

6-14-2024

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Recommended Citation

Brown, Tonya M. and Boyd, Ruth (2024) "An Exploration of the Mentoring Experiences of Ethnically Diverse Women Faculty at an HBCU: A Qualitative Case Study," *Journal of Research Initiatives*: Vol. 8: Iss. 3, Article 5.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.uncfsu.edu/jri/vol8/iss3/5>

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An Exploration of the Mentoring Experiences of Ethnically Diverse Women Faculty at an HBCU: A Qualitative Case Study

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Keywords

HBCU, Mentoring, Women Faculty, Diversity, Academic Success

Cover Page Footnote

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An Exploration of the Mentoring Experiences of Ethnically Diverse Women Faculty at an HBCU: A Qualitative Case Study

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Abstract

This qualitative case study explored the professional and personal growth benefits for women faculty who engage in mentoring relationships at a historically black college or university (HBCU). Data were collected using one-on-one interviews with full- and part-time women faculty members who served as research participants. The participants provided data about their experiences with mentoring, including details such as the frequency of their meetings with mentoring partners, the preferred method of communication, and the areas of support resulting from the mentoring relationship. Findings indicated that mentoring relationships positively enhanced the experience for women faculty teaching in full-time or adjunct positions in higher education. Mentoring relationships provide support, guidance, and even retention of the mentee. The findings also suggested the importance of structured mentoring programs developed and supported by universities for women faculty.

Keywords: HBCU, mentoring, women faculty, diversity, academic success

Introduction

Mentoring employees for efficient onboarding, facilitating professional development, and contributing to employee retention and its implementation in higher education settings are familiar. Early research by Nye (1994) found that mentoring positively impacted faculty careers in higher education, particularly among minorities and women. Subsequent research by Gibson (2006) concurred, "Mentoring has been proposed in higher education to enhance orientation, socialization, and career outcomes of faculty and, specific to women faculty, to facilitate increased equity" (p.732). The unique challenges faced by women in the higher education workplace, such as achieving work-life balance, addressing bias and stereotyping, and navigating

the pathway to tenure and promotion, can be facilitated by mentoring relationships, thus creating a greater connection to the college or university (Rhee & Sigler, 2015; Toffoletti & Starr, 2016).

As Gibson (2006) determined long ago, "Individual characteristics of the mentor are associated with willingness to mentor, altruism, positive affectivity, and prior experience with mentoring, while situational factors include the organizational reward systems and opportunities for interaction on the job" (p.732). The engagement of mentors can be integral to assisting novice faculty members as they navigate multiple challenges, including the delivery of course material and the facilitation of class discussions focused on current events, including contemporary topics such as social unrest, police brutality, political rhetoric, and racial injustice. These may be particularly difficult to navigate without guidance from a trusted mentor. The academic classroom space requires faculty members to demonstrate skill in managing class discussions on complex topics with sensitivity, compassion, and respect for different perspectives. Diverse women faculty often have even more significant challenges to overcome in higher education. As Conway (2018) found:

Female faculty, especially African American females, must avoid assuming that people will assist them because they are new to the institution. In some cases, the women faculty may be seen as outsiders because they did not attend the university where they teach. (p. 4)

