

# Retirees Paying it Forward: A Retiree/Faculty Mentorship Pilot Program

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## Abstract

Retirees often have a desire to offer meaningful contributions to their academic community after retiring from their academic roles. This article presents findings from a study of a multi-component mentorship program, with a mentorship development component and a career focus, conducted in a Canadian post-secondary institution. In the mentorship program, retiree faculty served as mentors to faculty members from across the academic career continuum. A Merriam-informed case study approach was used to delineate the study, and the analysis of the data was informed by established processes for reflexive thematic analysis (TA), a method for systematic analytic engagement with qualitative data to produce themes. A primary finding from the study was that retiree faculty represent a relevant and promising resource as mentors. Further, both mentors and mentees reported that the intentional focus on the mentoring relationship, the mentor and mentee development program and the voluntary nature of participation were key components of the success. A future focus on understanding

mentor motivations, mentor suitability and on mentoring across professions is encouraged. In addition, future researchers and/or administrators are encouraged to be intentionally inclusive of a diverse population in mentorship programs.

*Keywords:* Mentorship, Retiree Mentors, Mentees Across the Career Continuum, Mentorship Development, The Mentoring Relationship

Retirees often have a desire to offer meaningful contributions to their academic community after retiring from their academic roles (Hall, 2021). Mendez et al. (2017) propose that retirees who serve as mentors benefit from the opportunity to contribute to their field and to meaningfully give back to, and remain engaged with both their academic setting and their faculty colleagues. Mendez et al. (2019a) posit that the impact of retirees' mentorship of academic faculty across the career continuum includes enhanced retention, informed support for faculty as they navigate tenure/promotion processes and an improved overall socialization experience throughout the academic career.

This article presents findings from a pilot study of a multi-component mentorship program conducted in a Canadian post-secondary institution. In this program retiree faculty served as mentors to faculty members from across the academic career continuum. The mentor participants included retiree mentors who retired from their academic setting between 2017-2021. Mentees represented early, mid, and late career faculty members. The primary foci of the study were to inquire into the degree to which 1) faculty mentees experienced support in the development of strategies and their capacity to achieve success in achieving their individual career goals related to their faculty role, 2) retiree mentors developed expertise in the formal role of mentors, and 3) retiree mentors and faculty mentees reported enhanced career, professional and personal satisfaction.

## Background

### Mentoring in Academia

Garvin (2019) notes that navigating an academic career, with obligations to conduct research,

teach and engage in service to the academic community has the potential to be a demanding and isolating experience. Alves et al. (2019) and (Pope-Ruark, 2022) posit that the demands inherent in the role of faculty members may result in a state of burnout. Sabagh et al. (2018) conducted a review of faculty burnout and reported that higher levels of social support predict lower levels of burnout. Research further posits that the mentoring experiences of academic faculty have the potential to mitigate the risk of isolation and burnout (Cranmer et al., 2018; Ebuwei, 2020). Furthermore, the mentoring experience may enhance professional fulfillment, inclusive of increased productivity, career resilience and a more expansive knowledge about the academic promotion process (Crites et al., 2023; Menzin et al., 2020).

Career development focused mentoring in academia has been described as a dyadic relationship between an experienced mentor and a less experienced mentee with the goal of supporting and fostering the development of the mentee's academic career (Law et al., 2014; Waddell et al., 2017). This relationship is typically achieved through the exchange of experience, knowledge and information within the context of the dyads (Bean et al., 2014; Sarabipour et al., 2021). Mentors draw on their familiarity with institutional norms, values and procedures (Bean et al., 2014; Jackevicius et al., 2014) and their

academic experiences to support the mentee as they explore, determine, set and prioritize their academic career goals. These dyadic relationships are often characterized by a hierarchical power differential that allows the mentor to disproportionately influence the scope and direction of the mentoring experience (Ragins, 2016; Waddell et al., 2017). To mitigate potential hierarchical power imbalances, and to ensure a diversity of perspectives, relationship-centered mentorship models are emerging. Examples include peer mentoring (Croke et al., 2021), mentorship circles (Waddell et al., 2017), group mentoring (Pololi & Evans, 2015) and programs modeled on a constellation structure such as mentor networks (DeCastro et al., 2013), or team mentoring, wherein one mentee has two mentors situated at different stages of the career continuum (Webber et al., 2020).

### Mentor Outcomes

Martin and Douglas (2018) suggest that goals identified by mentors include the desire to help junior colleagues, share expertise, and to foster personal and professional development. Outcomes reported by various studies include a sense of contribution, pride, accomplishment, and personal satisfaction through mentoring individuals in an academic setting (Mendez et al., 2019a; Mendez et al., 2017; Zellers et al., 2008; Zerzan et al., 2009). Zerzan et al.

(2009) also report that mentors gain professional stimulation and a sense of giving back to their profession through engagement in mentoring relationships. Goldberg and Baldwin (2018) further note that drawing on retirees as mentors can free up time for non-retired faculty to focus on teaching and research.

