Learning the Ropes Together:
New Faculty Co-Mentoring in a "Mandatory" Community of Practice

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We analyze the outcomes of a mandatory, research-based, semester-long new faculty development program that serves as an extended orientation to the university. Although the program is designed like a "course" and not like a faculty learning community (FLC) as many new faculty development programs are, we discovered that communities of practice (CoPs) arose as new faculty discussed expectations, learned about the wide variety of departmental and institutional processes and practices, and got to know one another. Moreover, we also noted that peer-to-peer mentoring was a significant feature of participants' experience. We argue that although this model of new faculty development does not adhere to the usual requirements of an FLC or CoP, it nonetheless fulfilled the goals of offering new faculty support from multiple sources, fostering new faculty confidence, and enhancing their job performance and satisfaction.

Keywords: new faculty development, mentoring, co-mentoring, community of practice

INTRODUCTION

The job of the faculty member is becoming more and more complex. Colleges and universities primarily hire faculty to be experts in their fields. However, if they secure a coveted full-time and/or tenure-track position, they are confronted with figuring out the multiple systems they need to know to function effectively at a new institution (Bhavsar et al., 2018; Schimid et al., 2019). Faculty will be expected to be savvy pedagogues and good departmental colleagues. They may also be called on to recruit students and respond enthusiastically to requests from administrators to participate in new initiatives (Schimid et al., 2019). These tasks will likely keep them siloed in their departments, where they will learn about the institution primarily from a departmental/program perspective. However, to be successful in this multilayered environment requires multiple kinds of mentoring and guidance from supervisors and colleagues, both in and out of one's home department (Varma & Varma, 2001).

Out of a desire to create a common experience that would position new faculty for success, the provost at our mid-sized, Midwestern, comprehensive university (MMCU) tasked the director of the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) to develop a semester-long "course" for new tenure-track and renewable term faculty. New faculty would receive a 3-credit hour reassignment in their first semester to attend a weekly two-hour session with the CETL director (who serves as co-author on this study). After reviewing research on new faculty development, and consulting with administrators, deans, and department

heads, the CETL director developed learning goals and used backward design to create the New Faculty Colloquium (NFC), to highlight its topical and conversational focus. It was clear that, in a time of shrinking resources, the NFC needed to adhere as closely as possible to the requests of administration regarding what the program should include to make the expense of course reassignments palatable to the deans and other administrators. Thus, it became clear that the NFC would need to be highly organized, with specific guests and topics.

After searching for similar programs at other institutions, it was apparent that the NFC was unlike many other new faculty orientation programs or faculty learning communities because it is required of participants, has a single main facilitator, and some guest visitors, primarily administrators, and staff from offices on campus that provide valuable resources and services to faculty. In assessing the value of the NFC, we discovered that by creating a space where new faculty learn about institutional expectations for teaching, research, and service, the NFC creates and fosters what Wenger (2002) first termed as a "community of practice." Such groups identify and solve problems, create practices, and, more importantly, cultivate the development of peer or co-mentoring where peers "share developing expertise, learning from and, more significantly, *with* each other in the process" (Calderwood & Klaf, 2015, p.1).

Thus, the NFC offers new faculty and the institution numerous benefits, including more effective teaching, a greater understanding of institutional processes, and more opportunities for collaboration between faculty. The NFC also suggests a community of practice can develop organically, even in the context of mandatory attendance. Indeed, by bringing together faculty from many different disciplines and teaching contexts, who perhaps otherwise would not have volunteered for such an experience, the NFC creates a space where cross-disciplinary conversations create rich opportunities not only for learning but for co-mentoring, as well.

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY: THE NEW FACULTY COLLOQUIUM

The New Faculty Colloquium (NFC) could be characterized as a new faculty orientation program, though it differs from many orientation programs in several ways. Although there is no comprehensive list or consistency in how institutions define new faculty orientation, it would be unlikely to find very many institutions of higher education that do not, at this point, offer some kind of new faculty orientation program. The vast majority of them are fairly short, between 1-7 days in person, online, or a combination of both, and usually occur at the beginning of a semester. Our institution also has a two-day new faculty orientation that includes all new faculty, including administrators and adjuncts, but that orientation is separate from the NFC.

