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History, Practices, Outcomes of Mentoring@Cs—a collaboration of the CCCC Committee on the Status of Graduate Students (4CSOGS) and the WPA Graduate Organization (WPA-GO)

Report prepared for CCCC Executive Council by Hannah Rule, member 4CSOGS

Overview and History: In 2014, 4CSOGS discussed building upon mentoring and networking initiatives at Cs like the Newcomer Breakfast and the Graduate Student SIG. We engaged with various groups. At that time, WPA-GO had been thinking about ways to extend or invigorate their Breakfast Buddies program, a staple of the CWPA breakfast at Cs. After some deliberation about whether SOGS wanted to pursue the one-to-one matching scheme of the breakfast, our organizations decided to collaborate and Mentoring@Cs was launched in Tampa in 2015.

Mentoring@C's central goal is to forge informal mentoring relationships between newcomers and veterans in the field. The Committee for the Status of Graduate Students (4C SOGS) and the Writing Program Administration Graduate Organization (WPA-Go) partner each year (since 2015) to match mentees and mentors based on specific research, teaching, and professionalization interests, put them in email contact with one another, and encourage them to meet and chat at the conference by providing a number of social gathering opportunities: a light breakfast, the WPA-Go social, at a selected session, or through their own arrangements. This year, based on upon survey feedback, we've decided to offer an additional session with refreshments in the evening to provide another opportunity and incentive for pairs to meet up.

Planning Process: Planning is implemented by volunteers from both organizations. WPA-GO has a different subcommittee and chairperson that leads it (Brian Hendrickson [2015], Ruth Osorio [2016], Sarah Snyder [2017]) and in SOGS, Hannah Rule has lead each year, along with Katie Taylor, Karen Mitchell [2015], Kristie McDuffie [2016], and Dawn Opel [2017]. Planning starts in January.

- **Call and Circulation:** We modify a Google Form each year to solicit participation. We request the role (mentor/mentee), areas of scholarly interest (using categories from the Area Clusters of the conference), times available to meet, as well as a little about what is sought (if a mentee) and what is offered (if a mentor). We circulate the call/form for about 3-4 weeks using social networks of WPA-Go and SOGS members: WPA-L, Facebook groups and networks, Twitter, faculty lists, departmental listservs, etc. This year, WPA-GO set up a Google Spreadsheet for us to keep track of where we shared the call and members of both organization contributed to it.

The Google Form allows us to see both individual form submissions and responses by question. It helps us gauge our mentor to mentee ratio, crucial to soliciting participation. For Portland, we currently have 61 mentors and 68 mentees signed up.

- **Securing space and catering/sponsorship:** We work with various contacts each year to arrange a room and catering for the event(s). The Executive Council agreed to sponsor our first year catering—the initial budget in Tampa was supported with some extra funds from the EC and still the offerings were not sufficient for participants. Subsequently, the EC and WPA have matched funding, with 450\$ each in 2016, and 500\$ each in 2017. 4CSOGS has been responsible for making these arrangements each year.

- **Matching:** WPA-GO has handled the matching process, working from spreadsheets generated by the Google Form.
- **Emails to Matches:** WPA-GO leads this as well. A spreadsheet is circulated divided into chunks. Members of WPA-GO (and sometimes a SOGS member has helped) are assigned a group of pairs to email matched pairs to virtually introduce them, provide information about events where they might meet, and to encourage them to connect in some way. WPA-GO started a Gmail account (wpagomentoring@gmail.com) from which to send these emails. Emails go out a week or two before CCCC.
- **Event(s) at Cs:** Representatives from both organizations are on hand to welcome participants, make refreshments available and help mentors/mentees find each other. We also keep a sign in sheet (The EC requested that we submit official attendance records starting 2016). We've experimented with ice breakers, but in Houston, we just prioritized time to talk. We inevitably have a mentor or mentee missing their match, so in these instances, SOGS or WPA-GO members on hand will fill in. We take this opportunity also to represent our organizations to participants, especially the graduate students.
- **Survey:** Shortly after the conference, we circulate to all participants (through the gmail account and using the emails provided on the sign-up sheet) a survey on Google Forms. We've done this every year, though I only retain access to the 2016 survey. We received 45 responses from this survey some of which are highlighted below.

