

# **UNIVERSITY MENTORING: CREATING AN ASSOCIATION TO DEVELOP STUDENT CAREERS**

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## ***Abstract***

*As universities find themselves in an ever-more dynamic and competitive economy, they face several challenges: graduating their students and finding opportunities for their graduates. There appears to be a near universal failure by universities to graduate many of their enrollees. Even those who do graduate are not well prepared for the job market. In fact most universities don't provide graduates much more than a job-placement office. The Citadel School of Business Administration brought to these circumstances a new initiative called The Citadel Mentors Association and now consists of 185 mentors and 224 students. This article seeks to provide a snapshot of an unfolding program over the period from 2001 to 2010, the challenges it faced, and the results to date. The authors know of no other program like this in the country with the scope and the focus of developing students for careers. It describes a dynamic process of adaptation, changing conditions in the pool of mentors and students, and challenging needs very much like what all organizations experience as they confront the difficulties and opportunities before them.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Student retention and post-graduation job placement head the list of challenges faced by colleges and universities today (Carey, 2004, pp. 1-2 and DeBard et al, 2004, p. 66). How do we keep students focused so they get a degree? How can they be helped to find productive careers that will justify the tuition expense? Would career guidance early in college promote both goals?

In college, students face multiple competing priorities from the course workload, the increasingly wild social life, and the night jobs so many take in the food and beverage industry. Students are reaching for a place of belonging (Parks, 200, p. 126) in what has become a subliminal state of irresponsibility between home and adult jobs. The six-year graduation rate, once the track of athletes, has been common among all undergrads now for over two decades. (Carey, 2004, p. 1)

This increased drift makes career decisions seem distant and raises the likelihood of careers going awry from the start. Too often students do not graduate with a diploma or make a poor job choice. Even those of a serious bent face voices competing for their attention from parents, faculty, staff, friends, and contacts on the pervasive social media such as Facebook and LinkedIn.

The literature suggests that students' in-college relationships are seminal for post-college life. What they need is outside motivation, particularly from someone "who has been there and done that (Seldin, 1995, p. 37)." And yet, research suggests that out-of-class interaction with people seasoned in the business world or even faculty who consult with that world is fairly infrequent and superficial in most institutions of higher learning (Wilson et al., 1975, p. 151). Indeed, there appears to be a near universal failure by universities to do anything more to prepare students for the job market than offer a job-placement office and for business school students, the standard business curriculum.

At military colleges such as The Citadel, attrition is primarily a matter of the first months when some decide they cannot tolerate the environment. Nearly two-thirds of entering freshmen graduate in four years, but the problem of competing priorities and voices are equally intense.

Students live in a Spartan environment with literally a 24-hour schedule and a cadet chain-of-command. While this culture gets them across the graduation stage in a timely manner, it also encourages a mental drift in the form of expecting adult life to be equally structured. The Citadel School of Business Administration brought to these circumstances a new initiative designed to help both graduate and undergraduate students plan a career and secure a job in their chosen field. The Citadel Mentors Association now consists of 185 mentors and 224 students.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Literature on mentoring college students is quite limited. To be sure, there are numerous articles on mentoring, but most are on college seniors mentoring freshmen on how to "do college." And yet the available literature does suggest that mentoring and advising students improves the education experience, provides career opportunities, and develops

students' abilities to navigate the work world (Lerner and Steinberg, 2004, p. 395 and Stage et al., 1999, p. 9).

Workplace mentoring is substantially different from mentoring students. Workplace or professional mentoring seeks to develop leaders for a particular organization or career field or encourages employees to network with experienced executives (Edelman, 1999, p. 1-10 and Stone, 1999, p. 164). Mentoring students for a career suited to their skills and interests is quite a different kind of activity.

Other mentoring programs involve groups of students rather than one-on-one mentoring. Thus, a team of students working on a business or engineering project might be assigned an executive with experience on the topic. Another variation is the use of graduates of a selected college to engage in a relationship that may be done mostly by email or telephone.