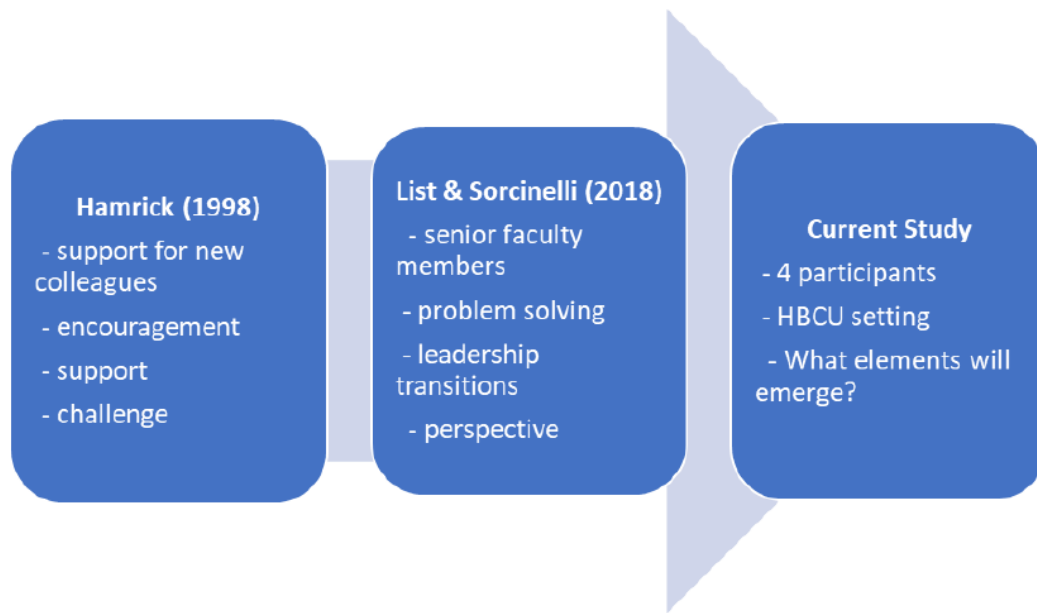
Significance of the Study

While Conway (2018) emphasizes that mentoring can positively influence the retention of women faculty in higher education, there are many obstacles to securing mentoring relationships for junior women faculty members, including the availability of engaged mentors, the prevalence of informal versus formal mentoring relationships, the time required for both, and the art of engagement and active participation in mentoring relationships. This study was designed to elevate the voices of diverse women faculty members to understand the impact mentoring relationships have had on their careers thus far. One unique setting in which mentoring relationships can be explored is in Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCUs); therefore, the research question guiding this study was: *What is the specific impact*

mentoring relationships have on the longevity and professional success of women faculty members at an HBCU?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is based upon the early work of Hamrick (1998), a qualitative study of 26 women full professors at Iowa State University. In this study, participants described three work roles that emerged at their institution: disciplinary experts, mentors, and change agents (Hamrick, 1998). Mentorship was regarded as "support [for] new colleagues and prospective colleagues - often but not exclusively women colleagues" (p. 8). Participants spoke extensively about people within the campus community who "had encouraged, supported, and challenged them in their careers" (p. 9). The identified mentoring elements included significant people who acted as professional role models, offered opportunities and laid a foundation for others' success (Hamrick, 1998). Later research by List and Sorcinelli (2018) also found a positive connection between mentoring and women faculty members' success in higher education. In this study, the researchers expanded the exploration of how mentoring benefits novice faculty members, including senior faculty members engaged in a mentor-mentee relationship. Although gathered data was from a slightly different demographic, List and Sorcinelli (2018) found that mentoring provided a "forum for professional problem solving among women academic leaders, including decisions on leadership transitions; a safe space, sounding board and source of perspective" (p. 11). Figure 1 illustrates how this current study sought to build upon this conceptual foundation to examine the benefits of mentor-mentee relationships at a particular Historically Black College or University.

Figure 1*Conceptual Framework***Literature Review**

This research explored the professional and personal growth benefits for women faculty who engage in professional mentor and mentee relationships. The anticipated goals were to determine, evaluate, and assess mentors' positive contributing factors for women faculty. The following literature provided the foundation for this project.

Understanding Mentoring

Leadership theories call upon organizations to invest in their employees to further their development, and mentoring is a practical, low-cost way to do so (Ramalho, 2014). Mentorship is rooted in two individuals cultivating a relationship that includes trust, openness, and the investment of time. As the relationship evolves and grows, the mentor positively enhances the mentee's career and personal growth development. Allen (2003) noted that mentors play a vital role within organizations, using their institutional knowledge and vast experience to support junior members of the organization. Furthering an organization's understanding of mentoring from a relational perspective is integral to establishing systems of support that benefit mentees, mentors, and the organization (Eby & Robertson, 2020). Golden et al. (2017) discussed the

significance of the faculty mentor as one who "[helps] the mentee to convert their possibilities and potential into tangible outcomes that allow self-sufficiency and the preparation required to move to the next level of accomplishment" (p. 492). Mentoring relationships allow mentees to develop their professional identity and personal competence (Love et al., 2020).

Formal Versus Informal Mentoring

Formal mentoring programs are typically tied to organizational objectives, in which a program manager facilitates specific goals and success metrics within a specific time frame (Insala, 2021). Processes are formalized, often requiring the mentee to apply for a program to be matched with a mentor. The organization often trains mentors to reach particular goals, and a timeline for the mentee-mentor partnership may be established (Herrity, 2022). Mentees may benefit from this program because it provides opportunities for short- and long-term development. However, this type of mentoring relationship may sometimes feel like a burden, one that increases feelings of anxiety among the mentees.

Relationships that form naturally often have unique bonds, which can also be true when mentoring relationships develop and evolve informally. Diamond et al. (2019) an informal mentoring relationship is free of the pressure that may result from a structured mentoring program, resulting in a degree of comfort for the mentee. However, it also places more responsibility on the novice to "recognize specific areas of need and seek guidance in particular areas" (p. 51). After identifying these areas of improvement, the mentee often approaches the mentor to receive tips, advice, and other information.