### Mentee Outcomes

Faculty mentees benefit from informed support as they navigate tenure/promotion processes and their overall socialization experience throughout their academic career (Mendez et al., 2019a). The experiences of faculty members who have been mentored included i) a reduced sense of isolation, ii) positive socialization, iii) enhanced teaching effectiveness, iv) increased career satisfaction, v) higher rates of promotion, vi) enhanced salary, vii) accelerated leadership development, and viii) a greater sense of competence in navigating their institution and increased motivation to serve as mentors to others (Allen et al., 2004; Bean et al., 2014; Martin & Douglas, 2018; Mendez et al., 2019a; Waddell et al., 2017; Zellers et al., 2008). In particular, early career faculty mentees also report feelings of safety, inclusion, community and belonging (Waddell et al., 2017). The inclusion of early and mid-career faculty participants in the pilot study described in this article was based on the desire to explore and respond to the needs of faculty

mentees across the early and mid-stages of the career continuum as well as the stated desire of academic retirees to support faculty the academic success of faculty colleagues.

### The Mentorship Relationship

It has been reported that the mentoring relationship is key to achieving the objectives/goals of mentoring (Allen, 2007; Martin & Douglas, 2018; Ragins, 2016; Sarabipour et al., 2021) and that participation in a mentoring development program that prepares both mentor and mentee participants for their respective roles can be instrumental to the development of strong, positive mentoring relationships (Pololi & Evans, 2015). Ragins (2016) defines high-quality mentoring relationships as close relationships that are mutually beneficial experiences, that meet the needs of both mentors and mentees. They are characterized by respect, trust, explicit expectations, honesty, friendship, and support (Allen et al., 2004; Croke et al., 2021; Martin & Douglas, 2018). To date the application of academic mentorship programs focused on relational mentoring have shown potential for developing a sense of inclusion, rapport, and support (Waddell et al., 2017), improved life satisfaction, work-life balance, ability to experience a meaningful connection, high self-esteem, enhanced self-confidence, and a safe environment that buffers mentees from negative and stressful workplace experiences

(Bean et al., 2014; Ragins, 2016). High-quality mentoring relationships stand in contrast to a mentoring relationship where the motivation to engage in the mentoring experience is driven by an interest in receiving a return on the investment in the experience (Ragins, 2016). While Ragins' conceptualization of the 'high-quality mentoring relationships' arose from studies that were conducted in workplaces outside of the academy, this pilot study includes the exploration of relational mentorship in the academy.

### The Experiences of Retiree Mentors

Engaging retirees as mentors to faculty across the career continuum has the potential to address the issue that, although more senior employed faculty members may wish to support their colleagues through mentorship, the time to devote to the role of mentor is scarce (Pololi & Evans, 2015). Furthermore, it is often the senior faculty cohort who are responsible for evaluating their early to mid-career colleagues (Hobson, 2016), making them unavailable to serve as mentors. Drawing on retiree faculty to assume the mentor role has the potential to address this paucity of available senior employed faculty who may wish to assume the role of mentor for early to mid-career faculty colleagues. the mentor role.

### The Role of Mentorship Development

An essential element of retiree/mentee mentorship that is not addressed in current scholarship is the need for mentorship development related to the roles of both retiree mentor and faculty mentee. Mentorship development programs aimed at preparing academic mentors and mentees to engage in an effective mentoring relationship have been found to have a positive impact for both mentor and mentee participants. Pololi and Evans (2015) described how a two-day mentorship development and career advancement focused program facilitated the development of trust between mentees and mentors, and how the presence of trust allowed the participants to work collaboratively and openly on their academic development in a subsequent year-long mentoring experience. Mendez et al. (2019b) described the efficacy of a mentor/mentee orientation session focused on effective strategies to establish trust and shared expectations to create a foundation for a successful mentoring relationship.

### Understanding the Role of Mentorship for Faculty Across the Career Continuum

Mentorship programs in academia often focus on supporting and socializing faculty members as they navigate cultural and institutional expectations

across their academic life (Jackevicius et al., 2014; Mendez et al., 2019a; Waddell et al., 2017; Zellers et al., 2008). In a study of a collaborative mentoring program, Pololi and Evans (2015) reported that both early and mid-career cohorts found the mentorship program experience to be rewarding. Specifically, the authors noted that group gatherings, a long duration (one year), and an explicit focus on the mentoring relationship enabled the development of trustworthy mentee/mentor relationships that allowed participants to work productively on their career development. Additionally, Mendez et al. (2017) described a career development-focused mentoring program that included early and midcareer mentee participants. They observed that both early and midcareer mentees benefitted from the mentorship.

This article reports a multi-component mentorship pilot program with the aim to develop a stronger understanding of the potential role of retirees as mentors, the impact of professional development for both mentors and mentees, including mentees that are early, mid, and late career faculty members. The program engaged retiree mentors and faculty mentees (across the career continuum) in a mentorship development program that prepares members of each group, and as a collective, to engage in meaningful and productive mentoring relationships.

## Conceptual Frameworks and Anticipated Outcomes

This study was guided by the IMPACT mentoring program described by Mendez et al. (2019b), and the conceptual framework, 'Benefits of the Being a Mentor', developed by Ragins and Scandura (1999). The 'Benefits of the Being a Mentor' framework highlights five factors that contribute to mentor benefits (rewarding experience, improved job performance, loyal base of support, recognition by others and generativity) and was used to provide a conceptual underpinning for the IMPACT program. In the IMPACT program, retiree mentors, as well as early and mid-career mentees, participated in mentorship development centred on the following three domains: career development, sponsorship, and coaching. The structure and foci areas of the IMPACT program and the Benefits of Being a Mentor Framework guided the structure of this study. Specifically, in the RPIF study, the intervention components included: 1) retiree mentors and mentees working in dyads, and 2) both mentors and mentees engaged in professional development specific to their respective roles (career planning and development for mentees and career coaching development for the mentors).