The Citadel School of Business Administration's Mentors Association is an unusual example of a program designed around highly experienced executives from an extended community and students in the School's undergraduate (BSBA) and graduate (MBA) programs.

### **DEVELOPING A MENTORS ASSOCIATION AT THE CITADEL**

The Citadel (officially called, The Citadel: The Military College of South Carolina) is a South Carolina-sponsored University located in Charleston, a region that offers too few opportunities for the talented graduates of an AACSB-accredited Business school. The Citadel has a tight-knit alumni association that has fostered a myth that those graduating with a bachelor's degree from the South Carolina Corps of Cadets would never be unemployed. If they survived the four years in the Corps, cadets believed that jobs which were perfectly fit to their skills and preferences would somehow magically be offered by alumni. The reality was that when jobs were offered, they were not well-suited to the skill sets of the graduates. Indeed, many fell into a trap of three jobs while in their twenties and found themselves stuck in the third one in their late 20s, unhappy and not working up to their potential.

And the undergraduates at The Citadel who were (and still are) mostly young men tend to meet young women at the mostly-female College of Charleston, marry, and then want to remain in what many consider an ideal location. All this adds up to still further reasons why too many

remain in Charleston. As all on the faculty understood, too many cadet graduates were in dead-end jobs around Charleston. Some were waiting tables, others coaching Little League baseball, and still others in a variety of other endeavors that did not take advantage of their special education that includes experiences in leadership, time management, and a strong code of integrity. Indeed, The Citadel has found that life in South Carolina Corps of Cadets is truly living in a leadership laboratory with all cadets involved in leadership

The MBA students were more focused, but they too often were unaware of opportunities existing beyond Charleston. Many viewed the degree only in terms of the next promotion at their existing firms and not career changes and new opportunities.

Both undergraduates and graduate students were also victims of Charleston's charms. The beaches, year-around moderate weather, restaurants, bars, cultural life, and historic ambiance are siren songs that disguise a job market with no large corporate headquarters and very little chance for a stellar career. Young people are moving to Charleston from all over the country, but they either have a profession such as accounting or law, or they too often end up working in the service sector, a notoriously low-paying, low-skilled sector with few opportunities for upward mobility. As most faculties have learned, undergraduates also suffer from the "center-of-the-universe syndrome" and thus expect adults to come to them.

Also facing universities in South Carolina was a state legislature that made it quite clear that money for higher education would diminish rather than rise for the foreseeable future. As the Great Recession has progressed, the State has reduced appropriations to universities by over 30%. Furthermore, the State legislature decreed that colleges in the state system were now to focus more on community impact and raising funds from private sources, a pattern that is consistent across the United States.

## **Opportunities**

Charleston, South Carolina offers rich assets to address these challenges. The barrier islands of Seabrook, Kiawah, Sullivan's, and the Isle of Palms as well as the Charleston peninsula have up-scale communities where purchase prices are well into the millions of dollars. The region is seen by

outsiders as a genuine community with the charm and attractions of a “kingdom by the sea.”

Thus the region attracts highly experienced executives who have spent careers with multiple job transfers and lived life at full-tilt. They yearn for more serene lives of beaches, tennis, golf, the arts, theater, and the symphony. They also find in Charleston a fine medical center in the Medical University of South Carolina, a center that assures them of continuing good health. What they quickly learn is that they could not fully let go of their careers and so move to consulting or form new companies. And they find they are very rapidly bored by golf.

As demographics drive the baby boomers into retirement, there are many who both want a more leisurely life and yet some meaningful involvement with younger people. Most of them find their children out of the house and living where job opportunities are richer. So working with young people who are disciplined and courteous is most attractive. What they have found in the mentors association are just such young people. The cadets are all taught – and indeed conditioned -- to be gentle people and Citadel part-time MBA students are hungry for more opportunities.

So, these executives have time on their hands and a perspective of looking back on a life full of experience. Many want to give back to a community as well as offer their experiences to young people (Trubowitz, 1997, pp. 107-110). And “mentoring is one of the great joys of a mature career, the professional equivalent of having grandchildren (Bennis, 2004, p. 8).”