Mentorship for Women in Higher Education

Women faculty members may experience feelings of isolation on their campuses. Commenting on their own experiences within the campus community, List and Sorcinelli (2018) noted, "As women leaders we were recognized as successful in our respective positions, but we were leading in isolation" (p. 1). Feelings of isolation may result in mental health challenges, including depression and anxiety, which may lead to job dissatisfaction and negatively impact job performance. The COVID-19 pandemic compounded feelings of isolation for many, particularly those juggling various roles within work and family structures (Bzdok & Dunbar, 2022). Traditionally, women play a significant role in their children's lives. Managing full-time

teaching responsibilities while caring for children who were home and engaged in virtual schooling increased feelings of isolation for many (Nye, 2023). Engaging in mentor-mentee relationships can provide women faculty members with a safe space to discuss these concerns (List & Sorcinelli, 2018).

Mentoring relationships for faculty in higher education are unique due to the "independent nature of academicians [and] the individual differences among participants" (Cordie et al., 2020, p. 149). Acknowledging these differences, it is noted that women faculty members may engage in either informal or formal mentoring relationships, both to their benefit. Conway (2018) found that informal mentoring might be in simple interactions, such as brief daily conversations, guiding critical career processes such as tenure/promotion, and grant writing. Johnson and Smith (2019) concurred, stating, "Although advantageous for all employees, mentoring is particularly helpful to women for addressing the myriad barriers to career advancement" (p. 1). Improving the mentoring process for women in higher education can significantly impact their careers and personal lives (Chesler & Chesler, 2002).

Mentorship for Women Faculty of Color

Just as each mentoring relationship is unique in terms of gender roles and level of formality, race may add a layer of complexity to the mentor-mentee exchange. "Female faculty of color need mentoring opportunities that recognize, validate, and nurture their perspectives and experiences as assets rather than liabilities to their work" (Hsieh & Nguyen, 2020, p. 169). In an article appearing in *Inside Higher Ed*, Flaherty (2020) wrote that faculty of color expressed frustration at some campuses' practice of making hiring choices to reach diversity goals and then ignoring the social isolation that educators feel upon arriving on campus. If institutions state a commitment to a diverse faculty, Richard Reddick, an associate dean for equity, community engagement, and outreach at the University of Texas, says, "they'd better bring the resources, mentoring, ... and senior-scholar partnering that will make these scholars viable for promotion and tenure" (Flaherty, 2020).

Although this study focused on women faculty teaching at an HBCU, it is significant to acknowledge the positive impact mentoring relationships have on other campuses, including Predominantly White Institutions. Wright-Mair (2020) highlighted, "Although predominantly

white institutions (PWIs) were not designed for racially minoritized populations, many racially minoritized faculty members end up employed by these institutions" (p. 2). One strategy to support minority faculty, particularly women faculty of color, at PWIs is the development of mentoring relationships. Fries-Britt and Snider (2015) found, "These relationships have the potential of removing feelings of isolation that many undergraduate and graduates, as well as faculty of color, experience at PWIs" (p. 4). These relationships refer to the professional and emotional support women faculty and faculty of color find, who may pay it forward to women students and students of color. The premise is that women faculty of color who benefit from a positive mentoring relationship will likely invest in mentoring relationships with minority students experiencing challenges navigating their academic journey. Assensoh (2021) encourages campuses to foster this sense of community, stating that Black faculty and students who find meaningful relationships can weather the difficulties in other areas of campus life.

Faculty Mentorship at HBCUs

There are over 100 Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the United States, providing a unique lens through which to view the topic of mentorship for women faculty members. Ireland (2020) noted that female students tend to outnumber male students on HBCU campuses, and Golden et al. (2017) found that when HBCU students encounter faculty members of color, "this may be the first time the student has ever had an African American instructor. For many students, this may be the first time that they have met an African American person with an advanced or terminal degree" (pp. 491-492). It is in the institution's best interest to recruit and retain diverse students *and* faculty members, advocating policies that contribute to the success of diverse groups.

Hendrickson and Haynes (2019) outlined obstacles faced by HBCU faculty members who wish to advance in the profession, including lack of institutional support for navigating research, grant writing, and excessive teaching loads. The researchers advocate for institutional change, a "vision from the top" that assists faculty members in building relationships and that "create a nurturing environment that supports and encourages growth, empowers others, and ... [is] transparent" in its communication (Hendrickson & Haynes, 2019, p. 13). As Conway (2018) emphasized, when female faculty members find a good "fit" in a mentoring relationship, it

allows the mentee to progress at a higher rate of speed. It assists them in navigating challenges with confidence.

