Fostering development of mentoring and reverse mentoring skills among public relations undergraduates

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Mentoring and reverse mentoring have gotten a lot of attention in the academic and professional literature in other disciplines (accounting, management, nursing, the sciences, etc.). But these concepts haven’t been addressed much in public relations. We believe that if these practices were more fully integrated into the undergraduate curriculum, our students would be more prepared to participate in mentoring in the professional environment, as well as launch careers as independent PR practitioners.

The purpose of our panel discussion is to briefly share our experiences in regard to mentoring, reverse mentoring, and entrepreneurship. We’ll talk about what our research and our classroom experience taught us about the use of mentoring in public relations – and what additional questions still need to be answered.

- **Betsy** is particularly skilled in the area of entrepreneurship and has taught a class focused around how to thrive as a PR entrepreneur. Her experience as her department’s Internship Coordinator and as the 2010 President of the Central California Chapter of PRSA has given her great depth of knowledge into the realities of the modern PR workplace and what employers are looking for from new PR graduates. She also advises her campus’ student-run firm and in that capacity has counseled students about reverse mentoring with their clients, especially in the area of social media. Reverse mentoring has also become part of her service-learning assignments.

- **Julie** has an extensive background in journalism and public relations. She was elected to the PRSA College of Fellows in 2004, and was elected the National Faculty Adviser for PRSSA in 2009. Julie teaches a class where she shows students how to mentor nonprofits to set up social media. She will talk about what she has learned from that experience and how what she has developed could be replicated elsewhere.

- **Doug** supervises a student-run agency that is a capstone course for students in advertising and public relations concentrations. Because students come to the agency with different skill sets, much of their learning comes through peer mentoring. He recently published a study showing undergraduates working in college media often prefer learning from a peer as opposed to learning from faculty.

As you can see, we have a variety of experiences that are similar and yet different. We think there’s tremendous potential to use mentoring and reverse mentoring to strengthen the undergraduate curriculum in a number of areas – and to build students’ knowledge and skills in service-learning projects. We hope to offer a thought-provoking discussion of the issues, followed by a robust question and answer session.

We hope those who attend our panel session will find many good ideas to take with them back to their home campuses!