As one Citadel Professor discerned, these retired executives have a wealth of knowledge and are prepared to share it. He was convinced that these executives could truly ramp up the career paths of our graduates. As he told other faculty, our cadets are mannered and respectful and highly ambitious. They dress appropriately and say “yes, sir” and “yes, ma’am.” Our MBA students all hold jobs and have grown beyond the success fantasies of the undergraduate years. Given these facts, he felt the students would interact well with experienced executives, and a mentoring program would be successful. With the formation of a business school (to succeed the then-existing department) and the arrival of new founding dean in August, 2001, the business faculty and staff pressed for development of a mentoring program.

Clearly Charleston presented an opportunity to expand the horizons of our students and engage the local community, all in one program – and the authors contend that this is possible in many other communities as well. As the program has grown, Citadel mentors find themselves as counselors, coaches, challengers, friends, listeners, promoters, inquisitors, protectors, role models, and sponsors (Coomber et. al., 2002, p. 170). And the students' fresh perspectives have been intriguing to the mentors. Clearly development works both ways (Conway, 1998, p. 102).

### **Association History**

Implementation. The Citadel Mentors Association was conceptualized in the Fall of 2001, supporting documents were prepared and proposed to a mentors association board in February, 2002, mentors were recruited in the Fall and Spring of 2002, and the pilot for the program began in 2002. The business school faculty were also convinced that this initiative would help their new school reach out to the larger community to find friends, engage guest speakers, and ultimately to raise money.

As the Department of Business Administration (the school was not formally created until the Fall of 2002 by The Citadel Board of Visitors) continued to develop its mission and values in the Fall of 2001, the creators began their efforts to develop the association. The creators described the initiative as “a team of active and retired executives dedicated to developing a new team of leaders.” And all agreed from the beginning that a rigidly structured program would fail. Targeted executives were accustomed to running big companies and would not respond well to guidance that was too specific. Furthermore, since student needs differed so widely, the creators were not sure that very specific guidance could even be constructed and thus would not be helpful. Laissez-faire was essential. The association creators also decided that an orientation for prospective mentors was very important, because there were a number of educational and military issues that executives needed to understand.

The team of creators did decide that suggestions to the new mentors were appropriate. Clearly Citadel students needed to learn more about such things as resume-writing, career selection, career-path planning, dealing with office warfare, changing jobs, and finding a mentor in the work place. Etiquette at social events is also a central issue for many young

people, and mentors are urged to take the student to a restaurant, country club or home, and then insist on appropriate thank-you notes.

As John Dewey has taught, students learn best by doing. They need to explore new fields, and “what better way to do that than through a mentoring relationship with former executives and CEOs (Royse, 20001, p. 136).”

Another issue was what to call the students who were being mentored. Two alternatives were “mentee” and “protégé.” “Protégé” was discarded, because it suggested that the mentors were to recreate the students in their image. In fact the team hoped that the mentors would help the students discover their strengths and preferences for a career and then act on these conclusions to envision a career. What they also made clear was that the mentors association was not a “job-finding program.” That is, mentors were not to find the students a job, but rather guide them to a career field and then assist them in discovering firms that would suit them. If suitable jobs for mentees came out of the program all to the better, but job searches were not the central concern of the association.

Creating an Advisory Board. With these considerations in mind, documents were finalized on December 17, 2001 describing the program. The dean continued his outreach to try to enhance the soon-to-be-created business school and seek potential mentors.

An advisory board was formed to assess the prospects for this initiative and met on February 12, 2002. At this meeting, the advisory board decided that this program held great promise for Citadel students. Specifically it suggested that the program focus on career steering/pathing; (b) reinforcing what [the students] already know, especially with cadets; (c) translating Citadel experience into corporate success; (d) helping them socially; and (d) showing that competence is more than technical skills -- it is attitude and character.