Methodology

A qualitative case study was used in this research. Johnson and Christensen (2020) explain that qualitative research illuminates human thought and behavior and is personal and social. It allows for a wide-angle approach to research, the ability to visit with individuals in natural settings, and collect data from in-depth interviews in order to better understand a phenomenon. Using a case study approach allows a researcher to examine individual cases in-depth and then allows for a cross-case comparison to analyze similarities and differences in the experience of each faculty member (Johnson & Christensen, 2020). This study's cases consisted of women faculty members at an HBCU in the northeastern United States. Examining mentorship systems this way provided a "holistic description" of participants' experience (Johnson & Christensen, 2020, p. 413).

Participants

This study's population consisted of women faculty members employed at a particular HBCU. A convenience sampling technique drew a participant sample from this population. Convenience samples include individuals "who are available, volunteer, or can be easily recruited" (Johnson & Christensen, 2020, p. 253). Four individuals consented to be interviewed to share their perspectives on engaging in a mentor-mentee relationship. Table 1 provides an overview of participant demographics and characteristics.

Table 1*Participant Demographics*

Participant (Pseudonyms assigned)	Gender	Race	Higher Education Experience	Faculty Rank	Academic Department
Laila	Female	East Indian	10 years	Full	English
Tina	Female	African American	10 years	Associate	Sociology
Maya	Female	East Indian	10 years	Adjunct	English
Rosalyn	Female	White	10 years	Adjunct	English

Results

The results of this qualitative case study are presented first as individual cases to share each participant's unique experiences. A summary table of individual experiences will follow. This section will culminate with the results of the cross-case analysis, identifying common themes and experiences among the participants.

Case 1: Laila - From India to America

As a young girl, Laila grew up in India, where girls are not encouraged or expected to advance in education beyond high school. The cultural expectation is for girls to graduate high school and marry. However, as a young girl, she saw the world through the globe and books. Laila loved reading, and her parents supported her desire to learn and eventually teach. As a result, Laila was awarded a national scholarship to attend Capital University in Koderma, Jharkhand, India. After completing her college degree, she was allowed to pursue her graduate studies in the United Kingdom (UK). She started her teaching career prior to coming to America.

While in the UK, Laila completed her graduate and doctoral studies. She holds a Doctor of Philosophy in English.

Upon arriving in America, Laila accepted her first full-time faculty position at this HBCU. Her daughter, who is now in elementary school, was born after Laila and her husband began their professional careers in this community. Laila is a tenured English Department faculty member with ten years of experience. Her primary focus as a full-time and tenured professor is teaching World Literature, Gender and Women's Studies, and Colonial and Post-Victorian Literature. Laila stated that she is also deeply committed to research and service.

Mentoring & Experiences on Campus

Laila's teaching experience while pursuing graduate studies in the UK did not prepare her for teaching in America or at an HBCU in particular. She stated, "I wasn't prepared to teach in the American culture or within the culture of an HBCU." Early in her career, Laila took the initiative to find mentors outside the University to assist her. She said that she started with her former professors in the UK and colleagues at other universities to serve as her mentors. Laila enlisted assistance from Mentor A, her former professor in the UK, and from Mentor B, a colleague at another American university. Although Laila is a woman of color, she immediately recognized that she needed support navigating the unique culture at an HBCU.

Consistent with women in the workplace across professions, Laila recognized early in her career that challenges were unique to women, including work-life balance, navigating tenure and promotion, pressure to prioritize family responsibilities, and career obligations. For instance, she experienced an academic year when her department chair scheduled meetings at the end of the day, negatively impacting her time to pick up her daughter from daycare. In contrast, her male colleagues did not have this challenge and did not see a need to change the department meeting time to accommodate female faculty who were also mothers. Specifically, Laila's colleague, Mentor B, supported creating a safe space to discuss these challenges that are often unique to women. Therefore, Laila could use her voice at her current institution to influence a change in meeting times and her voice at home to request support that allowed her to stay on a path of professional success.

Another challenge Laila experienced was that her mentor, her former professor, Mentor A, helped her navigate the complexity of publishing research in a professional journal. Laila stated, “[I] submitted research to an international journal and my research was repeatedly denied publication. I believed the reviewers did not understand my research and denied me in error.” Consequently, she worked with Mentor A to interpret the feedback from the reviewers of her research, make changes, and re-submit the research, finally resulting in publication.

The final challenges Laila experienced were situations with students, including plagiarism, poor attendance, tardiness, and disruptive behavior. Mentor B helped her to navigate these cultural obstacles. Laila is a native of India, and the cultural expectation for college students is the opposite of these behaviors. Therefore, Laila stated she "was shocked when she first encountered these challenges with students." Her mentor, who is American and has completed all degrees in America, was able to provide Laila with guidance and solutions. For instance, I will note an attendance policy in the course syllabus, work with the university academic misconduct committee, and build relationships with students to build a culture in the classroom that encourages punctuality and respect.

