

**TITLE:** *Practices of Promise: Developing Powerful Mentoring Relationships across Campus*

**AUTHOR:** *Balachowski, M.*

**ORGANIZATION:** *Everett Community College, Everett, WA*

## **ABSTRACT**

What makes Everett Community College a great place to work? Our Practices of Promise are helping to attract and retain great employees. Our college has made a commitment to the professional growth and development of the campus community. Campus leaders see mentoring as an investment in retention, integration, and the continued growth of all faculty and staff. Our Mission Statement and Strategic Priorities focus on improving student success, but this only happens with the engagement of staff and faculty. The implementation of four new practices has had a positive impact on the campus culture by increasing employee satisfaction. These four practices include the New Faculty Teaching Academy (for new tenure-track faculty), the Associate Faculty Academy (for new adjunct faculty), the Senior Associate Faculty Mentoring Program (a rank promotion for adjunct faculty) and a new mentoring program for classified and exempt staff. Based on anonymous surveys and comments from participants, we believe that these practices not only help eliminate or reduce the isolation new teachers and employees feel, but help frame an individual's professional journey. They also promote positive attitudes about our institution that support retention. Survey and interview feedback from participants indicates a high rate of satisfaction with the mentoring programs, and we have seen an increase in participation in campus activities as well as an increase in classroom effectiveness.

## **Mentoring at Everett Community College**

Everett Community College (EvCC) is one of 34 community and technical colleges governed by the Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC). The college was founded in 1941, and serves more than 19,000 students every year at three campuses in Snohomish County, WA.

In the college's vision statement, we state that we will educate one successful student at a time. In recent years the college has recognized both the need and value of informal and formal mentoring relationships for staff on our campus to promote this vision. Vice President of Human Resources, Jennifer Howard, said that her goal is "to make the college the place everyone wants to work... a variation on the vision statement... making the world a better place, one successful employee at a time" (J. Howard, personal communication, June 18, 2015). This is similar to Google's vision. Google has been consistently rated among the top 10 best places to work because of their "strong, numerous, rewarding personal relationships" (Colvin, 2015). EvCC wants our employees to share the same feeling identified by one employee at Google: "The best perk of working at Google is working for Google" (Colvin, 2015). The intellectual capital and engagement of our employees is critical to the success of our students. To that end, the college has made the investment in all employees an institutional priority. Our college is actively and aggressively committed to moving a success agenda forward, both for students and our employees. While the four Practices of Promise described in this paper are directed at 4 different sets of employees, they share some common themes:

- Build the campus community
- Improve employee/campus morale
- Create a career vision
- Preserve best practices

The effects of mentoring relationships are wide-ranging, and include an increase in employee retention, efficiency, skills, knowledge and abilities. In a climate of drastically reduced budgets, investing in mentoring programs is an idea that makes sense. We are developing a campus climate where faculty and staff trust that they will be supported in their efforts to improve their own and student success.

### **The New Faculty Teaching Academy**

The New Faculty Teaching Academy was developed four years ago when the need for something greater than a single information packed orientation was recognized. All new tenure-track faculty from each of the 34 colleges in our system attend a 2-day state orientation called the New Faculty Institute which covers basic issues (such as “what makes a good syllabus?”) and important legal issues (ethics violations and FERPA, for example). These are important issues, but faculty return to their home campuses with information overload, and not necessarily the critical information they need to start the first day or first week of classes. Additionally, there was no person on our campus to serve as a mentor throughout the critical first year. Faculty who are tenure-track do engage with their tenure committees, but the philosophical approach to the tenure process is uneven at best. Many tenure committees serve as informal mentors, but the legacy of tenure committees has been more evaluative; there are forms to complete and papers to file, all by a certain date, and the focus is often “is this person doing a good job?” Faculty new to the college sometimes struggle with who their go-to person is to discuss issues of pedagogy, classroom improvement, and student evaluations outside the evaluation process of tenure. Senior administrators recognized the needs of new faculty, and the New Faculty Teaching Academy was developed.

