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Book Review: *Best Practices for Mentoring in Online Programs: Supporting Faculty and Students in Higher Education*

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Abstract

This book review examines Ko and Zhadko's (2023) practical guide to designing and sustaining mentoring systems in virtual learning environments. The review highlights the book's dual focus on faculty and student mentoring, emphasizing structured, institutionally supported models that promote collaboration, professional growth, and learner persistence. Key strengths include the inclusion of actionable tools and templates, as well as thoughtful attention to both synchronous and asynchronous mentoring modalities. However, the book relies largely on descriptive approaches, with limited empirical evidence and less balanced depth across faculty and student mentoring discussions. Overall, the book is positioned as a timely and valuable resource for higher education leaders, faculty mentors, and instructional support professionals seeking to strengthen mentoring ecosystems in online and hybrid programs.

Keywords: *faculty and student support, higher education, mentoring models, online mentoring, virtual learning environments (VLEs)*

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Summary of Contents and Organization

Ko and Zhadko (2023) provide a comprehensive and pragmatic guide for designing, implementing, and sustaining effective mentoring systems within online higher education (HE). The book is organized into two sections: Part I, "Faculty Mentoring Models," and Part II, "Student Mentoring Models," which mirror the dual responsibilities that institutions hold in supporting both instructors and learners in virtual learning environments (VLEs). The introduction highlights the increasing need for formalized coaching and mentoring models and practices as online programs expand. While informal mentoring remains valuable, scalable mentoring requires systematic institutional design.

Part I explores diverse models of faculty mentoring, including peer, group, and network-based approaches. These chapters emphasize collaboration, collegial support, and knowledge sharing among instructors to address challenges such as professional isolation and workload in virtual teaching. Subsequent sections expand on institutional culture, incentives, and mentor training, providing clear templates and checklists that connect theoretical frameworks to actionable implementation and assessment strategies.

Taken together, these and chapters illustrate a mentoring continuum that bridges the experiences of faculty and students. By demonstrating how support for faculty mentors directly enhances student learning, Ko and Zhadko (2023) position mentoring as an integral part of an institutional ecosystem rather than a set of isolated practices.

A notable strength of Part II is its attention to technological and logistical considerations. Ko and Zhadko (2023) emphasize that mentoring can be equally effective through synchronous meetings or asynchronous exchanges, depending on the needs of participants and the institutional infrastructure. This nuanced discussion of modality reflects the realities of online communication and provides practical insight into adapting mentoring programs to institutional contexts. Appendices and sample documents enhance the book's utility, making it equally suitable as a reference guide and a hands-on toolkit.

The authors also address the technological and logistical considerations of online mentoring, distinguishing between synchronous and asynchronous modes of communication. They note that mentoring can occur effectively through both real-time (synchronous) meetings and time-flexible (asynchronous) exchanges, depending on participants' needs and institutional infrastructure. This attention to modality adds nuance to the design strategies presented throughout Part II and reflects the authors' understanding of the diverse communication dynamics that define contemporary online learning environments, offering practical insight for adapting mentoring programs to institutional contexts.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Ko and Zhadko (2023) skillfully translate mentoring theory into actionable strategies that serve both faculty and students, blending conceptual insight with practical guidance. A key strength of the book is its nuanced examination of mentoring practices across both faculty and student populations. This dual perspective enables readers to view mentoring as both a relational process and an institutional mechanism that fosters teaching excellence, collaboration, and learner persistence. The integration of these two audiences reinforces the idea that successful online learning depends on well-structured mentoring networks that support the professional growth of instructors and the academic success of students alike.

Equally notable is the book's pragmatic orientation. The authors provide concrete tools, checklists, templates, and case examples that bridge the gap between theory and practice while situating mentoring within organizational culture and policy. Their astute awareness of institutional dynamics, such as compensation, workload, and leadership support, sets this work apart from more narrowly focused guides. The book's timeliness further enhances its value amid ongoing transformations within HE.

Despite these strengths, several limitations merit attention. The book's broad scope occasionally limits depth; faculty mentoring, for instance, receives less detailed treatment than student mentoring. The authors tend toward descriptive accounts rather than empirical analyses, offering limited data on mentoring outcomes or longitudinal impacts. Although the included templates are adaptable, their generality may require modification for smaller or specialized institutions. Future editions could strengthen the text by integrating emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and learning analytics, more fully into the mentoring discourse.

Contributions to the Field

By addressing mentoring within online modalities, Ko and Zhadko (2023) make a substantial contribution to the mentoring literature, framing it as both a pedagogical and institutional imperative. Through an integration of multiple mentoring models, they position mentoring as a foundation for sustainable program quality and community building in VLEs. Their focus on structured, institutionalized mentoring aligns with contemporary priorities in HE, including equity, professional development, and quality assurance.

Suggested Audience

This book will be particularly valuable for administrators, program directors, and academic leaders who oversee online or hybrid programs. Faculty mentors, instructional designers, and teaching and learning specialists will find the templates and implementation strategies immediately applicable. Graduate students and researchers exploring mentoring systems in VLEs may also draw insight from its conceptual and organizational frameworks. Collectively, these audiences will find in Ko and Zhadko's (2023) work both a conceptual foundation and a practical roadmap for cultivating effective mentoring ecosystems.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Best Practices for Mentoring in Online Programs: Supporting Faculty and Students in Higher Education offers a timely and practical guide for HE institutions seeking to cultivate and strengthen meaningful mentoring relationships in VLEs. Although greater empirical grounding would enhance its scholarly depth, the book remains an invaluable resource for professional libraries and faculty development centers.

The authors' inclusion of both synchronous and asynchronous mentoring formats is especially noteworthy. This dual focus reflects the adaptive communication practices essential to successful online programs, offering flexible strategies tailored to diverse institutional models, time zones, and learner needs. By acknowledging multiple modalities, Ko and Zhadko (2023) enhance the book's relevance to the realities of contemporary online teaching and learning.

For educators and administrators in teacher education or professional preparation programs, the frameworks presented can be easily adapted to support both faculty mentors and student mentees. As online learning evolves, this book offers a durable foundation for developing and enhancing mentoring programs that foster connection, growth, and academic excellence in virtual learning communities.

References

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