The 'Benefits of Being a Mentor' framework and the IMPACT program further guided the anticipated outcomes for the RPIF study in that mentors would: 1) continue their

engagement in academia, and their profession(s) in a formal and meaningful manner, 2) have an opportunity to formally invest in and support the next generation of professors and academic leaders and 3) gain personal satisfaction in the opportunity to positively promote mentees' accomplishments and academic career development. Anticipated mentee outcomes were that faculty mentees would: 1) be supported by retiree mentors as they navigated their academic career, 2) receive support in furthering their socialization within and external to their professional field, 3) engage with, and benefit from, the experiences of fellow faculty mentees across the career continuum, 4) develop an enhanced understanding of the roles of university departments and staff that have the potential to support their ongoing academic career development and 5) report enhanced career, professional and personal satisfaction.

## Method

### Retirees Paying It Forward

The Retirees Paying it Forward (RPIF) mentoring program was a voluntary three-phase multi-component program that shaped the mentorship relationships between retiree mentors and faculty mentees through a series of mentorship development workshops. The phases and components are outlined in Figure 1. The program focus was on career development

in academia, in ways that are not specifically tied to any particular school or to the faculty in which the study was conducted. The program was held virtually due to the restrictions put in place to mitigate the spread of the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2).

### The Mentorship Development Program

RPiF participants engaged in a formal mentorship development program consisting of several virtual workshops, related to their role as mentors and mentees (see Figure 1). The workshops took place over time, allowing the participants to reflect on the concepts and workshops

they engaged in within the mentorship development program (see the Appendix for more detail). The program was facilitated by a professional career coach external to the university, as well as members of the research team with expertise in career planning and development. A career development-focused workbook titled Building Successful Mentoring Relationships©, (donnerwheeler & Integral Visions Consulting Inc., 2016) was used to guide the structure and process of the mentorship development program for both mentors and mentees.

Mandatory mentor workshops included: 1) mentor development, 2) coaching skills, 3) relationship building and 4) a group check-in with mentors.

Mandatory mentee workshops focused on 1) career planning & development, 2) mentee development and 3) relationship building. Individual check-ins with the mentees were conducted with a member of the research team twice over the course of the project. Both mentors and mentees had the option to attend a panel event describing key resources related to academic career development available from different departments across the university (e.g., Human Resources, Office of the Vice-President of Research and Innovation, Office of the Provost, Centre of Excellence in Learning and Teaching).

### Figure 1

*Phases and Components of the RPiF Pilot Program*

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#### **Phase 1: Mentorship Development (2 months)**

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The mentorship development program consisted of the following workshops:

*Mentors:* 1) mentor development (90 min), and 2) coaching skills (90 min).

*Mentees:* 1) career planning & development (90 min), and 2) mentee development (90 min).

*Mentors and Mentees:* 1) relationship building (90 min), 2) matching session (120 min), and 3) academic career development panel (90 min)

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#### **Phase 2: Engagement (5 months)**

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The frequency of mentor/mentee dyad meetings were determined by the needs of the mentees and as agreed upon by the dyad.

*Mentors:* group check-in with research team (60 min)

*Mentees:* 1:1 check-in with research team (2 x 30 min)

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#### **Phase 3: Feedback**

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*Mentors:* Focus group (60 min)

*Mentees:* Focus Group (60 min)

*Mentors and Mentees:* adjournment event (60 min)

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## The Matching Process

Retiree mentors and faculty mentees were matched into dyads. The matching process was informed by the principles of choice-based matching (Blake-Beard et al., 2008). In choice-based matching, participants engage in one (or more) selection activities from which both (or either) mentors and mentees provide feedback on their preferred matches. Blake-Beard et al. (2008) has found that participant involvement in choice-based matching increases psychological ownership and commitment towards the mentoring experience and deepens the mentoring relationship. In this study, mentors and mentees participated in a two-hour virtual selection activity, where every potential mentor/mentee dyad combination met in private breakout rooms for successive 6-minute discussions. Prior to the activity, participants were asked to prepare a brief verbal introduction of themselves, to reflect on what they value most in a mentoring relationship and to consider their unique needs related to the mentor-mentee relationship. The decision to ask participants to share what they value most was rooted in a belief that an axiologically informed conversation in the selection activity would encourage an axiologically focused reflection on which candidates would be an effective dyad partner. Following the activity, mentees were asked to create a non-ranked list of five priority mentors they believed they

could work with effectively. Based on this information, the research team created mentor/mentee dyads. All mentees were matched to an identified priority mentor.

## The Mentoring Period

Mentor and mentee participants worked together over a period of five months, during which the dyads were asked to engage in the Building Successful Mentoring Relationships© workbook (donnerwheeler & Integral Visions Consulting Inc., 2016). Mentor/mentee dyads met regularly during this time. Dyads scheduled the frequency and duration of the meetings to align with the mentee needs. In addition to the specified check-ins with the research team described above, dyads were also invited to contact members of the research team with any questions related to the study.