In my proposal to the then Vice-President of Instruction, Dr. Sandra Fowler-Hill, I offered these three points as a rationale for a year-long Academy: induction into the Academy is an investment in retention, integration, and continual individual growth, with the central goal of improving student learning; mentoring relationships offer an opportunity for reciprocal growth and learning; and a successful program is integral to the implementation of other campus initiatives. I also listed these potential benefits: improved instructional performance; transfer of the educational philosophy of the college; framing of the educational journey; promotion of the norms of collaboration and learning. The mission statement for the New Faculty Academy is an outgrowth of that proposal:

*The New Faculty Teaching Academy will serve as an agent for innovation and transformation, and will seek to foster excellence in teaching and learning practices. Toward this end, the Teaching Academy will be designed to provide opportunities for professional growth to new faculty.*

To date, three cohorts of new faculty have completed the Academy. In Spring 2015, the first cohort of the Academy received tenure. At the Spring 2015 Board of Trustees meeting where the official announcement of tenure is made, EvCC’s President, Dr. David Beyer told the Board and the audience that he believes that in the years since the Academy has been founded, the level of excellence of tenure-track faculty has improved considerably. The new faculty are more engaged in campus activities and discussions, department and division committees, efforts to improve curriculum, and are more frequently innovating and taking risks in their classrooms. Their anonymous end-of-year reflections corroborate this. From the 2014-15 cohort, an anonymous faculty member said: “The New Faculty Academy demonstrated to me on day one

that I was about to become a part of a community that valued teaching and learning, and one that valued teachers as human beings with experience and skill. This is not always the case at academic institutions.” Another faculty responded: “Thank you for the Academy. It is the ground level, the foundation of trust, respect, and community that made my first year here so enlightening and wonderful.” One new faculty member in a department with many adjuncts said that she would make an effort to be a better mentor to adjuncts because of her own experience being mentored. A faculty member from the first cohort said, “Thank you so much for all of the training, mentorship, and advice you have provided over the last three years. I know that my classroom presence, ability to create a lesson plan, rubric, and presentation have largely been affected by the guidance you have provided. It has been your example that has prompted me to push for improvements in training for prof-tech faculty and encouraged me to consider ways in which I can take a role in that training” (R. Hellings, personal communication, June 9, 2015). As the mentor for each of the three cohorts of new faculty, I believe that I have also benefited, from seeing the theories in our book club (using *How Learning Works*, Ambrose et al.) put into practice in different disciplines (both academic and professional/technical), to the innovative activities that the new faculty have tried in this safe setting. In fact, taking risks has been encouraged from the first day of the Academy, and I have made it a practice to help faculty reflect on seeing failure as an opportunity for learning. It has given me, a practitioner with 20+ years of experience, a fresh perspective on how to engage with my own students.

### **The Associate Faculty Academy**

Associate (adjunct) faculty teach the majority (58%) of public community college classes (American Federation of Teachers, 2008). Since adjuncts typically earn lower wages, fewer benefits, and have contracts which involve less commitment than full-time faculty, colleges have historically used them to fill classes in times of both expansion and recession. While it may cost colleges less to pay an adjunct, there are hidden costs to the higher turnover associated with part-time faculty. Resources such as the number of man-hours required to hire and acquaint associate faculty with department and college culture drain the college budget. Students also pay for the higher turnover that comes from relying on adjuncts. Adjunct faculty can be just as hard-working and professional as their colleagues, but the low-wage, contingent nature of their work means that part-time faculty tend to be less engaged with and knowledgeable about their college (Quarles, Balachowski & Dykes, 2015). While colleges often put considerable thought into welcoming their new tenure-track faculty, adjuncts are often not given the same orientation. Because some colleges have little commitment to adjuncts, they tend to invest fewer resources in them (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). In 2012 EvCC received a Title III Strengthening Institutions grant, and a portion of that grant is devoted to serving adjunct faculty. Our goal is to increase faculty effectiveness in the classroom. Our Associate Faculty Academy (AFA) was developed in the first year of the grant; mentors from among current faculty who were known to have excellent relationships with both their colleagues and students were chosen; a training program for the new mentors was developed, and an orientation and quarter-long Academy for new adjuncts was created. The purpose of the Academy is three-fold: to promote teaching effectiveness and innovation; to facilitate pathways to successful teaching; and to develop opportunities for leadership both on campus and in our profession.

A team in our eLearning department developed a hybrid model Academy with readings and assignments located in Canvas, our Learning Management System (LMS). The assignments are designed to have faculty build a relationship with students in their LMS classes (by creating a welcome page for their class, using the grade book function, and learning how to use other tools for student communication). Faculty are given important “just-in-time” information during the quarter long Academy to help them manage the new academic schedule and important due dates. Faculty in the Academy report that having this information in one easy to access location has been extremely helpful. Many new adjuncts are teaching at multiple colleges that are nearby. Even closely located colleges have different cultures and rules, and faculty (especially those who are only on our campus for evening classes when administrative assistants or tenured faculty are not available for help) have nowhere to turn for even the most basic needs.