Business school faculty found considerable interest among students who were among the school’s best rising seniors. MBA students were also recruited. Thus, the pilot program was open only to invited students.

The team also found considerable interest among active and retired executives in the greater Charleston region. Although some of these executives were Citadel graduates, most in fact were not. The network of

interested executives grew with surprising speed. Although some executives indicated that they were too busy for the Association, no one was skeptical or failed to see its value. Based on these efforts a mentors association orientation was designed and then given to prospective mentors in three sessions during May and June, 2002.

The founders knew from the beginning that the mentors association would need support personnel. Matching mentor and mentees was a difficult problem. And mentors were accustomed to getting immediate response to questions and concerns. They were also incredibly eager to please the school and wanted reassurance they were on the right track. Thus two new members of the mentors association team were added, one faculty member and one staff member.

Also implemented were certain procedures for students and mentors. Students were asked to contact their mentor soon after an assignment. And the program stressed that the mentors should feel free to drop out if they find they were not having fun. Both mentors and mentees were given the right to “fire” each other. Thus a mentor who found a student was not responding could fire him or her and be assigned a new one. Students who felt they did not have a good match could go back into the pool for the next available mentor.

Pilot Year. When the pilot program was launched on September 1, 2002, the association consisted of 17 mentors and 36 students, 17 of whom were MBA students. Each of the mentors had at least one cadet and one MBA student. Table 1 displays the number of mentors and mentees as the program has grown since the Pilot in 2002-2003.

To implement the pilot, mentors were asked to provide a one-paragraph biography, and students were required to fill out an interest sheet. The student interest sheet asked for all contact information. The team found that having personal emails and cell phone numbers – especially for undergraduates – was crucial. It also asked for a list of career fields students were interested in pursuing, a list of hobbies, and a short paragraph indicating why they wanted a mentor and what they hoped to gain. After several years, mentee candidates were also asked for a resume, so that mentors can learn about their work history.

The pilot was judged a success by the business school faculty and staff. Thus in the Spring of 2003, the program moved to a full-fledged

association open to any business school student. Clearly more mentors were needed. Faculty and staff have continued to actively encourage undergraduate and graduate students to enroll and, as Table 1 makes clear, it has seen considerable growth.

The pilot did reveal a number of lessons. First, undergraduates needed to get a mentor earlier than their senior year. If mentors started with them in the second half of the undergraduates' sophomore year, mentors could influence students' course choices and their summer activities based on their interests. Thus if students were interested in marketing, they could take more marketing electives during their senior year. In addition students could seek an internship either during the academic year or in the summer and could find summer employment that exposed them to marketing firms. It became clear that even more staff support would ultimately be needed to sustain the ever-growing number of mentors and mentees.

The team found that mentors like to get together not only with all the mentees, but also by themselves to get to know each other. Thus, as numbers continued to grow and social events were planned, staff support was needed to match mentors and mentees, help mentors and mentees who were not able to connect effectively, and coordinate breakfasts, lunches, and parties that brought members of the association together. The team also learned that an active advisory board of executives was needed to oversee the program.

**Table 1: Number of Mentees, Mentors and Orientations for the Citadel Mentors Association.**

Category	Year							
	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
Mentees (Students) <sup>1</sup>	36	58	109	172	204	203	193	224
Under-graduate	19	38	59	104	143	144	127	148
Graduate	17	20	50	68	60	59	66	76
Mentors <sup>2</sup>	17	44	76	117	146	149	145	185
Mentor Orientations Each Year	4	5	2	5	3	2	4	4

Notes: All data is from The Citadel Mentors Association electronic and paper files maintained in The Citadel School of Business Administration.

1. 2002-2003 mentor and mentee data is for the beginning of the year; Mentor Orientations for 2002-2003 are actual end of year data. For all the other years, the data is for end of year.
2. Some mentors drop out each year, so numbers reflect actual mentors. Clearly recruiting of mentors has been ongoing and kept the numbers growing.