Evidence of Outcomes—Some Participation & Survey Data:

Program Participation:

- 2015: 134 total participants matched
- 2016: 121 total participants matched
- 2017: currently 129 participants—matching process has not started yet

Breakfast Event Participation

- 2015: no records
- 2016: 9 mentoring pairs stayed the whole time; at least 3 pairs met at the breakfast, but went offsite for their meeting. Approximately 27 attendees total.
- 2017: *We'll have a coffee/donut morning session as well as a light appetizers options in the evening, Friday March 17. We hope these options encourage more of our pairs to meet up.*

45 responses to the Mentoring@Cs Survey—HOUSTON 2016

Some highlights:

- 80% of respondents indicate this was their first time being involved
- 95% of respondents indicate they met their pair in Houston
- 27% of respondents indicate they met at the Breakfast
- 95% of respondents indicate they would definitely recommend or recommend Mentoring@Cs to their colleagues

+ lots of good qualitative feedback, comments that demonstrate the ways mentoring is a rich learning and reflective experience for *both* parties. Here are a few participants' take-aways from Mentoring@Cs 2016:

- I was able to get to know someone in the field whose work I respect, get some practical advice about preparing to enter the job market, and brainstorm with someone new on how best to integrate a research study into my dissertation.
- As a first-timer to the conference, and as a person who finds it sometimes kind of difficult to interact with new people, it was really helpful and affirming and wonderful to have an "excuse" to talk to someone who wasn't already affiliated with my school. Also, there were so many helpful overlaps between our research interests and personal interests. Our conversation about work-life balance was particularly generative and encouraging to me.
- My mentee was a first year Assistant Prof, and I find I'm often mentoring grad students. It helped remind me of the challenges of first-year Assistant Prof life, and gave me good perspective on how I might mentor my own students to prepare for this reality.
- I appreciated the chance to meet with a graduate student (mine is a primarily undergrad-serving institution) and be helpful with her questions about research and navigating family life.
- I was able to connect to a lovely individual with whom I found much in common, so props to the pairing done by you! We met at a coffee shop since she had a lot going on in her life and at C's so wasn't able to meet at any of the group times set up by Mentoring@Cs. I felt that this mentoring idea is a way to use the more experienced instructors' in ways useful to the individual entering the profession; because she and I found a good deal in common, we plan to keep in touch. So potentially a budding friendship will come as well as a mentoring relationship through Mentoring@Cs!
- Pleasant social exchange. I am not sure of the long term value but it was nice to have some outsider perspective on conversations that I have been having only with colleagues at my institution.
- A great new node in my scholarly network, as well as some advice on research and publishing!
- Got to know in person a well known scholar in my field/subfield. Feedback on a draft, job market advice.
- A delightful contact who is going to be a marvelous WPA.
- Knowledge about professionalism, ethos, and the ethics of teaching while queer, which have been at the forefront of my mind for a while before the meeting.
- I made a connection with a younger colleague who has similar interests as I do.

Ongoing Concerns and Considerations:

- ***Access:*** We remain concerned that this program serves graduate students who may already be in programs that have mentoring support. We're interested in making this program more open and available to more graduate students, especially those who are new to CCCC and those who are working in smaller programs or those outside composition and rhetoric.
- ***Nature of Mentoring Relationships:*** We have discovered need in this process for young career mentorship—we had requests from young faculty or WPAs for mentoring from more senior colleagues. We are committed to graduate student mentoring primarily though as this is the focus of both organizing organizations. There is also the question of when one becomes "eligible" to be a mentor. We value the perspectives of advanced graduate students or recent graduates: those who are ABD, on the market, in visiting positions, adjuncting, in post-docs, working in schools, etc. so we want to make clearer what experience mentors might have. We also encountered a situation in Houston where a mentor turned out to not exactly be suitable, so the question of vetting matches is also a concern.

- ***Attendance to Events:*** to increase attendance at the events, in Portland we've added an additional session (surveys suggested that the early morning time was challenging). We've also arranged for the evening session to directly follow the Graduate Student SIG meeting and be hosted in the same room.
- ***Ongoing Participation:*** Ideally both mentors and mentees would participate year after year! We don't have data yet on how many repeat participators we have, but we'd like to work on encouraging repeat participation.
- ***Other Suggestions from Participants:*** follow up meetings, encouraging more exchanges before the CCCC, a session at the conference on mentoring, follow up email/reminders right before the event(s), more strategies/ideas to keep the relationship going after the CCCC, a situation room to meet at will rather than time/room events, a way to get another mentor if your match isn't able to meet or doesn't respond.