## End of Study

The study focus on relational mentoring guided the collective experience at the conclusion of the study. The constraints related to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic negated the possibility of an in-person event and, therefore, a virtual gathering was held with all study participants. During the gathering, the research team shared the themes from the study, followed by the opportunity for mentor and mentee participants to share concluding thoughts regarding the study and related findings with their peers.

## A Case Study Approach

A Merriam-informed case study approach was used to delineate the study of the multi-component mentorship program. The Merriam and Tisdell (2016) definition of a case is “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 45) that is singular, and where the identification of the object of study and the delineation of its boundaries is constructed by the researcher. The case was the multi-component mentorship program titled Retirees Paying it Forward. As a constructivist methodology it focuses on understanding and meaning making within the case, which necessarily includes processes of consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said (Yazan, 2015). Given that the primary focus of this study was to explore the retiree mentors and faculty mentees experience of the RPiF program, and their role as mentors and mentees, a constructivist methodology was deemed to be an appropriate fit.

## Recruitment and Eligibility

The faculty within the university where this study took place is comprised of nine distinct and diverse academic programs serving approximately 7,500 students. The retirees who had been employed as full-time faculty members had retired in 2010 or later, and current full-time tenured stream faculty members across the career continuum were eligible to

participate as mentees. All retirees had previously held administrative positions within their career, and the mentees spanned pre-tenure to full professors. Study participants were recruited through email sent by an academic coordinator, from the research team to retirees and faculty members across one Faculty. A maximum variation sampling strategy (Silverman, 2006) was used to ensure a diversity of perspectives and emails were distributed to all individuals who fit the inclusion criteria. Retirees and faculty members who expressed an interest participated in a telephone conversation where the study objectives were explained, and questions addressed. Eighteen (18) participants were recruited for the study; nine retiree mentors and nine faculty mentees. Retiree participants had retired from three academic programs and faculty participants were from five academic programs.

### Data collection

Data were collected at the termination of the pilot program, in separate focus groups for retiree mentors (n=9) and faculty mentees (n=9). Focus group questions were open ended and included, but were not limited to, prompts to describe (for retiree mentors) ‘the experience of being engaged in academia beyond retirement’ and ‘the relationship with the mentee with respect to this study’. FCS faculty mentees were prompted to describe, among other things, ‘their motivation to

participate in the study’ and ‘the experience of being mentored by a retiree mentor’. As a research technique, focus groups represent a way for a moderator to access data and insights, using the verbal responses and the interaction within the group as mechanism to enhance the data and insights (Morgan, 1997; Stalmeijer et al., 2014). In line with the constructivist paradigm’s interest in meaning and understanding, focus groups leverage the dynamics of the group and record the emergence of opinions, meanings, feelings, attitudes and beliefs about a topic area (Stalmeijer et al., 2014). All focus groups were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Each member of the research team reviewed all recorded discussions prior to engaging in the collaborative analytical work processes. At the end of study event, themes that were produced from the focus group data were shared with the study participants. In comments and feedback, the participants confirmed that the themes resonated with their experiences.

### Analytical approach

Analysis of the data from the multi-component mentorship program was informed by established processes for reflexive thematic analysis (TA), a method for systematic analytic engagement with qualitative data to produce themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022a, 2022b). Reflexive TA recognizes the

subjectivity of the researchers as a valuable tool in developing rich analysis and thus, requires an “reflexive unpacking” by the researchers. In this study, such reflexive unpacking was achieved by the research team, comprised of two scholars of nursing education, one education scholar, and one doctoral candidate by working in an iterative and collaborative manner. The four-person team met regularly throughout the study intervention to discuss perspectives, actions, and findings. At times, the research team worked in dyads, after which the dyads came together to discuss the output of the dyad work (e.g., notes on analytical observations). In addition, descriptions, notes and analytical observations were kept in a shared folder to which all members of the research team had access.

## Findings

### Themes – Mentors

Table 1 outlines the themes that were produced from the mentor focus groups. Across the themes, the appreciation for the connection between the mentors and 1) their work as academics, 2) to their colleagues and 3) to the institution was evident. In several instances, there was strong evidence of how this connection continues to exist beyond the date of formal retirement.

**Table 1**

*Themes- Mentors*

Theme	Description	Representative Quote
1: Staying connected	Captured both the sense that mentors wished to contribute to the development of the careers of their junior colleagues, and also wished to maintain a connection to each other, to academia, to the Faculty and to the institution.	“It was really important to me to continue to be involved with the department and faculty colleagues.”
2: Paying it forward	Captured comments that made a connection between the experiences that mentors had themselves, the impact of this experience on their own career development and the interest in offering such an experience to others.	“I had some excellent mentors... over my career and found the experience enriching, but also, it helped move my career forward, there's no doubt about it”.
3: The mentoring relationship	Relational engagement was reported as key for mentors. Comments that highlighted the mentoring relationship focused on how relational engagement can strengthen the effectiveness of mentoring. Mentors expressed that this is especially true when mentoring across disciplines. There was an acknowledgement that investing in getting to know each other and making efforts to understand the context that the mentees lived in, and worked to develop their career in, was a strong variable in the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship.	“I knew my mentee, but from having worked on a committee or two – so only very professionally. We always pulled in the personal, so we got to know each other...I think that truly contributed... to the development of the relationship ...”.  “I learned that, as always, it is the relationship that makes the outcome”.
4: Mentor skill development	The mentoring development program that equipped mentors to engage in informed academic mentorship with a career focus was viewed as important. Following the completion of the workshops, mentors felt supported and prepared to enter the experience. The workshops and the workbook were used to facilitate effective relationships.	“... sometimes I would, especially in the, in the early meetings, I would go back, and I'd refresh, in my mind I'd scan the questions that that were there to prompt or to, you know, help you sort of find your way”.