A recent analysis of the new faculty orientation programs at 148 R1 and R2 institutions found a wide variety of practices, including the amount of time spent and topics covered (Miller, 2021). In addition, "a majority of institutions (n=86; 58%) did not report anything in addition to the new faculty orientation day (or two-day program)," though a third of the institutions "promoted, alluded to, or advertised" additional resources like teaching or mentoring programs (Miller 2021, p.8). Although anecdotal evidence suggests that there may be a few other programs similar to the NFC, and one similar program has been identified (Pierce, 2001), the lack of a complete list of new faculty development programs renders it nearly impossible to find out whether and how many other such programs exist. Many hours of searching on the internet using terms like "new faculty academies," "new faculty development programs," and "new faculty seminar," yielded a dizzying collection of programs—semester-long, yearly, two-year—focusing on many aspects of the academic career—with a majority centering primarily on teaching. Many of these programs include mentoring by senior faculty.

In contrast to most of these programs, the NFC is required of most new faculty. It focuses on teaching, research/creative activity, and service, and does not include a formal mentoring component. However, it does create a consistent cohort of new faculty who spend the semester together learning about many aspects of their new roles as faculty.

Another difference from many new faculty orientation programs is that the NFC is facilitated primarily by one person. She was a tenured, full professor, and had more than twenty years of experience at the

institution in various roles. However, she knew that her view of the institution was only one person's perspective and did not want to present her experience as the only way to think about the topics they would address during the semester. She certainly did not want to be perceived as the mentoring "guru" (Rockquemore, 2010). She understood her role to be a facilitator, not a mentor since she would not be able to develop formal mentoring relationships with each participant.

Early on in the development process, she considered attempting to include formal mentoring in the NFC. She knew, however, that there were several obstacles to making this happen, including finding the time to find good mentors and train them effectively, as well as figuring out—on a very small budget in a CETL consisting only of the director—how to compensate them fairly. In addition, some of the faculty participating in the NFC would already have assigned mentors in their departments and colleges. After abandoning the idea of a mentorship program, she focused on developing a program where the goal was to share information and expertise by discussing books and articles (faculty did have periodic "assignments" to complete) and inviting guests who would address issues such as faculty governance and academic freedom, professional ethics, and research support.

The NFC was created using a backward design, based on research regarding what new faculty need to know to succeed at their institutions. To reach its goal, the NFC formulated five learning outcomes, namely (1) Learn about how the university works; (2) Explore what it means to be a part of the professoriate; (3) Examine your knowledge about teaching and yourself as a teacher; (4) Develop a plan that will allow you to create a viable research/creative program; and (5) Consider service and faculty governance.

Our study examines the experience of the first four cohorts in the NFC, using research questions developed from these learning outcomes. From 2016-2019, 84 faculty, from every college and department on campus, participated in the program. Participants were international faculty, U.S. faculty, white faculty and faculty of color, and numerous other demographic similarities and differences. They also had a wide variety of teaching experience: a number of them came in with a deep knowledge of pedagogy from their graduate programs and teaching experience; others were novice teachers.

Some faculty, like music instructors, taught primarily in one-to-one situations, while others taught mid-sized (20-50 students) or large (50-100+) courses. The cohorts included scientists, humanists, social scientists, and faculty involved primarily in educating students for professions in education or business. Tenure-track faculty had research programs to cultivate; renewable-term faculty had higher teaching loads. All of them would be expected to participate in service activities. The varied experiences and expectations of the participants meant that making sure that the NFC met the needs of all new faculty was challenging.

Would new faculty think that spending two hours of their time every week be worthwhile? Would one facilitator with visiting guests be sufficient for new faculty to acquire enough institutional knowledge and information? Would the model of the NFC be an effective substitute for a formal mentoring program? We discovered that spending time together every week with peers who had a wide range of academic interests and experiences created a rich context that fostered the creation of a community of practice (CoP) that included peer-to-peer co-mentoring, thus helping to connect new faculty and the institution.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: MENTORING AND COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

There is abundant advice available for early-career faculty. In addition to hundreds of articles that address specific aspects of new faculty development and posts in places like *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Inside Higher Ed*, there are also excellent book-length resources. They include Boice's *Advice for New Faculty* (2000), Rockquemore and Laszloffy's *The Black Academic's Guide to Winning Tenure--Without Losing Your Soul* (2008), and Haviland et al.'s *Shaping Your Career: A Guide for Early Career Faculty* (2017). The resources focus on teaching, research, and service, with variations on "building and maintaining positive professional relationships" (Haviland, et al., 2017, p.58) or "socializing with compassion" (Boice, 2000, p.8). The resources recommend that faculty acclimate to their institutions by building relationships with mentors as an effective way to gather the information they need to be successful. The NFC, however, was not structured to include traditional mentoring. Nonetheless, we discovered that

bringing together new faculty with wide-ranging experiences, created a rich environment where they could mentor one another in a peer-to-peer situation.