Description of Mentor

- Laila described her mentors using the following words:
- Precise
- Responsive
- Encouraging
- Supportive

Outcomes of Mentorship to Date

The outcome of the mentorship relationship to date is that Laila believes she has benefited from having two mentors. However, she believes her current institution should provide a structured mentoring program for women faculty since neither mentor is on her campus. Discovering the benefits of mentorship that she has experienced, Laila pursues opportunities to mentor junior women faculty because she has developed a passion for supporting women faculty on her campus.

Case 2: Tina - From PWI to HBCU

Tina, an African American woman, was raised by a single mother and leveraged higher education to transform her life. Today, Tina is a single mother passionate about her career, grateful for her degree attainment from three PWIs (Predominately White Institutions), and fiercely dedicated to her only child, her daughter. Tina holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Criminal Justice, a Master of Arts degree in Sociology, and a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Criminology. Tina is an Associate Professor of Sociology at this HBCU, with twelve years of experience in higher education.

After completing her doctoral degree in Criminology, Tina accepted a faculty position in sociology at her current institution. Although she is an African American woman, the transition to teaching at an HBCU required Tina to adjust to embrace many of the traditions that remain at HBCUs. Tina said, "I was not exposed to the nurturing of students, which is a significant aspect of HBCUs." Therefore, Tina had to adjust and take on more of a mentor role in the lives of her students. One strategy that Tina used to develop mentoring relationships with her students was encouraging them to meet with her during office hours, resulting in "a hub for students to hang out," Tina said. Tina's primary focus as an Associate Professor of Sociology is teaching and mentoring students.

Mentoring & Experiences on Campus

Tina's academic training did not prepare her for teaching at an HBCU. One of the cultural norms at an HBCU is comradery amongst peers, which often results in the development of mentoring relationships for faculty. She stated, "I am so independent that I have never pursued formal mentorship, but I have a colleague in my department who is a tenured professor and I depend on him for guidance and consider him a mentor." Tina and her mentor frequently communicate via text and Zoom one to two times per week.

Like other women and African American women's workplace experiences, Tina has encountered colleagues and students who dismiss her academic credentials and refer to her as Ms. Jones or Tina instead of Dr. Jones. Tina stated, "I do need for my peers and students to call me Dr. Jones for personal validation, but hearing my students and colleagues refer to professors who are white as doctor makes me feel devalued in my workplace." Tina believes this happens to

her because she is a woman and African American, teaching in a predominately male department, including three White men, two African American men, two African men, one Asian Female, and one African American woman. Tina is the only African American female professor in her department at the University. Unfortunately, Tina feels that her mentor cannot adequately guide her on this issue because her mentor is a male. However, because he is African American, he can listen and provide emotional support from a racial perspective but cannot identify with the gender discrimination Tina experiences.

Another challenge Tina experiences is balancing her role as a single mother and Associate Professor. Tina stated, "My daughter means everything to me. I love her, but parenting her as a single mother is very challenging." She often talks to her male mentor, who has encouraged her to advocate for herself in the workplace, use resources in the community, and even pursue relationships with women faculty outside of the Sociology department. However, Tina admits, "[I] am a loner and I primarily rely on myself to achieve my professional and personal responsibilities."

Tina's final challenge is knowing her worth in the workplace. Tina shared that there have been times throughout her career when her worth and contribution to the department and the institution were not valued. Therefore, she stated, "I understand the importance of self-efficacy, self-esteem, and self-awareness." Tina believes her mentor has been valuable in guiding her in this challenge as he can relate to this challenge as an African American male professor. Tina and her mentor have bonded over the racial and cultural challenge, which has motivated her to focus on her responsibilities at the University and raising her daughter.

Description of Mentor

Tina described her mentor using the following words:

- Affirming
- Dedicated
- Passionate
- Supportive

Outcomes of Mentorship to Date

The outcome of the mentorship relationship to date is that Tina believes she has benefited from having a mentor. However, since her mentor is a male and a mentor-mentee relationship *she* cultivated, Tina believes the University should provide a structured mentoring program for women faculty on campus. Reflecting on her challenges, Tina believes that structured mentor-mentee relationships would benefit fellow women faculty who are introverted and autonomous and who may need more support to develop relationships with other female colleagues.