The pilot also demonstrated that mentors were referring mentees to other mentors whose specialties fit student career preferences. Thus a student may be interested in finance, be assigned a mentor based on that preference, and then decide later that a career in management was preferred. Thereby the mentor could seek another mentor with considerable management experience to counsel the student.

Although the number of undergraduate students signing up for a mentor continued to grow, some were hesitant to contact their mentor. To the surprise of association leaders, undergraduate mentees were rather intimidated by the backgrounds of the mentors and thus put off contacting them. Indeed, mentors to undergraduates had to work harder to meet with them. To be successful, undergraduate mentors needed to contact their students first, plan an event, and strongly encourage the mentee to come. Once the relationship was established, communication and meetings were much easier.

Finally, it became very clear that faculty and staff advisors were crucial if the program was to reach more students. Faculty needed to discuss the mentors association in their classes and emphasize the great help a mentor could provide in developing a career and getting a good start on a new job. As students visited the business school office seeking course counseling, faculty and staff had another great opportunity to encourage students to get a mentor. And mentees were instrumental in encouraging other students to sign up. In fact, the association leaders and faculty concluded that the most effective sales tool they had was word-of-mouth promotion by mentees.

### **Subsequent Mentors Association Developments**

As the mentors association has continued to evolve over the period 2003-2010, staff have changed, the founding dean retired and returned to faculty, social events were altered, processes were codified, and a sponsor stepped forward. With staff changes ongoing staff development and

training were instituted. The staff requirements have continued to grow substantially. Just the sheer number of students and mentors as well as working with the advisory board and planning social events required one-half the time of an hourly staff person by 2010. Also the school hired two professional staff, an MBA director and an undergraduate curriculum advisor. Both advise students and actively encourage them to sign up for the association.

Leadership of the association became a serious challenge. Mentors sought more communication, orientations required more coordination, and more involvement with the advisory board became more important. The business school decided that using faculty as directors, who could give only part-time attention to association operations was not sufficient. So, the school decided that a paid chief operating officer model was appropriate. This faculty COO was to dedicate four to six hours a week to association affairs.

This model was instituted in January, 2008 with the dean as the chief executive officer, the COO, and a coordinator who assigned mentees to appropriate mentors and provided staff support to the COO and the board. The COO's specific job responsibilities are to serve as the association planner, the initiator for selecting new mentors, ongoing communication with existing mentors, and advisory board liaison. More specifically, the COO is to determine, formulate, coordinate, and execute policies, procedures, and budget for the overall successful operation of the mentors association as recommended by The Citadel Mentors Association Board of Directors and approved by the dean.

The budget for the association also became an issue. Funds were needed to hire the COO and hold the social events that keep the mentors and mentees involved with each other. Fortunately a Citadel School of Business Administration Advisory Board Member and his organization stepped forward to provide funds to sustain ongoing activities.

A number of social activities have been used for the mentors and mentees. Each Christmas, The Citadel Chorale does a concert; the mentors association has a reception before the event and then preferred seating is arranged for the mentors. Also each Fall, the association has a lunch for all students and their mentors and a mentor breakfast to bring the mentors together. In the spring, there have been receptions and parades to honor the mentors.

The COO and the board have held meetings as often as once every two months and new processes have been developed. These include criteria for selecting mentors, objectives for mentors in working with students; suggested activities for mentors to do with their mentees, and a fact sheet on what life is like at the university. A new mentor's association brochure for students and mentors covered the mission and goals of the program, the various firms that were represented by the mentors, and an application form that each student must fill out to obtain a mentor. A new motto and logo were designed. The team decided that the motto should be "Crossing the Bridge to Success in Business, the Military, and Public Service." Finally, a pin and a bumper sticker were sent to all mentors along with a letter personally signed by the university president.

Recruiting Mentors. Recruiting and orienting mentors is a crucial association issue. Given that the association saw itself as a community of trusted individuals working with young people on their careers, selection needed to be done carefully. Association leaders created criteria for selecting mentors, the first of which was substantial executive experience. By "executive" the association meant that someone had been in charge of a number of others or possessed a major portfolio if a staff leader (such as a comptroller or director of a portfolio of assets) and had at least four years of experience working as a manager or higher. The association did not limit itself to just business leaders; clearly, governmental, professional, and not-for-profit service also qualified someone to be a mentor.