New Faculty Mentoring

Many discussions of mentoring focus on the most common form of mentoring in academic contexts: "a personal and reciprocal relationship in which a more experienced (usually older) faculty member acts as a guide, role model, and sponsor of a less experienced (usually younger) student or faculty member" (Johnson, 2016, p.23). Such a relationship is helpful because the role of the mentor is "to offer experience, guide, and support the development of the mentee, resulting in improved performance" (Western, 2012 p.43).

Research also confirms that mentoring is an essential aspect of developing junior faculty members (Abeles & Doyle, 2018; Rees & Shaw, 2014; Viravong & Schneider, 2018). Mentoring programs can enhance the retention of new faculty and help them engage in leadership alongside their senior colleagues (Ambrosino, 2009; Morgan, 2014). In their examination of numerous studies, Perna et al. (1995) found that mentoring new faculty promotes positive perceptions of a supportive work environment as well as job performance and job satisfaction. In her research on effective programs for new faculty development, Sorcinelli discovered that new faculty who "experienced mentoring fared better than those who did not" (Sorcinelli, 1994, p.478).

Mentoring programs for new faculty serve different purposes. New academics may experience physical and professional isolation, which does not make them feel supported (Kensington-Miller, 2017). Additionally, a supportive or hostile environment can either facilitate or frustrate faculty members' sense of agency in their careers (Campbell & O'Meara, 2014). Mentoring programs can address these challenges and enhance the socialization of new employees who need to learn about institutional culture, values, and mission, as well as formal and informal in-house practices to do things (Kensington-Miller, 2017; Viravong & Schneider, 2018). Darwin and Palmer (2009) confirmed that the feeling of belonging to a group is an influential factor in enabling new academics to have more confidence and grow professionally.

Despite the numerous benefits of traditional mentoring relationships, there can also be drawbacks. They can, for instance, be particularly challenging for minoritized faculty. Indeed, they may have fewer opportunities to be mentored, or mentoring may not address issues like marginalization. Traditional mentoring can also lead to intensive mentoring of minoritized students because it can hinder their career progress (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2008; Smith et al., 2013). In addition, mentoring within departments can be problematic if the mentor is in a position to evaluate the mentee. Finally, mentors who share academic interests with mentees may intentionally (or unintentionally) encourage their mentees to approach their work in the same way as the mentor (Viravong & Schneider, 2018).

Furthermore, Lunsford et al. (2013) indicated that "mentoring relationships are not always positive and sometimes manifest a dark and dysfunctional side" (p.1). Even with guidance on mentoring best practices, some mentors will ignore such advice and do what they think is best, resulting in a poor transition of the mentee to the institution (Viravong & Schneider, 2018). Sometimes, the traditional mentoring model is simply not sufficient or helpful for new faculty acclimation.

The Community of Practice and New Faculty Mentoring

We know mentoring is beneficial for new faculty development; the challenge is whether there is a form of mentoring that avoids some of the pitfalls of the traditional mentoring model. We found that one option for delivering effective new faculty mentoring is by creating a supportive space where new faculty can co-mentor one another. Such co-mentoring occurred in the NFC, primarily because cohorts had the time to create a community of practice (CoP). Wenger et al. (2002) defined a 'community of practice' as "a group of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on a recurrent basis" (p.4).

CoPs are said to be an effective way to help participants upgrade their "know-how." Smith (2016) argued that "tools such as formal training programs and documentation can provide individuals with "know that" information, the "know-how" must be learned elsewhere" (p.660). In addition, CoPs offer a "safe

space" for participants to "seek knowledge" and develop a "shared sense of identity" by communicating what they do with one another (Smith, 2016, pp. 659–660). Among many organizational forms including mentoring, the CoP is a structure that is deemed effective in knowledge co-creating and sharing, learning together, and fostering change. Because of these features, CoPs are particularly suited to address new faculty development.

In the specific context of faculty development, the CoP is quite similar to the Faculty Learning Community (FLC). As Cox and McDonald (2017) noted, CoPs and FLCs in a higher education context emerged independently from one another: both models were developed as ways to support faculty in their teaching endeavors. Cox (2016) defined an FLC as "a voluntary, structured, yearlong, multi-disciplinary community of practice around 6-12 participants (8-10 is ideal) that includes building community and the development of scholarly teaching and the scholarship of teaching and learning" (p.87).

Indeed, both types of small groups are quite similar, and both consistently have three defining features. All CoPs and FLCs have what Wenger called a domain, or a focused area of interest, that appeals to a wide variety of participants who want to meet with others who have similar interests (Mercieca, 2017). Because of a need for "personal passion" to make a CoP effective, an important defining feature of a CoP or FLC is that it is voluntary (Cox & Richlin, 2004; Wenger, 2002). Wenger's insistence on the voluntariness of the CoP stems from the idea that "the kind of personal investment that makes for a vibrant community is not something that can be invented or forced" (Wenger, 2002, p.38). Second, a CoP requires an interactive, engaged community committed to sharing their expertise (Mercieca, 2017). Finally, a CoP develops "a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems; in short a shared practice" (Mercieca, 2017, p.11).