Case 3: Rosalyn - From Poverty to Academia

Growing up in rural Pennsylvania, Rosalyn and her family lived in extreme poverty. Despite her own needs and her family's often unmet, Rosalyn discovered a sense of purpose in the Christian church and at school. Rosalyn said, "I grew up poor, blue collar, and often had to choose between school and helping my parents to pay bills." As she evolved and transitioned through adolescence and into young adulthood, education and the Christian church provided a pathway to professional success and financial security. Rosalyn has a Bachelor of Arts in English, a Master of Arts in English, and a Doctor of Education in Higher Education Administration. Even with such dynamic degree attainment, one obstacle Rosalyn initially struggled to navigate was her identification as a lesbian, White, and Christian woman. Rosalyn has persevered and found tremendous joy in her staff and adjunct faculty position at this institution and in her marriage to her wife.

Rosalyn has over a decade of teaching and professional experience in higher education. Rosalyn never imagined working at an HBCU, but when the opportunity arose, she took it. Now, because of her personal background and academic accomplishments, this HBCU is her happy place, and she truly enjoys teaching and working at a Historically Black University despite her minority status in this predominantly African American institution of higher education.

Mentoring & Experiences on Campus

During the day, Rosalyn works in the Office of Student Success and provides advising for first-year transfer students. Her caseload is approximately 1,200 students, and she meets with approximately 40 students daily. Rosalyn said, "My caseload is six times the average caseload. Most academic advisors have 200 students, but I have 1,200 students." She meets with students

by phone, in person, and virtually. Also, during the day, she serves on multiple committees, including the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council, in which she creates safe spaces and facilitates workshops to increase awareness of diversity, inclusion, and the LGBTQ community. When her multiple daytime roles at the institution end, Rosalyn changes hats and teaches in the English department two nights per week during the Fall and Spring semesters.

Since she wears multiple hats at the institution, Rosalyn initially believed it was essential to identify mentors at the University. Rosalyn leveraged her extroverted personality and leadership skills and pursued mentoring relationships with three African American women at the University. Rosalyn stated, "I am a White woman working at an HBCU, and believe that my select willentors will help me thrive and gain acceptance at the University." Each of Rosalyn's mentors has upper-level administrative positions and has served as faculty at the university.

Rosalyn's most significant challenges are managing her advising load, ensuring that she remains vigilant as an advocate for diversity and inclusion, and maintaining work-life balance. Each of her mentors has assisted her in navigating these challenges. Mentor A is also a Christian and has a son who identifies as gay. Therefore, Rosalyn and Mentor A have bonded in the spaces in which Rosalyn identifies as an academic, an educator, and a member of the LGBTQ community. Rosalyn said, "Mentor A has allowed me to feel accepted at the University, which has transformed my life and contributed to my peace."

Mentor B pushes Rosalyn to think outside the box and opens doors for her to serve and present workshops to students and faculty. She describes Mentor B as "not afraid and always striving to build trust." Through this mentoring relationship, Rosalyn has emerged as a well-respected leader amongst staff, faculty, and students. Mentor B has inspired Rosalyn to dream bigger, and she plans to pursue opportunities for an upper-level leadership position eventually. According to Rosalyn, Mentor C is similar to Mentor B and consistently gives Rosalyn "a seat at the table." She has helped Rosalyn develop effective communication strategies at the University and has encouraged her to "be brave." Additionally, Mentor C always encourages Rosalyn to have an open mind and consider multiple perspectives when making decisions.

Description of Mentor

Rosalyn described her mentors using the following words:

- Genuine
- Intelligent
- Respectful
- Tenacious
- Inquisitive
- Compassionate
- Communicator
- Brave
- Faith-filled
- Inclusive

Outcomes of Mentorship to Date

The outcomes of the three mentorship relationships are highly beneficial and effective for Rosalyn. Rosalyn communicates with her three mentors monthly via text, phone, in-person, and virtually. Most importantly, Mentors A and B will proactively contact Rosalyn to provide opportunities and support. Rosalyn believes that having support from these three women mentors has assisted her in "climbing the ranks despite male domination, being present at home, serving the community, and achieving work-life balance." Although Rosalyn developed these mentoring relationships independently, she believes universities should develop mentoring programs for women faculty.

Case 4: Maya - Roots

Maya is a native of Philadelphia with ancestry from India. She left home at 18 to pursue each of her degrees at this institution, including a Bachelor of Science in Biology, a Master of Arts in Education, and a Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership. Today, she is the Director of Assessment and adjunct English professor at this University. Thus, Maya's educational and professional roots are here, and she has no plans to leave

the University. Outside of higher education, Maya is a wife and mother, but for this research study, she preferred to focus more on her career in higher education.

Mentoring & Experiences on Campus

As an adjunct professor of English, Maya has experienced challenges with course design, students needing to complete incomplete obligations, and plagiarism proactively. These are the primary areas in her teaching role that Maya has relied on her mentor to address. She truly believes that students today struggle with "ethics and morality." Ethics and morality are complex in American society today and certainly impact teaching and learning. Maya communicates with her mentor as needed, ranging from weekly to monthly. Maya and her mentor communicate by phone, email, and in person. Due to frequent communication, Maya and her mentor collaborated to develop a plan to address Maya's concerns.