The other criteria were educational, ethical and interest in young people. That is, a mentor candidate needed at least an undergraduate and ideally a master's degree. He or she should be someone of high ethical standards and integrity as manifested by such indicators as corporate or professional ethics training (as in ongoing law or accounting courses), membership in a service organization such as Rotary, attendance at a military college, armed forces service as an officer, or living in college under an honor code. The leadership team also wanted people who were empathetic to and interested in young people (often manifested by expressed interest or passion in helping young people or having had children of his/her own).

All these characteristics meant that mentors could help in developing character, competence, and more complex skills in the search for successful careers (Lerner and Steinberg, 2004, p. 396). In addition, maximizing gains in college can be done through developing mature

relationships with people within the larger community who serve as social support (Chickering and Schlossberg, 1995, p. 148).

Once a candidate had been identified, association leaders found that asking questions and listening to others as they talked about their careers, their families, and their interests were highly effective devices to decide whether a candidate was appropriate for the association. Not all interviewed were selected. Indeed there were a number of cases where it was clear that someone just did not fit. Based on team leaders' recommendations, a candidate was required to attend the mentor orientation.

Association mentors are remarkable. Not only are they enthusiastic about the association and committed to developing young people, they have had successful careers with a number of organizations. The business organizations include many famous firms such as: AT&T, Bankers Trust, Citigroup, Colgate-Palmolive, Corning, Deloitte & Touche, Ernst & Young, ExxonMobil, General Foods, General Motors, IBM, Kimberly-Clark, KPMG, Oracle, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Proctor and Gamble, RJR-Nabisco, United Technologies, and Xerox. Other mentors are from governmental, health care, military, and not-for-profit organizations

A good number have been entrepreneurs as well as family and small businesses owners. Others are attorneys and one was a Watergate Prosecutor. Another mentor is the current CEO of the huge South Carolina power generator Santee Cooper. Still another had just retired as CEO of Bayer Crop Science.

They have attended a remarkable range of Universities to include: Berkeley, Barcelona Polytechnic (Spain), Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, Duke, Emory, Fordham, Georgetown, Georgia Tech, Harvard, INSEAD, Johns Hopkins, Michigan, MIT, North Carolina, Ohio State, Pepperdine, Princeton, Rutgers, Sorbonne, Stanford, Swarthmore, Syracuse, the United States Military Academy, Virginia, VPI, Wake Forest, Wesleyan, Wharton, and Yale.

Clearly such diversity in experience and education has been of huge benefit to the mentors association and to Citadel students. What has not been detailed here is the equally extraordinary range of volunteer activities in which mentors have been engaged. Although most are not Rotarians,

they have lived the Rotary motto of “Service Above Self” in their contributions to their communities.

### **Mentors Association Orientations.**

Mentors were assigned a mentee after attendance at an orientation. Three hours were allocated for the event. In attendance were members of the board, association directors, the dean as CEO, the associate dean, the COO, representatives from The Citadel Tactical Department, and one or two mentees.

In three hours, mentor candidates find themselves bombarded with details. Clearly the special culture of The Citadel needed to be explained as well as details about the business school’s undergraduate and graduate programs. Furthermore, detailed documents were distributed about the School’s mission, values, and vision; philosophy of the program; and how mentors and mentees were assigned. To promote the association goal of a community, all candidates were also given a complete list of all mentors to include their contact information and their biographies.

In keeping with the association’s conviction that it would not survive if heavily structured, the orientations do not get specific about how mentors and mentees should interact. Thus, they outline some basic objectives but stress that mentors have extensive experience in developing people and do not need the association managing their interaction with the students. The association does provide a potential activities guide that could be used or ignored at will. Thus, suggestions are made to the mentors about what meetings with mentees might cover, how frequently mentors might meet with mentees, where and when meetings might take place, and the kinds of relationships that had occurred between some mentors and mentees.