Table 1

*Themes- Mentors*

5: Enrichment through engagement	Mentors expressed that the opportunity to engage post-retirement represented a welcomed departure from the usually rigid structure of academia. In the study intervention, they had the freedom to stay engaged in activities that they found enriching without the constraints that academic life demanded.	“...I worked to try and maintain a connection with colleagues, I didn't formally teach classes, simply because I wanted the freedom to not be constrained by marking and deadlines and things that I wasn't looking forward to”
6: The academic context	<p>Uniquely, retiree mentors could offer a rich understanding of the history and culture of an institution. This allowed for a uniquely meaningful perspective to be passed on to the mentees who were navigating the institution.</p> <p>At the same time, mentors were keenly aware that the academic context was undergoing change. The expansion of requirements and obligations on faculty was noted, and comments highlighted that participation in programs like the study intervention would need to remain voluntary in order to maintain the level of genuine engagement that was required for it to be successful.</p>	<p>“...the wisdom of how you do it within the culture of the university is sometimes something perhaps we can bring to the, to the table.”</p> <p>“We don't want to see this as yet another job requirement that you must do either as a mentor or mentee.”</p>
7: The career trajectory of the mentee	Comments were grounded in a desire to provide a differentiated mentoring experience that was specific towards the individual mentee, and their location along the career trajectory. This was also evident in the inquiring work mentors engaged in to establish where the mentee was at and then match their coaching and mentoring strategies to that.	<p>“Where they're at in their career trajectory makes a difference.”</p> <p>“There may also be different levels of anxiety as well. I mean, I mean, the amount of anxiety that probationary faculty feel is just enormous.”</p>

**Anticipated Outcomes - Mentors**

It has been noted that navigating the complex process into retirement raises questions of identity, purpose and fulfillment (Strage, 2018; Van Ummersen et al., 2014; Yakoboski, 2015). For mentors, participation in the study may have offered some mentors

the opportunity to remain engaged in the academic environment as they transitioned to retirement. In this study, retirees spoke positively of the continued connection with the academic community, the opportunity to contribute to the career development of mentees and the enrichment they experienced in their role of mentor.

The anticipated mentor outcome that mentors would “continue their engagement in academia, and their profession(s) in a formal and meaningful manner” (outcome # 1) was reflected in the appreciation they expressed for maintaining relevant connections (theme 1), the enthusiasm they demonstrated for paying forward the support

they received during their time as faculty members (theme 2) and the enrichment they experienced in their new mentor role (theme 5). The perceived importance related to the mentorship development program (theme 4) and the meaningful relationships that developed between mentors and mentees (theme 3) were similarly connected to their expressed experience of being formally and meaningfully engaged as mentors.

The anticipated mentor outcome that mentors would “have the opportunity to formally invest in and support the next generation of rising professors and academic leaders” (outcome #2) was similarly reflected in the expressed appreciation for maintaining relevant connections and the opportunity to ‘pay it forward’. In particular, their ability to provide broad and illuminating perspectives of career advancement and leadership as a result of their historical knowledge and understanding of the academic context (theme 6), afforded mentors a panoramic view that the mentees were still developing. Seeing the bigger picture also allowed retiree mentors the opportunity to provide mentoring that was relevant and meaningful to mentees where they were at (theme 7). Mentors spoke of having invested and supported the next generation of faculty members in a variety of informal ways throughout their career.

It was also anticipated that mentors would “gain personal satisfaction in the opportunity to positively promote mentees’

accomplishments and academic career development” (outcome #3). Mentor appreciation for the mentorship development (theme 4) that enabled them to pass on the benefits they had received from mentoring (theme 2) was supplemented by comments that expressed satisfaction at passing on their lessons learned of the historical institutional culture (theme 6) - formal, informal and hidden – to the mentee faculty members. Retirees spoke of the accomplishments of the mentees with enthusiasm and as described below, mentees spoke of an intentional and targeted focus on their career development with appreciation.

### Themes - mentees

Table 2 captures the themes from the mentee focus groups. Across the themes there was a strong acknowledgement of the unique opportunity it was, to take time to reflect on one’s own career and an appreciation of doing so with the guidance of senior colleagues.

### Anticipated Outcomes - Mentees

The anticipated outcome that mentees would “be supported by retiree mentors as they navigate their academic career” (outcome #1) was reflected across the five identified mentee themes. Not only did mentees embrace the support they had during this reflective pause to consider their career (theme 5), they also experienced a genuine interest

being taken in their career (theme 1). They reported that mentors would strengthen the mentoring relationship (theme 2) by tailoring the mentorship to their career stage and associated needs (theme 3) much like a personal trainer does (theme 4). It is worth noting that one of the mentor workshops in mentorship development program focused on coaching skills, emphasizing mentee-centered discussions and exercises that enhanced the mentee’s ability to articulate their specific career needs openly. Further, mentees noted that because they were matched to retirees, they felt more comfortable accepting the investment that mentors made in their mentoring. Where they might have otherwise felt that they were encroaching on the time of a senior faculty colleague, working with retirees alleviated this concern, and enhanced the support they felt by the mentors. The findings suggest that that retiree faculty represent a relevant and promising resource as mentors.