Two of these three features were prominent in the NFC. First, the NFC brought together an "interactive, engaged community" of participants, all of whom were in the same situation in the institution as new faculty, who were able to share "their expertise with one another." Many new faculty concerns — "lack of a comprehensible tenure system, lack of community, and lack of an integrated life"—can only be addressed through interaction with multiple people and institutional systems (Rice et al., 2000). The NFC is structured not only to facilitate interactions with several institutional entities, but it also allows the new faculty to compare their individual experiences within their smaller units or departments.

Instead of traditional mentoring (where senior faculty members pass down knowledge and advice to junior faculty members), the NFC creates the context for a more mutual model of mentoring, co-mentoring, or collaborative mentoring, "which unites individuals in a mutually beneficial relationship" (Mullen, 2016, p.134). In a group context, co-mentoring highlights the interdependence of the group members (Driscoll et al., 2009), as individuals function as both mentors and mentees to one another (Mullen, 2016) as they share the advice, challenges, and practices of their departments with one another. Smith et al., (2016) described this type of mentoring as "a reciprocal model of mentoring—a *community of practice for mentoring*—that integrates collaborative mentoring into a faculty's daily work" (Smith et al., 2016, p.2). In this type of CoP, the primary mentoring occurring is largely implicit, collaborative, and peer-focused, as participants function as resources, supporters, and mentors for one another (Bottoms et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2016).

Second, the NFC creates "a shared repertoire of resources" and "ways of addressing recurring problems" that can help new faculty solve immediate problems they may encounter, encourage creative solutions, and improve their work. Gundel et al. (2013) indicated that CoPs are a way to spread knowledge and innovation. Having opportunities to discuss their experiences in a supportive context helps new faculty in the NFC see that their problems are not unique and that others may have similar concerns. Moreover, in solving problems with their peers, participants can also see the benefits of problem-solving with people outside their disciplines and departments (Rees & Shaw, 2014). Kensington-Miller (2017) indicated being in a multidisciplinary CoP with co-mentoring gives the group a broader knowledge of how the university 'works' and a glimpse of how different departments operate compared to their own.

This "shared repertoire of resources" and problem-solving that members of a CoP create can also foster increased confidence and a sense of belonging. Gourlay (2011) argued that many new academics lack confidence, and some early-career faculty often report poor experiences that challenge their confidence and leave them feeling "inclined to quit academe" (Foote & Solem, 2009, p.48). The connections established in

CoPs invoke shared language, camaraderie, cooperation, understanding of multiple viewpoints, and, ultimately, trust (Smith, 2016). In creating "a strong network of professional colleagues," for mutual encouragement and support, (Kensington-Miller, 2014, p.14), new faculty develop a greater sense of individual autonomy, as well as an understanding of their professional roles at the institution (Rees & Shaw, 2014). A CoP with co-mentoring can create an easier and faster transition for faculty into academia than if they were left alone (Kensington-Miller, 2017). CoPs with co-mentoring may also provide a beneficial alternative to traditional mentoring models for minoritized faculty (Bottoms et al., 2020). All of these features were found in the NFC.

The only aspect of the CoP and FLC which was not present in the NFC was voluntary membership. The NFC was required of new faculty, who were granted a one-course release to attend. Because of its expense, the provost insisted that the NFC syllabus contain an attendance policy that stated that non-attendance could result in the absent faculty member being required to teach an additional course in the future. Thus, faculty members were not only required to attend, but the consequence for not attending were also significant. What this means is that there is little absenteeism in the NFC. Although one could imagine some faculty feeling resentful of their required participation, when asked on end-of-semester surveys whether the NFC should continue to be offered to new faculty, 100% of the respondents replied, "yes." This suggests that the voluntary feature of the CoP or FLC may be more flexible if the members of the group coming together—however enthusiastic or not to begin with—are convinced by others in the group that what happens within the group is of beneficial to them. Thus, the NFC may offer an additional type of CoP to Saint-Onge and Wallace's three forms of CoPs: the Obligatory CoP. In examining the role of the CoP in a business context, Saint-Onge and Wallace note that there are informal, supported, and structured CoPs, which differ primarily in terms of their organizational support and their accountability to the organization (Saint-Onge & Wallace, 2003). Even the "structured" CoP, which is highly supported and has specific objectives to be fulfilled by its members, has a membership that, while invited, is, nonetheless, voluntary (Saint-Onge & Wallace, 2003). The NFC offers the possibility that even in a situation where members are required to attend, the benefits of the CoP—the sharing of expertise, the mutual mentoring— can still be attained.