To sign up, mentor candidates were asked to either fill out a form or email a message with all contact information and a brief biography. Association experience was that almost everyone who attended one of the orientations joined.

Recruiting and Assigning Mentees. To the association leadership’s surprise, mentees did not initially flock to the program. Clearly the issues were time and intimidation. That is, undergraduate cadets already had very full schedules, and the MBA students were also fully engaged with their courses, work, and family life.

Intimidation also played a role. Reading of the backgrounds of the mentors both undergraduates and graduate students were hesitant to sign up. Clearly business school faculty, staff, and the association have had to play a more prominent role in getting them all to realize the opportunity to have a mentor. So after the pilot year when mentees were mostly hand-picked, the faculty and staff began to play a more prominent role in encouraging students to sign up.

Once a student signed up, the association coordinator assigned him or her to a mentor. The matches were made primarily on career interests on the part of the students and career experiences on the part of the mentors. The association was able to use a computer program written by a graduate student to help with the matching process. However, the coordinator still needed to spend considerable time working on the matches.

Mentors also needed to play a stronger role. Building chemistry with students increasingly became a mentor role. Mentors found that if they made the initial efforts to get mentees out for a meal or a meeting, the relationships prospered. Clearly as Coomber et. al. have noted in other circumstances, mentor resumes were intimidating, and students were reluctant to approach them in a casual, relaxed way. (Coomber et.al., 2002, p. 171).

Many mentors wanted only one student and sometimes preferred an undergraduate or graduate student, and mentors with the appropriate career experiences were not always available. Therefore mentees could also be assigned based on their hobbies. Interestingly these matches seemed to work out as well as those assigned on career interests, particularly for the undergraduates. The undergraduates so often had little idea of their strengths or career interests, and they needed help uncovering opportunities that existed in the marketplace.

What was not accomplished by 2010 was a mentee orientation, in which prospective mentees were told of the program. This was discussed frequently by the board, but usually set aside as the students were seen as too busy and unlikely to attend.

In a small number of cases, students disengaged from the program. That is, some never contacted their mentors, while others had one or two meetings and showed no further interest in continuing the relationship.

This was most frustrating to the mentors who expected students to be responsive and involved. Therefore, association leaders and staff found themselves eliminating such students from the program and working to smooth relationships with the mentor.

## **RESULTS**

So what have been the results for the mentors association? That is, has the Association in fact improved career planning and prospects for Citadel students? The leadership is confident, but not fully convinced that the association has had a profound impact on students. So far its data is anecdotal. Surveys have been used, but the association leadership does not have much confidence in them. For example, as mentees graduate, they tend to move on with their lives and generally do not stay in touch with association leaders. Clearly more work needs to be done here.

The anecdotal evidence comes from a variety of sources. First, some of the mentors as well as some mentees have shared their stories. Furthermore, faculty report that students in class talk openly about the impact that mentors have had on their thinking, their planning, and their futures.

This section will share some of the stories of students finding their way to careers that suit them as well as exciting new jobs they have found. To better understand how much the program has helped, one must first realize that most universities have very little data on the impact its undergraduate experience or its graduate program have on its graduates.

Furthermore, although most universities have fine directors of career services and alumni affairs, their offices are usually woefully understaffed. Part of this shortfall has sprung from the fact that all states' higher university funding has endured large cutbacks in the Great Recession. Thus, graduates have not had access to exciting opportunities in highly demanding jobs where they can showcase their skills. Consequently, it has been unusual for many highly talented students from many smaller, state universities to find their way to the big accounting firms, exciting financial organizations, or Fortune 100 firms.

MBA students have also suffered from this lack of career counseling. Many of them appear to have remained near their universities or homes. Thus the world-views of the associations' mentors have had a huge impact

on students' sense of opportunities beyond their own community as well as upon their confidence that they too could compete in a wider world.

