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Mentoring Fellow Business Librarians: One Model from BLINC

"The friend Sticks close, a Mentor worthy of his charge"
William Cowper (1731-1800), from Task, Book II, line 595

Back in March 2003, at the very first meeting of what would become BLINC: Business Librarianship in North Carolina, the assembled librarians identified **mentoring** as a worthy goal. (See "[BLINC of an Eye](#)" from Academic BRASS, Vol. 1, no. 3 for the origins of that group.) Many of us wished that we had had mentors in our early days as business librarians. Given the specialized nature of business librarianship, the unique aspects of business research and the sometimes isolated work of business librarians (in many libraries, there is only one business specialist), mentoring and business librarianship seemed like a good combination.

It took us a while, though, to get a mentoring program going – not because it was hard to do, but because BLINC had other projects to tackle first. One early project was to become a section of the North Carolina Library Association (NCLA); that happened early in 2004. Another was to develop several programs for the NCLA/SELA combined conference in Charlotte last November. At the conference, there was a panel discussion sponsored by a different section on the subject of mentoring. One panelist, a public librarian from Charlotte, has a mentor from the Institute of Museum and Library Services in Washington, D.C.; those two had been paired up via the Urban Libraries Council's Executive Leadership Institute. That panelist's example of **two librarians from different libraries** working together as a mentor and mentee gave BLINC the impetus to set up our own mentoring program.

Most existing mentoring programs in academic libraries focus on getting recently-hired librarians through the tenure process. In these cases, an older, more experienced librarian is usually paired with a younger librarian. The BLINC mentoring program, however, is based on **peer-**

level relationships from **different libraries**. For example, the business librarian at a library in one city might mentor a business librarian from a different city. Also unlike the tenure-mentoring model, our mentor/mentee pairs would **set their own goals** for the relationship. Some mentor/mentee pairs might decide to focus on resources; others might focus on library instruction and faculty outreach.

Possible topics or goals of the mentorship could include:

- reference resources;
- collection development;
- promotion and marketing of one's services to local businesses, students, and/or faculty;
- library instruction on the topic of business research;
- methods of training general reference librarians to handle business reference questions;
- options for continuing education;
- avenues for getting involved in professional associations (like BRASS);
- publishing;
- etc.

While the goals of each mentoring pair may vary, BLINC wanted to establish some **guidelines** for the roles and responsibilities of each mentor and mentee, as well as to establish confidentiality as a characteristic of these relationships. Confidentiality could be important in BLINC mentoring, since the mentor and mentee might discuss management or budgeting issues at their libraries. We've included these guidelines as the [Appendix](#) below. The guidelines are based in part on a review of this topic in library literature, although we modified what we found to reflect our needs and situations.

There are currently three BLINC mentorships running: 2 pairs of academic librarians and one pair of public librarians. The authors were the first pair to be formed. So far, we've talked over the phone, chatted over Instant Messenger, and visited each other's libraries. In the course of these interactions we've identified our numerous roles as academic librarians, established goals and priorities for our relationship, and begun a process of teaching and sharing that will fulfill the mentee's identified needs.

Getting the BLINC mentoring program started turned out to be pretty easy. We ended up with **three steps**:

1. Establish guidelines;
2. Recruit mentors and mentees, and match them up;
3. Review the program occasionally (ex. someone needs to check on how things are going with everyone involved once in a while; the guidelines might need adjustments; etc.)

Since the BLINC mentoring program is new, we haven't gotten to step 3 yet. Perhaps in the future we'll publish an assessment of what happened with the various mentorships.

Appendix: BLINC Mentoring Program Guidelines

Communication Options

- In person, email, chat, and/or phone.
- Most of the communication will probably not be in person (unless the mentee and mentor work or live close to one another.) However, the pair should try to meet in person to begin the relationship, and should visit each other's workplace early in the relationship.

Mentor's Responsibilities

- Create a welcoming environment for the mentee.
- Listen well and respect the mentee's opinions and contributions.
- Define, with the mentee, the scope of the mentoring relationship and establish limits, where appropriate. (For example, the mentor may not be interested in co-authoring a research article, but could help find someone who is.)
- Promote a positive, professional attitude about librarianship.
- Respect confidential and sensitive information.
- Be willing to use examples and illustrative anecdotes (good and bad) from one's professional career.
- Remember that although you may become a friend, a successful mentor is not the same as a friend.
- Assess the progress of the relationship periodically.

Mentor's Responsibilities

- Take responsibility for your career goals.
- Listen well, consider the mentor's point of view and remain open to new ideas.
- Respect confidential and sensitive information.

- Define, with the mentor, the scope of the mentoring relationship and establish limits, where appropriate.
- Identify specific learning needs or areas for development (the mentee may want to prioritize these.)
- Assess the progress of the relationship periodically.

Administration of the Mentoring Program

- Beyond these guidelines, each mentor and mentee will decide what they hope to accomplish, how much time each will put into the relationship, and if the mentorship should at some point be concluded.
- Both the mentor and mentee should be open to switching partners if the match doesn't work out for whatever reason.
- The officers of BLINC will help pair up mentors and mentees. They, as well as veteran mentors and mentees, will provide any guidance when asked for.