METHODS

Data Collection

This study used end-of-semester surveys and focus groups to analyze the experience of new faculty participating in the NFC from 2016-2019. We secured IRB approval to use existing data in the form of end-of-semester surveys collected yearly by the CETL, and new data collected in focus group interviews after the 2019 NFC (the co-author did not participate in the focus groups). Our research questions were developed based on what we had asked on the existing surveys, though our research questions were more specific. We asked to what extent faculty feel satisfied with the NFC program outcomes concerning the following variables – teaching, research, service, institutional literacy, time management, and goal-setting skills, as well as networking. We also asked whether peers at other institutions have the same kind of opportunities, what the gaps they saw in the program were, and how they could be improved.

Out of 84 participants, 47 completed the end-of-semester survey, with a response rate of almost 56%. In addition, 16 faculty participated in focus groups, 19% of the total participants in the NFC. Table 1 includes the breakdown of participants by cohort.

TABLE 1
**NUMBER OF NFC PARTICIPANTS AND RESPONDENTS TO SURVEYS AND
FOCUS GROUPS**

Year	Total NFC Participants	End of Semester Survey Completion	Focus Group Participants
2016	16	11	4
2017	18	11	2
2018	19	13	4
2019	31	12	6
Total	84	47	16

To recruit focus group participants, the research team sent email invitations to all 84 participants in the NFC. They were given a one-week window to confirm their participation in the study. Out of the 84 faculty members who received a recruitment email, 16 gave their consent and participated in the 45-minute focus group interviews that we recorded and transcribed.

Data Analysis

Once the interviews were transcribed, each author read and coded the transcriptions to find major themes. We then compared our coded documents and highlighted our common themes, which aligned with our focus group questions on teaching, research, institutional literacy, time management, and goal-setting skills, as well as social and professional networking. Although our major themes were predetermined, our coding process discovered subthemes. In the teaching theme, for example, confidence reframed mindset, and assessment emerged as subthemes. For research, subthemes of productivity, organization, and collaboration were evident. For service, we identified minor subthemes of 'saying no' and managing time. Comments about institutional literacy and social and professional networking coalesced broadly under the theme of building community. After the focus group themes and subthemes were identified and categorized, we then coded the written survey results. We discovered that aspects of the NFC that were found to be beneficial or unhelpful were remarkably aligned with our focus group themes. Thus, we were able to categorize the written survey comments under many of the same themes and subthemes we found in the focus groups.

FINDINGS

We analyze the themes we found in the focus groups and surveys, emphasizing how participants' interactions with one another encouraged the development of co-mentoring communities of practice that enhanced their experience and knowledge.

Teaching

The NFC emphasized course development using backward design. Participants came into the NFC with a wide range of teaching experience and pedagogical training. Some had never heard of backward design, and others used it in their courses. Although their reactions to spending time on learning outcomes and course design varied widely, some faculty found it very helpful to have time to think about future courses and to discuss these issues with their peers. One participant said that one of the aspects they found the most helpful was "the opportunity to spend time in class and with peers developing objectives and thinking more deeply about my course objectives." Another commented that "the experience other people have about designing a course" was beneficial. Finally, one shared that "opportunities to meaningfully reflect on

teaching practices - learning from one another through the process" was one of the greatest benefits of the NFC overall. Discussing teaching and learning with their peers created a sense of shared investment in their work as they learned from each other about teaching.

These comments reveal the importance of conversations about teaching in the NFC. Offering new faculty multiple perspectives from their colleagues and new teaching strategies allowed them to think more carefully about who they are as teachers, and how they want their classrooms to work. The ability to take time out from their otherwise hectic schedules as new faculty allowed them to begin and/or continue to become self-reflective and effective teachers: to enhance the "know-how" that communities of practice encourage. Being able to do this work with their peers offered community support, created conversation partners, and emphasized the value that the institution places on good teaching.

