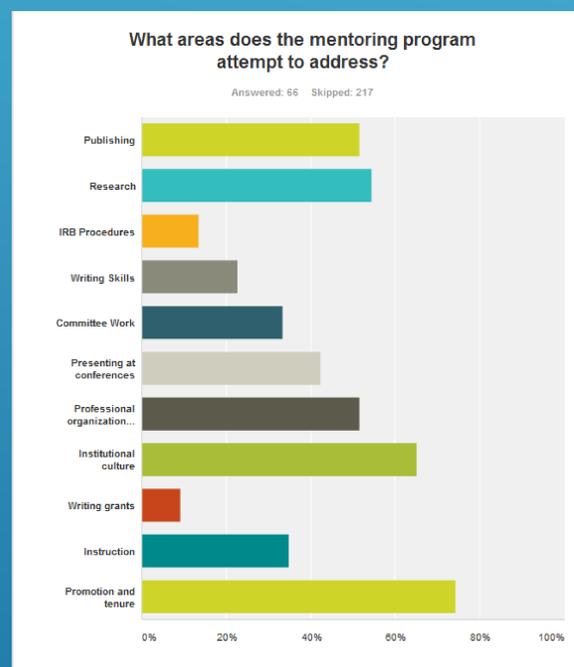
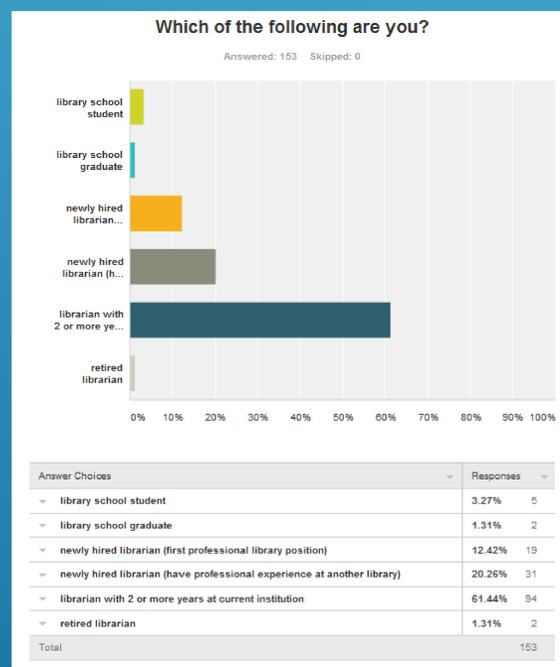
"If you're going to ask someone to mentor, you have to realize it's not just that you have coffee with them. They have to do some background work or homework."

"It should be more about what people need, not just what would be fun."

MYTH #2: Mentoring only benefits the mentee.

FACT: In the best mentoring programs, mentors see their role as professional, serious, even coveted, and very valuable.

"It's actually kind of coveted to be a mentor. Like when I put out a call for interest I usually get twenty to twenty-five people. ... So the mentors take it very seriously."



MYTH #3: Informal mentoring is best.

FACT: Informal mentoring is common, but lacks clear goals and expectations and, therefore, motivation.

"It doesn't work when it's informal... It's way too easy for people not to contact their mentor and for them to find someone that just agrees with them."

"We have found the most successful pairings are the ones that stick to a regular schedule."

"Informality is great, but it makes it hard to be sure things happen."

MYTH #5: The best mentor has the same job duties as the mentee.

FACT: Pairing up librarians with diverse job duties or even librarians with other faculty can have serious benefits.

"I think it's very important for librarians to see themselves, if they are faculty status, as equals. ... I have to integrate them, I have to let the other faculty see that they're equal."

See *handout for list of sources.*

MYTH #4: The ability to be a mentee is innate.

FACT: Mentees (and mentors) often don't know how to behave in a way that most takes advantage of the mentoring relationship.

"I think mentees need a better understanding or some suggested activities so they can get full use out of this person [the mentor]."