The most impactful aspect of the AFA is the mentor relationships. Each quarter, an average of 15 new adjuncts are enrolled in the Academy. In addition to the Director there are 3 mentors from different disciplines: Business, English, and Cosmetology (representing the professional/technical programs). Mentors are assigned to new faculty outside their discipline to reduce the fear that the relationship is evaluative rather than supportive. Mentors and Academy members meet as a group twice a quarter. In these meetings mentors have an opportunity to share experiences as new teachers and what they have learned as long time members of the campus community. The first meeting is critical to develop a positive mentoring relationship. In addition to lunch, there is a presentation that describes the basics of formative assessments. This session not only demonstrates how to incorporate these assessments in their classes, but helps new teachers to begin building a toolbox with skills that have an immediate positive impact in the classroom. At the end of this meeting, mentors arrange the first one-on-one meeting with each new protégé. The second meeting (mid-quarter) focuses on student evaluations. New faculty are likely not familiar with the evaluation instrument used at EvCC, so the theme is how to prepare and use the forms to their greatest advantage. By mid-quarter, mentors have met in person with each faculty member and/or have had email or phone conversations. Discussions are often about classroom pedagogy or student management issues; mentors take great pains to empower their protégés with not only essential information about how to handle difficult situations but how to thrive in their new environment. Mentors meet with the Director of the AFA to discuss ways to support innovation and excitement. The mentors’ high level of excitement about helping their protégés to become a part of our college community translates into their own improvements. One faculty mentor said, “I realize the investment in mentoring new instructors will support student success and learning. Mentoring provides me with professional growth opportunities and challenges me to use the continuous improvement processes in my course work and program.” (T. Evans, personal communication, June 21, 2015). The benefits of mentoring are bi-directional, and mentors cannot help but be proud of the impact they are having on the overall success of new faculty. There is a great deal of personal satisfaction in their role in nurturing the next generation of faculty leaders on our campus.

The new faculty in the Associate Faculty Academy are also enthusiastic about the relationships they are building and the feeling of community that is developing across campus. Comments from their anonymous end-of-quarter reflections support this:

“My mentor was available for questions when I needed her, she encouraged me to reach out to her even more than I did and she made me feel extremely comfortable asking her for help.”

“She (my mentor) was always there for me, either checking in to see if I needed any help or responding quickly when I had questions. As a mentor she definitely has the skills that are required to help others. Every time we interacted it was with enthusiasm and professionalism.”

“It was really great to meet other teachers to talk about common challenges. That has been like a bit of therapy at times. One on one time was a great help to get feedback on how I am doing and what changes I can make to improve my effectiveness as a teacher.”

“Often times, teachers are placed in a classroom with little connection to the overall college, new developments, and new information and research. I felt going through this program bridged those gaps.”

“When meeting one on one and in a group, my mentor made me very comfortable and having face-time with her made me feel connected to the EvCC team and less of a fumbling new guy on his own.”

There are several issues that the team of the mentors and Director are working to overcome. One issue is the different needs of professional/technical faculty. Many of these faculty have not completed the same educational programs as academic faculty, and as a result, do not have the same models for how a college classroom should work. After several quarters of struggling to help these faculty, many of whom also hold down a regular 40-hour/week job in industry, a different delivery model for the same kinds of skills has been developed. In Fall 2015 there will be a one day training session called the Toolkit Academy. It will be delivered on site for our Aviation faculty. The outcomes of the pilot will be carefully measured, and if it is successful, the same training will be delivered to other professional/technical departments on campus, including Welding, Composites and Precision Machining.

The assessment of the AFA is currently under review. In the first 3 years of the Academy success has been measured by the number of completions each quarter. However, with the help of our institutional researcher, a more rigorous plan of assessment will be put in place in Fall 2015, designed to tie improvements in learning to retention and completion.

### **Senior Associate Faculty Mentoring Program**

In 2014, our administration negotiated contract language with the faculty union (AFT) for a new program for rank promotion for associate faculty. This new rank, Senior Associate status, would be available to adjunct faculty who have consistently demonstrated successful teaching over a nine quarter review process. Each associate faculty member who decides to begin this process must also have a faculty mentor. Mentors are tenured faculty and must complete a half-day training program. The training is a highly interactive session with faculty from across all disciplines. In the training, new mentors brainstorm the goals and components of a successful mentoring relationship. A mentoring handbook developed specifically for this training has suggestions for activities and advice on how to begin building a relationship with a new protégé and how to handle difficult situation.