It was further anticipated that mentees would “receive support in furthering their socialization within and external to their profession field” (outcome #2). The importance of the mentoring relationship (theme 2) was similarly relevant here. Both mentors and mentees were guided by an emphasis on relational engagement in the Building Successful Mentoring Relationships© workbook and across the mentorship development program. For example, one of the initial

Table 2

*Themes- Mentors*

Theme	Description	Representative Quote
1: Focus on the academic career	Captured an awareness that mentees developed about different career trajectories and leadership possibilities that exists at the program, Faculty and institutional level. For some, this awareness was enhanced when matched to a mentor from a discipline other than their own.	“... to listen to learn from the experiences of others, to make better decisions in terms of what lies ahead. And how you know what the different trajectories can be.”
2: Relationship formation	Relational engagement was reported as key for mentees. There was an acknowledgement that the centering of the mentoring relationship and the investment that both mentors and mentees made into developing an effective relationship, allowed mentees to speak about various aspects of their lives, including pressures and joys they experience outside of their academic role (e.g., with family/friends/community).	“And we know that our time is really limited in what we have and how normally I wouldn't give myself the luxury of time to have a lovely talk about family, because that wasn't necessarily my initial thought, but it was lovely.”
3: Meeting us “where we're at”	Mentees were aware of the targeted and individualised mentoring they received. They noted the importance of having their specific career location and vision understood and reflected in the way mentors engaged with them. They noted that mentors worked diligently to identify possible connections or next steps in their careers that may not have been considered by the mentee.	“It's – I really feel more grounded in knowing that I have some people to bounce decisions off of but also at the same point in time I've been encouraged to reach out to speak to people that I wouldn't have before.”
4: Personal trainer	This theme centred on the time and accountability that was experienced by the mentees. They arranged for time to be carved out to spend with the mentor and this was their time. Also, mentees expressed the value of having a mentor that was retired. They felt that there was a different nature to the time they spent together and felt that they could not expect or ask for this from a senior faculty colleague.	“... I'm working with my mentor, you know, I was accountable to the time that they were putting in. And so, I made sure that I set aside the time to prepare or reflect or work on things so that it was sort of a like I didn't feel like I was wasting [their] time.”

**Table 2**

*Themes- Mentors*

<p>5: Seeing the 'big picture'</p>	<p>This was a reflective pause that mentees allowed themselves. Mentees spoke of taking a welcomed moment to gaze beyond their day-to-day demands and see the broader perspectives that their mentors made visible to them. The importance of being exposed to perspectives that illuminate the diversity of possibilities on the road ahead and pausing to reflect on them was captured by this theme.</p>	<p>"It was an opportunity for me to kind of reflect on my career."  "... I guess it kind of confirmed, and I guess, having the opportunity to talk to the people like to my mentor that I was kind of on the right track and I enjoyed doing what I was doing, but it did give me an opportunity to reflect upon my career, and where it can go."</p>
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activities for the mentor/mentee dyad is to develop a Mentoring Relationship Agreement. To develop this, the mentors and mentees are given guided questions that foreground their expectations for their mentoring relationship. This contributed to the positive emphasis both groups placed on the relationship itself. The subsequent development of trust in the relationship then allowed for conversations within and across disciplines or fields of study that were driven by curiosity and genuine interest by mentors who were favourably perched to see the bigger picture (theme 5).

The expectation that mentees would "engage with, and benefit from, the experiences of fellow faculty mentees across the career continuum" (outcome #3) was also linked to the ability of mentees to see a "bigger" picture (theme 5). Because mentees were from across the career continuum, and because they came together in

several mentorship development workshops, they shared experiences, thoughts, concerns and celebrations with each other. While the relationships they developed with each other across the mentee groups may not have been as deep as their relationship with their mentors, this engagement was also generative.

The anticipated outcome that mentees would "develop an enhanced understanding of the roles of university departments and staff that have the potential to support their ongoing academic career development" (outcome #4) was met in two ways: 1) through ongoing conversations with the mentors, and 2) by attending the panel event showcasing key resources related to academic career development from across the university. This event was optional, and seven of the nine mentees attended. Mixed feedback was offered with some participants benefitting from the exposure and

information, while others felt they were already familiar with the resources. This was an instance where a more tailored approach to meeting the mentees where they were at (theme 3), may have enhanced the reported experience of the mentees.

Lastly, it was anticipated that mentees would "report enhanced career, professional and personal satisfaction" (outcome #5) as an outcome. The targeted focus on their academic career (theme 1), the high-quality mentoring relationship mentees developed with their mentors (theme 2), the notion of being met where they are at (theme 3) and the experiences of being paired with mentors who were able to see "the big picture" (theme 5) all served to meet this anticipated outcome. Collectively the findings within these themes contribute to the enhanced satisfaction reported by the mentees. The findings suggest that mentees from across

the career continuum benefit from the mentoring experience and relationship and that there is also a benefit to mentee group interaction.

