



A88 Changing the Mentorship Paradigm: Survey Data and Interpretations From Forensic Anthropology Practitioners

*Allysha P. Winburn, MA**, University of New Hampshire, Dept of Anthropology, 310 Huddleston Hall, 73 Main Street, Durham, NH 03824; *Audrey L. Scott, PhD*, Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, 590 Moffet Road; Bldg 4077, Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, HI 96853; *Cate E. Bird, PhD*, Anthropology, University of South Florida, 4202 E Fowler Avenue, Social Science Bldg 100, Tampa, FL 33620; and *Sean D. Tallman, PhD*, Boston University, Dept of Anatomy and Neurobiology, 72 E Concord Street, Boston, MA 02118

After attending this presentation, attendees will understand current perceptions of the roles of mentors and protégés within the field of forensic anthropology.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by informing future mentor-protégé interactions and guiding forensic scientists to focus on the positive influence that mentorship can have — not only on protégés' careers, but also on the personal development of the mentor and the overall well-being of the field.

The concept of mentorship originated in ancient Greek mythology and referred to a relationship between a knowledgeable person (mentor) and a less-experienced person (protégé). Today, mentorship can be conceptualized as the informal transmission of knowledge over a sustained period of time and in a domain in which the mentor and protégé have unequal knowledge. Traditionally, mentors are seen as older, wiser advisors who provide counsel to younger, less-experienced individuals in their professional or social sphere. Certainly, the role of this high-level mentor has been paramount in developing the field of forensic anthropology; however, anyone with greater knowledge in a specific domain who exerts a positive influence on another individual's professional or social development can be considered a mentor, regardless of age or experience. This presentation contends that peer-to-peer interactions (e.g., leading by example, sharing diverse work experiences, and dispensing advice) also qualify as important mentorship behaviors.

This research explores how the roles of mentors and protégés are perceived throughout the diverse academic and applied contexts of the field of forensic anthropology. All users of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS) Anthropology Section listserv received a link to an anonymous, Institutional Review Board (IRB)-approved Qualtrics.com survey. Instructions encouraged participants to share the survey link with other practitioners of varying skill and experience levels, including students and other non-members. Consenting participants answered 23 multiple-choice and 12 open-answer questions regarding their demographic information, opinions about mentorship, and experiences as both mentors and protégés.

A total of 96 professional forensic anthropologists and anthropology graduate students participated in the survey. The majority of respondents specialized in biological anthropology, had completed a PhD, and worked in the academic or medical examiner setting. Most had been in the field for fewer than 21 years and were less than 45 years of age. The majority self-identified as being of female gender and European ancestry.

Respondents were nearly unanimous regarding the importance of mentorship in forensic anthropology, and many felt that being mentored directly contributed to their career success. Nearly all respondents had benefitted from the influence of multiple mentors, and many had also mentored multiple protégés. As expected, most respondents reported being mentored by a thesis/dissertation advisor; however, many respondents also reported peers as an important category of mentor (68%) and peers emerged as the most commonly reported category of protégé (75%).



Anthropology - 2017

More respondents had received mentorship in career-related areas than they had in social interactions and social issues. Likewise, when asked in which areas they desired to provide and receive additional mentorship, more respondents selected these latter, social categories. Still, differences between distributions for mentorship provided/received and additional desired mentorship provided/received were not statistically significant ($\alpha=0.05$; Wilcoxon rank-sum test; R). Further, the most commonly selected category for additional desired mentorship (both received and provided) was “none,” implying overall satisfaction with the mentorship experience.

This study indicates that the traditional mentorship paradigm is already shifting. In forensic anthropology, the mentorship paradigm does not solely consist of vertical-level interactions, but often includes horizontally oriented interactions. If the future reflects the past, then forensic anthropologists must honor the long-valued (and still valuable) role of the traditional mentor, while emphasizing the non-traditional mentorship behaviors that can enhance the careers and lives of both trainees and experienced practitioners.

Career, Professionalism, Mentor-Protégé Interactions