Human Resources keeps the list of mentors who have completed the training. When associate faculty apply to begin the process, a quick interview with potential protégés helps

determine which of the mentors would be the best fit. The program has successfully “graduated” 63 faculty in the first round and has 37 faculty in the process. The new rank promotion is seen by associate faculty as evidence that the college is investing in their future. It is helping to foster collegiality and has diminished the isolation that many adjuncts feel. “When a college’s commitment to part-time faculty is contingent, the contingent commitment may be reciprocated” (CCCSE, 2014). These adjuncts are as engaged in campus activities as their tenured colleagues, attending professional development workshops and campus retreats. They feel an important connection with the campus community because they have been engaged in some very important aspects of the faculty experience: a portfolio that includes a professional development plan, observations by their peers, and a reflection piece that describes their growth in their professional practice with the guidance of their mentors. The tenured faculty who serve as mentors also feel a greater connection to their protégés. They have expressed a feeling of satisfaction in having the opportunity to have a positive impact on our workplace and organization.

### **Mentoring EvCC Staff**

Good mentoring partnerships provide support to future leaders in many ways and can enhance the career success for both people involved. In 2011, a group project developed by a team in EvCC’s Leadership Academy resulted in a new staff mentoring program. In this program, staff members who are protégés can explore opportunities on campus (and on occasion, off-campus) that may help them identify skill gaps. Mentors are typically upper level administrators (Deans or Vice Presidents) and protégés are classified staff or faculty or in a few cases exempt staff (Deans). As described by the VP of Human Resources, “At times, we’ve promoted from within expecting that someone who has no supervisory experience will be a great supervisor. We don’t train them, and even if we offer training, they don’t have time to participate. HR is stretched; supervisors are stretched, and when a ‘crisis’ occurs, we react. It isn’t pretty sometimes.” (J. Howard, personal communication, June 18, 2015). Exploring the opportunities on campus when working with upper level colleagues may help the protégés decide, before an offer of promotion is made, whether it’s a good fit before they make their next professional move. In this mentoring program, protégés gain access to wider professional networks, develop skills, and increase self-confidence. Mentors benefit by practicing and developing their counseling and listening skills leading to greater self-development. Additionally, both mentors and protégés achieve recognition and often express higher levels of job satisfaction.

One of the most successful aspects of this program is that people learn about other areas of the college. Administrators learn about employees outside their own areas. This helps the college identify our own “rising stars” and give them opportunities to try out skill sets in a controlled way, with coaching and support. It is the way EvCC addresses succession planning. Matches are strategic, and pairing occurs only after interviews with the protégés take place. The new protégés are asked to briefly outline their professional goals, and what qualities they’d like to have in a mentor. Good mentoring relationships provide support to future leaders in many ways and can enhance the career success for both people involved. One former mentor said, “I would be a mentor again in an instant if that opportunity comes up” (J. Leader, personal communication, June 17, 2015.)

In Summer 2015, a colleague and I developed a training program for new mentors. Mentors were asked to read several journal articles from the literature on mentoring (from both corporate and educational environments) and participate in discussions on the ideal mentor/protégé relationships. Other sessions included a discussion on the roles and

responsibilities of mentors, and how to help protégés develop a network. While this is the first year that a formal training was done, past mentor/protégé relationships have been successful because mentors are able to share their knowledge of the college's values and culture.

### **Conclusion**

There is a substantial body of literature on the subject of mentoring. While many of the best-known models come from the corporate world, more academic institutions have begun to pay attention to the benefits of mentoring on their campuses. Everett Community College is proud of the positive outcomes that have resulted from the various mentoring programs that we have developed in just the past few years with the help of a committed leadership pursuing broad institutional change. EvCC has made great strides in accomplishing our campus goal to make the world a better place, one successful employee at a time. To move this work forward, it will be important for the college to continue to support the resources for this targeted professional development program. The support and assistance that mentoring has offered to faculty and staff in developing their careers, the improved rates of retention of adjunct faculty, the innovative practices of new tenure-track faculty, the improved perception of staff of themselves as important members of the campus community and the developing collegiality on campus have all contributed to making Everett CC a great place to work.

## REFERENCES

- American Federation of Teachers (2008). *Reversing course: The troubled state of academic staffing and a path forward*. Washington, DC: JBL Associates, Inc.
- Center for Community College Student Engagement (2014). *Contingent commitments: bringing part-time faculty into focus (A special report from the Center for Community College Student Engagement)*. Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin, Program of Higher Education Leadership.
- Clifford, P.S. & Lakoski, J. (2008). Perspective: Top 10 Tips for Mentors. <http://www.adapp-advance.msu.edu/Faculty-Mentoring-Toolkit>
- Cohen, A.M., & Brawer, F.B. (2003). *The American Community College*. (4th ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Colvin, G. (2015, March 15). 100 best companies to work for. *Fortune*, 106-110.
- Quarles, C., Balachowski, M., & Dykes, A. (2015). *Onboarding New Faculty: A Framework for Engaging Adjuncts*. Manuscript submitted for publication.