### Discussion

A primary finding from the study is that retiree faculty represent a relevant and promising resource as mentors. Given previous research findings (Mendez et al., 2019a; Mendez et al., 2019b; Mendez et al., 2017), this finding is perhaps not surprising. By virtue of their employment with the institution, retirees have developed relevant institutional knowledge, and important insights into the culture of the institution they retired from. This vantage point offers retiree mentors a panoramic view that mentees are still developing (Hall, 2017). Mentees reported that this “bigger picture” perspective enables mentors to offer advice and support that are relevant beyond the ongoing shifts that occur in daily academic life, and that their absence from the academic institution has the potential to be an available, welcoming and informed source of support and advice within the context of academia. In addition, it is important to note that when mentor participants had previously held leadership positions within the institution, as most of the participating RPiF mentors had, they were able to offer a perspective on leadership that included, but was not limited to, the administrative leadership

positions that existed within their home department.

RPiF retiree mentors reported that they value the connection to their former place of employment, the structured and formal preparation for their role as mentors and the opportunity to support the career goals of faculty mentees. Mentees, from across the career continuum, also reported that being mentored by a retiree has benefits. While all parties acknowledge that the landscape of academia is undergoing change, and that the obligations for faculty members are increasing, the bigger picture perspective gained by the mentors over their career has the potential to broaden the perspectives of mentees. For example, how leadership outside of their own department may be quite different from that experienced within their department. Through participation in the RPiF program, mentees were exposed to career opportunities outside of their disciplinary departments and offering an opportunity to reflect on their own trajectories. This reflection allowed mentees to express that they were on the most suitable path, or that they need to pause and “look up” from their daily demands of academic work and see the range of opportunities that exists.

### The Mentoring Relationship

As reported elsewhere (Bean et al., 2014; Martin & Douglas, 2018; Pololi & Evans, 2015; Ragins, 2016; Sarabipour et

al., 2021; Waddell et al., 2017), the mentoring relationship is key to effective mentoring. Ragins (2016, p. 228) states that, “Extraordinary outcomes require extraordinary relationships...”. The results of this study suggest that when mentors and mentees invest in a high-quality relationship, the knowledge exchange within each dyad becomes reciprocal and genuine. Both mentors and mentee participants noted that the investment in the relationship between the mentor and mentee strengthened the quality and effectiveness of the mentoring process and outcomes. Mentees reported that a strong mentoring relationship allowed them to share various aspects of their lives in- and outside of academia with ease and comfort. Mentors described that knowing about context within which the mentees live, work, and develop their careers made it more possible for them to provide mentoring that was uniquely targeted to their mentee. Mentors added that the investment in the mentoring relationship was particularly relevant to dyads where the mentor and mentee are not in the same program. Administrators who wish to set up a mentorships program that spans multiple academic programs or Faculties may find this to be useful. In such cases, in particular, where participants are not well versed in the academic culture that exists within the field of the other, relational engagement can be the glue that provides, what Ragins (2016, p. 229) calls the “relational closeness” that makes it more

possible for people to express their needs.

### The Mentorship Development Program

While all retiree participants reported that they had previously served in the role of mentors, few had participated in a structured program focused on developing their role as mentors. The mentorship development program in this study offered both mentors and mentees a clear understanding of 1) what is expected of them in their respective roles, 2) what they can reasonably expect of their partners, and 3) guidance for how to achieve their desired result. Both groups reported that participation in the structured and formal mentorship development program was an important investment in their understanding of their role in the mentoring experience. This finding aligns with previously reported literature that has highlighted the relevance of formally preparing mentors and mentees for their respective roles (Mendez et al., 2019b; Pololi & Evans, 2015).

This pilot study was made possible by a mix of funded and in-kind resources. As a pilot, this was appropriate. Continuous mentoring programs (both the mentorship development programs and the mentoring programs that they exist within) require an allocation of resources that is appropriate and continuous. Supporting mentors and mentees to support each other needs

knowledgeable project owners (those who initiate and oversee the project) and strong administrative personnel who work together on a continuous basis, making it possible to improve the program year over year. The focus on relational mentoring also requires that the project owner and administration become and remain knowledgeable about relational mentoring as it continues to be studied so that evolving understandings of relationality can be applied to the project. Where appropriate and continuous resourcing can be secured, the study shows that structured mentorship programs that focus on career development and uses retiree mentors to mentor faculty from across the career continuum can be successful.

### Voluntary Participation

Bozeman and Feeney (2007) report that the knowledge translation that occurs in mentoring relationships must be free from the obligation to share knowledge that might exist, for example, in a supervisor/employee relationship. In this pilot, the voluntary nature of participation was highlighted in the invitations to faculty and the participants noted that participation as either mentors or mentees must remain voluntary, should the program continue. The voluntary nature of participation is the foundation upon which the investment in a high-quality mentoring relationship can be built.

### A Quick Pivot and an Adaptable Group

As with many other activities during this time, the study intervention was planned as an in-person experience, but the outbreak of the SARS-CoV-2 virus forced the program online. Both mentors and mentees noted that it was an unusual situation for them to participate as a research participant in a mentorship program during a time where uncertainty related to the SARS-CoV-2 virus made this shift to a virtual delivery necessary, and where a relatively new communication modality (Zoom) was being broadly introduced in academic settings. While there was some initial trepidation about how the quick pivot to virtual would impact the work that it is to develop a meaningful mentoring relationship, mentors and mentees proved to be adaptable. Some even preferred a virtual – or a hybrid – version of a program like this, and, in one instance, the virtual delivery was described as an “unexpected bonus”. With the transition back to in-person interactions, a researchers may consider a hybrid mentorship model where, for example, the regular mentor/mentee meetings are virtual, while group interactions (e.g., workshops in the mentorship development program) take place in person.