Research and Creative Activity

The professional activities of NFC participants vary widely. We invite our office of research to come to discuss the institutional resources and support available to them. However, the primary focus in the NFC is to offer new faculty strategies they can use to plan their time effectively so that they can make time for their professional activities. Nevertheless, in having these conversations, we have discovered that new faculty also gain a greater understanding of their peers' research activities, which has highlighted potential research collaborations and other activities to keep them on track. During the first year of the NFC, one of the participants shared a "research pipeline" strategy he learned in graduate school. Faculty found it so helpful, that it has been shared with all of the cohorts. In the focus group, Nkindiyanjye stated

> So really the most practical time management piece that I took away—I think it was Sam in our cohort who had a flow chart of the research pipeline—I think people still use it and I gravitated towards that and I liked that as a tool. So, I recreated that not only as an 8.5 X 11 but gigantic on my wall with my whiteboard. Each presentation, each book chapter, each article goes through the process and I can visually see [where in the process my work is], so just having that idea of 'oh, there is this pipeline,' and I knew that but it's keeping multiple priorities happening all at once and multiple products of scholarship in different phases…"

Multiple faculty members have visited Nkindiyanjye's office to see how she uses the pipeline and talked with her about its usefulness. Several faculty in the focus groups commented on the helpfulness of the research pipeline.

Faculty in the focus groups also talked about time management strategies and the importance of developing strategies to maintain productivity. Victoria commented that it was helpful for her to find "like-minded people to help hold you accountable." She now has "someone in my department who had very similar research goals and we are sort of continuing to support each other in making time for that. Checking in regularly." Imelda highlighted the importance of a writing group for her experience. She added, "We had the opportunity to start a writing group with people in our cohort, I jumped on that opportunity." Having others to discuss research strategies and challenges, along with peers to support them, was a helpful way for new faculty to create strategies for research success.

In addition, many participants highlighted how cross-disciplinary conversations were beneficial. Isabella shared, "I think there were a lot of networking opportunities out of the colloquium, to have potential research collaborations just by getting to know people. And even if collaborations don't come directly out of the colloquium, like if we never work on a research project together, that doesn't mean that you don't know someone that now knowing me can help us make connections through people that we met in the colloquium, too." And, Elisa said, "I think, one of the things that were mentioned in the colloquium, and I think it was a great idea, are you know obviously in the colloquium you have individuals that are from different disciplines but we oftentimes don't realize, although our disciplines are different, how intertwined they are. And so, you know, getting with individuals from different departments, different colleges, and seeing how you can, you know, work together."

Just as with teaching, having an opportunity to talk with peers about their research and the strategies they can use to manage their time is important to new faculty. Indeed, they gain new perspectives, acquire knowledge about possible collaborations, and give one another advice about possible organizational strategies for productivity in their research/creative activities. This is the kind of brainstorming and problem-solving that is characteristic of communities of practice.

Service and Institutional Literacy

Service expectations can be particularly challenging for new faculty because they want to be good university citizens and they also need to protect their time for the kind of work—scholarship, creative activity, good teaching—that will move them towards tenure. Learning about the structure of the institution—who is responsible for what—as well as hearing how their colleagues were handling service requests and responsibilities helped new faculty shape an approach to service that, to the extent possible, could be beneficial to their careers.

Focus group participants noted, for instance, that the NFC helped them build confidence in saying "no" to service and shaping the service they wanted to do. Louisa shared that she appreciated our conversations about service, "because as a new faculty member, especially as a non-tenure track, so like the bottom of the pecking order. I appreciated having [the facilitator] say, 'It's okay to say no, protect your time,' and she gave us a trick to say, 'I know you want me to be successful and I just don't think that taking this on is going to move me in that direction right now.' I used that and it worked, so I appreciated that."

Faculty also appreciated the knowledge they gained about the institution itself. Over the course of the semester, several guests visit the NFC to talk about their responsibilities. Meeting other faculty and administrators has been particularly helpful for new faculty as they try to get to know the institution. One faculty member commented on the guests that visited the NFC: "They helped me better understand MCU, its culture, how it works, and how I fit into it. It makes me feel like I can navigate campus and all the details better. It also provided me with knowledge of whom to turn to for help when I can't navigate campus on my own."

Another commented,

> It was great to have an introduction to the various organizations on campus and to know how everything works. After the colloquium, I feel like I know more about the university than some of my tenured colleagues. Some of the information is useful immediately (e.g., the office of research), and some are indirectly useful now, but will be very useful in a few years (e.g., Faculty Senate). I feel like I understand the university much better than my previous institution.

One faculty member made an explicit connection between meeting people from across campus and their ability to serve the institution: "The opportunity to meet faculty from around campus regularly was extremely valuable. The connections I've forged help me to be of greater service to students and the university in that I have a better grasp of the university's organizational structure."

Just as we discovered with teaching and research/creative activity, having conversations with peers, NFC guests, and others about service was also helpful to the NFC participants, particularly in instilling in them the confidence to shape their contributions to service in their departments and to consider how they can best become contributing members of the university community. In this way, new faculty develop institutional knowledge so that they understand how to participate in the institution's shared practices.