First, she ensures that the University plagiarism policy is included and highlighted in her course syllabus every semester. In addition, she has pinned the policy on her page within the University's Learning Management System. She also tried to implement flexibility with her students because she primarily teaches graduate students, balancing full-time work, school, and family obligations. Lastly, her mentor helped her design and develop videos to increase student engagement and dedication to completing the course.

Another professional challenge Maya has faced is her belief that "Women don't get taken seriously, and students don't take me seriously." Maya is 4 feet and 11 inches tall, one reason she believes she is not taken seriously. While she has not discovered a solution to these feelings and beliefs, Maya shared that her mentor encourages her to focus on the positive side of education and appreciate the gift of teaching and learning.

Description of Mentor

- Maya described her mentor using the following words:
- Caring
- Available
- Affirming

Outcomes of Mentorship to Date

The outcomes of the mentorship relationship to date are that Maya believes her mentoring relationship with her mentor at the University has benefitted her professionally and personally. Maya's mentor-mentee relationship is informal, but she wishes the University offered a structured mentoring program for women faculty that included activities supported by the University. She also said, "I really believe that universities should include conference opportunities in the budget for mentors and mentees to attend conferences together off campus." Maya believes this experience would support and strengthen mentoring relationships and improve employee satisfaction.

The four participants shared unique experiences and related to their mentors differently. All four women sought mentorship on their terms, as the institution did not provide a formal mentoring program. Table 2 provides a summary of key elements of each participant's story.

Table 2*Summary of Individual Results*

Participant (Pseudonyms assigned)	Description of Mentor(s)	Challenges	Solutions	Benefits of of Mentoring
Laila	Supportive Available Responsive Encouraging	Student plagiarism, students late to class, and disruptive student behavior	Asking questions, pursuing mentoring relationships, self-advocacy	Mentoring female junior female faculty
Tina	Affirming Dedicated Passionate Supportive	Overcoming Autonomy	Take the initiative to develop relationships with female faculty in other departments	Advocate for a formal and structured mentoring program
Maya	Caring Available Affirming	Difficult students	Restructure the course syllabus, leverage technology	Resilience
Rosalyn	Genuine Intelligent Respectful Tenacious Inquisitive Faith-filled Compassionate Communicator Inclusive	Work life balance	Trust her mentor	Increased confidence

Cross-Case Analysis Results

Three or more participants identified five recurring themes, illustrated in Table 3 and discussed in detail below.

Table 3

Common Themes

# of Participants	Common Themes
3 out of 4 Participants:	Support of mentors is needed to navigate challenges with students including plagiarism, late submission of assignments, and disruptive students.
4 out of 4 Participants:	Guidance from mentors is needed to achieve work life balance in the areas of career and roles at home, such as wife and mother.
4 out of 4 Participants:	Advice from mentors to develop relationships with women faculty outside of assigned academic departments.
3 out of 4 Participants	Feelings of being unprepared to teach at an HBCU, especially if the participants were not African American or did not attend an HBCU as a college student.
3 out of 4 Participants	Described mentors' most positive characteristics as supportive, caring, compassionate, and affirming.

Three out of the four participants particularly appreciated their mentors' help in dealing with challenges presented by students. Maya recounted when a student challenged her about a failing grade in the class, even though they had yet to communicate with her appropriately throughout the semester. She stated, "I want them to succeed; they're paying a lot of money for this class," but I did not know how to address their lack of participation. Maya stated, "I did get

advice from my mentor ... and I eventually gave the student an extension.” The students worked all weekend and submitted a product, which enabled them to pass the class.

Four out of four participants valued guidance from mentors to achieve work-life balance in their careers and roles at home. Tina shared that she and her mentor "have a family and do not want to bring any drama home." Therefore, their meetings often discuss how challenging students behave in their current or past classes because they are in the same department. As a result, they can resolve work issues at work "by comparing notes and exploring what they are doing to contribute to students succeeding in their individual classes." This approach allows the mentor and mentee to understand better why one student might perform well in her mentor's class, not Tina's. The ultimate goal is to increase the chance of leaving work challenges, resulting in the home as a separate space from work and time to focus on family.

Also, four out of four participants saw value in the advice from mentors to develop relationships with women faculty outside of assigned academic departments. This institution is more extensive than Rosalyn's previous university. As a result of the more prominent university, Rosalyn shared, "There is an opportunity to connect with women in other departments and other silos." Also, "One opportunity [I] had is that [I] got invited to be on the Diversity and Inclusion Council," by my mentor, who is in another department. This resulted in Rosalyn developing mentoring relationships with two additional mentors working in different divisions and departments on campus.