### Limitations

The nature of a pilot study is to implement a program that

is smaller than the ultimate aim. Should a multi-component career development mentorship program be continuously implemented it is possible that more than nine dyads would be formed, offering a broader diversity of experiences for administrators to draw on when making program improvements. Ideally, this broader range of experiences would include a diversity of views from faculty members who belong to groups that have been underrepresented historically. Mendez et al. (2019b) highlight the importance of mentoring for faculty from across minority groups, and we concur. Such views were not broadly available to us in this pilot program. If this study was to be replicated or a continuous program was developed, that would be a key area of focus. It is also a characteristic of a pilot that it is the first of its kind. Therefore, findings cannot draw on the culture of the program or be informed by historical occurrences, including things that have been tried and dismissed. Such things are not known in a pilot.

### Conclusion

In this pilot study a multi-component mentorship program inclusive of academic retirees as mentors and faculty mentees was designed and implemented in an academic setting. The study focused the mentoring experience on academic career development. The pilot program included mentorship development

components for both mentors and mentees that were aimed at preparing each group for their respective role as mentors and mentees. The primary foci of the study were to inquire into the degree to which 1) faculty mentees experienced support in the development of strategies and capacity to achieve success in achieving their individual career goals related to their faculty role, 2) retiree mentors developed expertise in the formal role of mentors, and 3) retiree mentors and faculty mentees reported enhanced career, professional and personal satisfaction. The primary study finding is that retiree faculty represent a relevant and promising resource to serve as mentors for faculty members across the career continuum. Study results further suggest that mentors developed relevant expertise related to their role as mentors in the mentorship development program. This then allowed them to provide the support that mentees needed in order to focus on developing strategies and capacity towards meeting their faculty role-specific career goals. Both groups spoke of a satisfying experience with a positive impact.

### Future Research

This study establishes the value of retiree mentors as well the importance of supporting both mentors and mentees with a multi-component mentorship development program. As this was a pilot program, the need for future research on understanding mentor

motivations, mentor suitability and on mentoring across professions was identified. Specifically, deepening understanding of mentor characteristics and motivations will strengthen future mentorship programs. A focus on understanding the recruitment and selection of mentors will additionally support the important goal of ensuring that the necessary diversity of mentors not only by discipline and experience, but by race and gender allows for more representative mentor/mentee matching.

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## APPENDIX

**Retirees Paying It Forward:  
A Retiree/Faculty Mentorship  
Program***Intervention Description*

Mentors and mentees engaged in interactive, experiential workshops to prepare them for their respective roles of mentor/mentee, and for the mentor/mentee relationship.

**Workshops  
Faculty Mentors - Retirees**

Retiree participants in the following workshops:

- **Mentorship Development Workshop:** a 90-minute interactive workshop that introduced mentors to mentoring skills within the academic context. Participants received a published mentorship workbook for ongoing use and reference.
- **Coaching Skill Workshop:** a 90-minute workshop focused on how coaching skills can contribute to the development of a successful mentoring relationship. Participants received resource materials on coaching.

**Faculty Mentees – Faculty  
Members**

Faculty participants participated in the following workshops:

- **Career Planning and Development Workshop:** A 90-minute interactive workshop that introduced mentees to a career development model and engaged them in experiential activities that prompted them to develop a career vision for their academic career, a self-assessment related to their capacity to actualize their vision and to identify their strengths and areas for development in relation to their vision and self-assessment.
- **Mentee Development Workshop:** A 90-minute workshop focused on an overview of mentorship and introduced participants to the Five-Phase Mentoring Relationship Model<sup>©</sup>. The first two phases, its purpose and engagement in the mentor/mentee relationship were highlighted. Participants received a published mentorship workbook for ongoing use and reference.

**Retiree Mentors and Faculty  
Mentees**

Retiree Mentors and Faculty Mentees participated in a **Matching Workshop** that actively engaged mentors and mentees in the matching process. In preparation for this workshop, everyone was asked to consider what they value most in a mentoring relationship, and what their needs were for the mentoring

relationship. Each mentor and mentee met with nine potential dyad partners to share their values, beliefs and hopes related to the mentor-mentee relationship. Following the workshop each mentee was asked to identify 5 mentors (in no order of preference) with whom they shared similar values, beliefs about, and hopes for, the mentorship relationship. The matching process conducted by the research team was guided by the shared values and beliefs of individual mentors and mentees.

Following the matching process mentors and mentees engaged in a 90-minute **Building Successful Mentoring Relationships Workshop** focused on the final three phases of the Model, planning, emergence, and completion.

**Additional Support**

1. An interactive dialogue with mentor/mentees and key University departments to provide an overview of information, resources and opportunities that are relevant to the mentees' academic career vision and related goals and objectives.
2. Mentor check-in which provided an opportunity for mentors to come together as a team and share the unique experience of each mentor to-date as well as the nature of varied mentoring approaches.
3. Mentee/mentor dyad check-ins on a monthly basis to share learnings.