Building Community

It is clear from our focus groups and surveys that the conversations that take place in the NFC about teaching, research/creative activity, service, as well as institutional literacy are important for new faculty, and offer them an opportunity to reflect on their new roles at our institution. However, by far the most powerful feature of the NFC is the opportunity for new faculty to meet their peers from across campus and develop relationships with them. Given the propensity for faculty to become siloed in their

departments/colleges, the opportunity to get to know other faculty from around campus is invaluable and contributed significantly to participants' sense of belonging at the institution.

For example, discovering that others experienced similar challenges was important. In his focus group, Joseph talked about how his main interests while earning his Ph.D. were research and being a practitioner in his field; teaching was simply something that one had to do if one was going to be a professor. However, once he arrived at the institution, he realized that he could not count on his luck to be successful in the classroom. The NFC was helpful to him not only because it clarified for him what he needed to do to be successful at the institution, but also because "hearing it from everyone else, it was nice knowing that because I wasn't taught as a teacher at all, and it was nice being able to hear from other people that you are not alone." Louisa found it helpful "to hear what was and wasn't working for the other faculty members so I could make…. late assignment policies and attendance policies and those kinds of things, so I appreciated having that focus group every week that I could get feedback from." Another summed up many other comments nicely:

> The number one, most beneficial part of the colloquium is connecting to other new faculty on campus. If I got nothing else from it, that made it worth the time and effort. I also appreciated the visitors we had, I think that was a great way to get us better connected to campus and helped me to have a greater understanding of the institution. I also appreciated the times that we were troubleshooting and discussing what was going on in our classes/departments.

The theme of community building was also emphasized in survey responses. When asked what aspects of the NFC were the most beneficial, faculty frequently commented on the importance of talking with others who were experiencing similar issues. One participant noted that their favorite thing about the NFC was "being able to meet regularly with other novice faculty members who are facing similar issues and concerns that I am facing." Another remarked, "networking with other new faculty members was the most beneficial for me. Some weeks, especially early in the semester, were especially stressful, and having the ability to talk about issues with others in a similar position was helpful." Another stated that their "favorite part was the structured opportunity to reflect and brainstorm with fellow new faculty." One participant "really enjoyed the times when we could discuss as a group how things were going and what our expectations were, roadblocks, etc. It was nice forming a cohort with other faculty in our position." One comment ties all of these aspects of the NFC together: the value of the NFC was "meeting other faculty from across campus. Interviewing more experienced faculty within my department. Being able to ask questions about the inner workings of UNI (and the tenure process, etc.). Having a space in which we are encouraged to reflect on our teaching and share how things are going. Being a first-year professor is hard, and this colloquium was helpful on a sort of support group level."

Indeed, repeatedly, participants commented on how important it was to have the opportunity to meet others from around campus. For some, this meant making friends with whom they could socialize. For others, it helped connect them to research projects. In a focus group, Addison remarked that the NFC "did help set up a social network on campus. I made several friends that I have kept in touch with, which has been helpful when looking for someone to share frustrations with or seek advice on things. I also was connected to a few small research or graduate student projects from people that I met through the NFC, opportunities I wouldn't have found without the NFC." Alceria agreed: "...I have made great social connections. So, we have a regular happy hour on Fridays at [a local bar], usually around four-ish, and you guys are welcome to come out any time… We are usually there, but I have [also] made some really good connections [there with people] in other departments that have been professional and you know friendships, all across the board, and I am grateful for it."

NFC participants also made specific references to how the NFC helped them learn from one another, comments that confirm how the NFC functions as a co-mentoring community of practice. In a survey, one faculty member commented, "I enjoyed meeting people who were in the same boat as me, and meeting important people from around campus was beneficial. I also liked our small group discussions where we

picked each other's brains on how to deal with particular issues such as handling problematic students or revitalizing boring class sessions." One faculty member commented that "learn[ing] from colleagues through the discussion and interaction" was the most valuable aspect of the NFC.

Our findings confirm how the NFC operates as a community of practice in which new faculty function as co-mentors for one another, even in a situation where the participants are required to attend. This may be because, before the experience of the NFC, the new faculty did not have any sense of how beneficial spending time with their new colleagues would be. This suggests that the need for participants who come voluntarily to the group because they have a passion for the group's focus may not be necessary for the creation of a CoP if the activities of the group demonstrate their value to the participants. What participants discover is that collaborating with their peers to solve problems and develop social and professional networks allows them to make the most of their new roles.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Findings from this study have implications in the area of mentorship for new faculty within a CoP. Our research shows that co-mentoring within a CoP results in new faculty growth and self-confidence in all aspects of their new roles. Three critical implications have been drawn from the findings. They include (a) the importance of cross-faculty collaboration and interdisciplinary discussions; (b) the benefits of establishing a mentoring community that reduces isolation; and (c) the need for creating continuous professional development programs within institutions of higher education.