Success Stories. One mentor told of an undergraduate mentee who managed to land a high paying job with J.P. Morgan in Houston. As an indicator of the mentor's thoroughness, he pointed out that he had been with a large financial firm, connected the mentee with that firm and found out that soon thereafter the student was interviewing the conglomerate's Senior Vice President in New York City!

This mentor noted, "I am finding that the program is as good for me as for the mentee. I bring them right into my home and make them part of my family." And as he did this, he found that he was helping the mentees "more with life lessons," and those were more important than the business lessons. For example with the student he helped place at J.P. Morgan, he found that he had a rough upbringing. "My family and I helped him with the needed social graces." Clearly this same lesson is true at many universities, especially where many are first-generation college students. Such students clearly need help with life lessons and social graces.

In another case a mentor came to the business school as a clinical professor of accounting. He was a great teacher and soon grew interested in the mentors association. After the association orientation, he began work with an undergraduate student. He was so impressed with his mentee that he introduced him to his son who worked in an investment bank in New York. At that firm, the mentee successfully interviewed for a summer internship and found himself among an intern group that was entirely from Ivy League universities. He performed so well he was given a job offer at the end of the summer. The association learned via back-channels that the senior partners were actually fighting over who got him as a trainee. Clearly this mentee was very capable, and the mentors program gave him the contacts to get out into a larger world and truly excel.

Still another undergraduate student was one of the first women to attend The Citadel and found herself a bit daunted by the future. She took the general legal environment course and was inspired to pursue law school. Her mentor had a highly successful career at a huge corporation, rising to be one of its most senior executives. So the mentor paid for her trip to the corporate headquarters and had her introduced to the corporate counsel, but also insisted that she visit the senior executives in other divisions. In the course of the visit, she talked with a senior production executive and

toured the manufacturing operation. Utterly enthused, she successfully interviewed for a job at the organization in production. After a several-year job in production, she subsequently decided to go to law school with a sterling experience in manufacturing.

A female MBA student had grown up in a broken home and worked hard to get herself an undergraduate degree. In the mentors association, her mentor introduced her to a number of executives, and she finally decided to enter a small business. Her mentor also introduced her to another mentor who volunteered at SCORE (Senior Corps of Retired Executives) and coached her on her small business. Her business grew quickly, and one year after graduation her business won the Chapter's For-Profit Business of the Year Award.

Another mentor had been a vice chair of a Big Four Accounting Firm. He has worked with several students, two of whom have found their way to his old firm. This mentor counsels all his students to develop an "Elevator Speech." That is, he coaches them to imagine they have 30 seconds in an elevator to tell a senior executive who they are and what skills they possess. He even takes them to the library to rehearse their speech over and over so, in his words, "They can say it in their sleep." This exercise has clearly helped his mentees.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Current business school concerns are focused on measuring and achieving better out-puts in the classroom. Yet a disjuncture exists between the classroom and the job market that has far more serious consequences than weak coverage in a narrow subject area. Failure to formulate career goals and career paths can result in extending the college time well beyond four years and lead to students selecting jobs by default rather than design. The Citadel's Mentors Association offers a promising strategy for bridging this gap and a potential national model.

Association leaders know from success stories that it is having a big impact on both students and mentors. But the evidence is anecdotal so far. What this mentors association needs is to find an economical way to measure outcomes in a field – mentoring – that is subtle and highly personal. The challenge is much like trying to decide how successful college professors are in educating students. To date most measures of teaching and learning are not well developed.

This initiative in student mentoring is still relatively young. As of 2010, the program has been in existence for eight years. It has called for many resources from the business school, but it has also dramatically enhanced the reputation of the school as an innovative force in education. And it has involved many executives who provide the advice, counsel, mentoring, guest lecturing and resources that all business schools so desperately need. Furthermore, the program has opened doors in the region for the school to be involved much more deeply in organizational development, consulting, and board memberships. These factors alone justify the school's investment and add to the success enjoyed by this mentors association.

### **ENDNOTES**

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