Three out of four participants expressed feeling they needed to prepare to teach at an HBCU, especially if the participants were not African American or did not attend an HBCU as college students. One of Laila's goals was community service on campus and in the community. She pursued guidance from her mentors on achieving this goal to identify with the HBCU culture. Laila asked her mentors, "How do you do community service? ... What can I do? And, remember I am an immigrant." In response to Laila's inquiry, Laila's mentors shared their community service experience, which is what she emulated. She aimed to connect with and serve the HBCU community outside the classroom.

The common adjectives that emerged when participants described their mentors included *supportive*, *caring*, *compassionate*, and *affirming*. Each mentor consistently made themselves

available for their mentees by phone, text, virtual, and in-person meetings. Rosalyn's mentors consistently communicated with her proactively to inquire about any points of concern or needed support. Laila's mentors encouraged her to ask questions and never hesitate to contact them. Although Tina described herself as "independent," she fully understands that she can contact her mentor anytime for advice, solutions, or to listen. Maya's mentor consistently provided affirmation and encouragement for Maya's primary concern of not "being seen" or "taken seriously" by other faculty and students in the university setting.

Discussion

There are benefits to structured and informal mentoring programs, and the findings of this study indicated that mentoring relationships positively enhanced the experience of women faculty teaching in full-time or adjunct positions on this campus. As seen in the examples of the four participants, the mentoring relationships formed naturally and resulted in positive outcomes, providing both support for and guidance for the mentee. However, the participants all expressed a desire for the university to develop *structured* mentoring programs, believing that they would foster support and create a safe space and time for mentor-mentee relationships to develop for women faculty. Providing a structured mentorship program among the campus community is a low-cost/high-return option for developing and retaining quality faculty members. The primary investment is, of course, time – the time spent together cultivating a relationship so that the mentor-mentee relationship can flourish. When individuals feel part of a positive relationship, they are more likely to ask questions, seek guidance, and take feedback (Altamirano, 2016). These outcomes benefit the faculty mentee, the students, and the institutions they serve.

Universities typically boast some scheduling flexibility that many other professional sectors do not. For instance, faculty members are typically directed to focus on the three-legged stool of 1) teaching, 2) research, and 3) service, but institutions can provide creative solutions within these parameters, such as teaching release time for mentoring practices or including mentoring participation as a component of service to the profession and the institution. As Tina stated in this study, the ability to meet with her mentor during typical work hours rather than in the late afternoon or evening allowed them both to prioritize their families and provide a small quantity of separation between home and work. Every faculty member is different, with some

exhibiting leadership strengths and interest in serving as a mentor. Institutions will likely have the resources on campus to provide the training necessary to develop good mentorship skills, such as active listening, strategic outlook, goal orientation, and communication skills (Gisbert-Trejo et al., 2019). They should provide these opportunities for those who are interested.

Specifically, HBCUs can create mentoring programs for women faculty that include workshops, presentations, and training on self-advocacy, work-life balance, and teaching challenging/disruptive students, all significant aspects articulated by participants in this study. Gasman (2021) states, "HBCUs boast faculty members who are doing remarkable work with a diverse group of students, across a variety of disciplines, with fewer resources and heavier teaching loads than at most PWIs" (p. 2). Therefore, institutions should create mentoring programs for women faculty that focus on "time management problem-solving and networking" (Northup, 2023, p. 4) to improve outcomes. All four participants noted that they sought advice from mentors outside their academic departments. Learning about the campus through multiple perspectives may enhance mentees' autonomy in addressing problems and overcoming temporary setbacks (Gilbert & Kelloway, 2018). Although qualitative research is not necessarily designed to provide a definitive answer to the research question guiding the study, this case study did contribute to understanding the impact mentoring relationships have had on diverse female faculty members at an HBCU. With the assistance of mentors exhibiting dispositions termed *supportive*, *caring*, *compassionate*, and *affirming*, these mentees are learning to navigate challenges with students, achieve a better work-life balance, and feel better prepared in the classroom.

Conclusion

As is always the case, continued research will facilitate a better understanding of this phenomenon. Future research should expand the participant pool to include ethnically diverse women faculty members at other HBCUs in various parts of the United States. This would provide a wider lens through which to view the outcomes of informal and formal mentoring programs. Additionally, interviewing ethnically diverse female faculty in other settings, such as Predominately White and Hispanic-serving institutions, would provide an understanding of experiences in different cultural environments. Research involving women faculty who are

actively, or have actively, participated in structured mentoring programs supported by their universities could help establish a framework for institutional consideration and implementation.

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