The findings validate the theory of mentoring developed by Higgins & Kram (2001), which emphasizes the importance of "developmental networks" where mentoring occurs in many different contexts at any given time, and not only in the traditional dyadic relationship of a more experienced mentor and a less experienced mentee. The CoP would be one example of developmental networks, as Higgins and Kram (2001) defined them.

Creating Opportunities for Cross-Faculty Collaboration and Interdisciplinary Discussions

Faculty careers require joint endeavors and broad knowledge in different areas. Hence, new faculty need to find colleagues not only in their departments but campus-wide and be acclimated to the kind of collaborative work they will be required to do. New faculty also need socialization in the institution and a community of peers to be successful in their roles (Boice, 2000; Smith et al., 2016). Co-mentoring within a CoP model provides a functional structure conducive to acclimating faculty to their roles. To create successful CoPs for new faculty, however, institutions may need to rethink traditional values, where "competition and individual achievement are valued over cooperation and collective success" (Smith et al., 2016, Implications). Instead, institutions will need to 'value and reward' faculty collaborations and encourage and support faculty community-building efforts (Rees & Shaw, 2014).

Building Community for Enhanced Faculty Performance

It is often assumed that higher education institutions are structured to create a community by having departments where like-minded individuals come together. However, it is often the case that new faculty experience isolation in their workplaces, which makes it difficult to acclimate to the institution (Kensington-Miller, 2017; Morgan, 2014). CoPs reduce isolation and create opportunities for cross-faculty engagement and relationship-building efforts (Calderwood & Klaf, 2014; Smith et al., 2016). A CoP like the NFC can help new faculty create connections across campus, make friends, and discover possibilities for interdisciplinary collaborations in research activity. Using institutional resources to support new faculty development beyond a few days of orientation is beneficial to the faculty and the institution itself (Kensington-Miller, 2017; Smith et al., 2016; Rees & Shaw, 2014). Supporting the development of CoPs where new faculty collaborate and mentor one another can nurture faculty who are fully engaged and provide support for one another to promote commonality and a sense of belonging.

Providing Resources and Support for Continuous Faculty Professional Development

Institutional support for mentoring new faculty is crucial. Indeed, the benefits of new faculty CoPs and co-mentoring suggest that ongoing mentoring for faculty development would also be beneficial. Certainly, many institutions have supported Centers for Teaching and Learning that include aspects of faculty development beyond teaching, like leadership training. Were the practice of continuing career development for faculty the norm in higher education, institutions might avoid the "midcareer malaise" that some post-tenure faculty experience (Monaghan, 2017; Rees & Shaw, 2014). In addition, more robust mentoring can also help faculty transition into retirement (Van Ummerson et al., 2013). Indeed, Smith et al. (2013) underscored the relevance of continuous faculty development and the importance of mentoring at all levels for junior, mid-career, and senior faculty for various purposes that include tenure, promotion, reflection, and rejuvenation. Moreover, the authors emphasized the importance of the active involvement of institutions in mentoring faculty throughout their careers.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

While the study results indicate participants' experience of the NFC was overwhelmingly positive, some areas would further enhance our findings. When asked on end-of-semester surveys whether the NFC should continue to be offered to new faculty, 100% of the respondents replied, "yes." Nonetheless, participants had many suggestions for ways to improve the NFC. For instance, some faculty spend much of their time doing 1-1 teaching or teaching large sections, and they noted that it would have been beneficial to have some sessions where their modes of teaching were specifically addressed. Some faculty complained about having to do readings or wanting the NFC to focus more on research and less on teaching. It was challenging to figure out how to meet the needs of all of the new faculty in the context of the NFC.

There is a call for more research on how to improve the NFC so that it can help develop mentoring programs that addressed the specific needs of all new faculty. In addition, further research on the perceptions of academic leaders (department heads and deans) on the NFC could be helpful to determine more clearly the benefits of the NFC for the institution. Finally, a longitudinal study focusing specifically on the long-term benefits of the NFC could underscore the value of such programs for new faculty development, especially given their expense.

CONCLUSION

Compared to traditional faculty orientation programs in most institutions, the approach of the NFC is unique. Creating the context for the development of a collaborative, co-mentoring CoP allows new faculty to construct and share knowledge, develop their identities as faculty members, create social and professional networks, and cultivate a sense of belonging. Programs like the NFC help new faculty 'learn the ropes together' in a way that sets them up for future success. Many institutions would benefit from such programs, which we have shown are well worth the time, effort, and resources it takes to make them work.

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