

MENTORING IN THE MEGST BIBLE COLLEGE, MYANMAR

John Buchanan

ABSTRACT

This paper reports on the design and implementation of and reflection on a mentoring course at the Myanmar Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (MEGST) in Yangon, Myanmar. An Alumni survey in 2016 identified the need for mentoring to be taught and practiced by MEGST. Because Christianity is an imitative faith and because we learn more from doing than simply listening, a practical mentoring course was developed whereby mentoring sessions were scheduled weekly. Faculty mentored Year 2 students and Year 3 students mentored Year 1 students. Research based on solicited student feedback and students' reflective essays affirmed the value of mentoring to the individual students – both in terms of being mentored and doing the mentoring themselves. Among the themes identified from student feedback were experiential learning, genuine relationship and being heard. Although implementation of mentoring at MEGST has been challenging, students are learning important life skills as the MEGST college models mentoring and not just talks about it.

Keywords: Mentoring, Discipleship, Bible College, Myanmar

Introduction

This paper reports on the design and implementation of and reflection on a mentoring course at the Myanmar Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (MEGST) in Yangon, Myanmar. MEGST offers four programs: a three-year MDiv, a two-year MTh, a DMin and a Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership (MAOL)¹.

The impetus for a mentoring course came from the convergence of four stimuli in 2015: a curriculum review, an extensive alumni survey, faculty reading

John Buchanan (PhD) is a New Zealander and is a faculty member at MEGST where he has been serving for seven years. He is head of the Pastoral Studies Department. John has had a varied career – in corporate planning and business consulting, as a university lecturer in the Management School at Waikato University and as head pastor of a local church. He has published 24 articles in his career, with a focus on decision making.

¹ In partnership with Development Associates International (DAI).

Transforming Theological Education² and discussions around the college vision statement – “*MEGST trains and equips Christians to be Christ-like leaders who build up the church and the nation of Myanmar and beyond.*”

The mentoring course was developed during the 2016-17 academic year and implemented in the 2017-18 academic year, for the MDiv program. At the end of each semester all MDiv students were required to write a reflective essay on their mentoring experience. Faculty and students also answered a simple questionnaire at the end of each semester which provided additional information. Feedback was positive, with a strong sense of a “first-time experience,” because almost all students had had no prior experience of mentoring.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews the literature on mentoring definitions and practice, with a focus on Bible colleges³. In Section 3 preparation and planning for the first year of implementation is recounted, followed by Section 4 where the student responses from the first year of mentoring are analyzed and discussed. Section 5 addresses practical issues and improvements for future mentoring.

Mentoring Concepts and Practice

In this section, research on and practice of mentoring are presented, followed by a discussion on modeling and the power of example. The doctrine of prevenience and its relevance for mentoring is also addressed. This provides a foundation for the ensuing discussion on the implementation of a mentoring course at MEGST.

Mentoring Described

Any discussion of mentoring in a Christian setting does well to begin with the great commission, as found in Matthew 28:18-20 – to go and make disciples. A disciple is one who learns, one who is a committed follower of their master. The context

² Perry Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education: A Practical Handbook for Integrative Learning* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2014).

³ The literature uses the terms “Bible college” and “seminary” somewhat interchangeably. In this paper we use Bible college as that is the common descriptor in Myanmar.

here is of a disciple of Jesus, who has made a life commitment to follow Jesus⁴. All Christian mentoring, regardless of the types or functions discussed below, must include this emphasis of helping and equipping mentees to be more like Jesus.

In this passage, to ‘make disciples’ is the imperative verb, with ‘go’, ‘baptizing’ and ‘teaching’ functioning as participles⁵. Some suggest, therefore, that making disciples is an “as you go” endeavor, while others state that “going” (even to the ends of the earth) is integral to Jesus’ commission. This paper ascribes a significant “ordinariness” to this disciple-making; that is, it is something every Christian is expected to participate in both wherever they are and if/when they go.

What is meant by mentoring? Definitions abound; however, we will follow Stanley and Clinton who state:

“Mentoring is a relational process between a mentor, who knows or has experienced something and transfers that something (resources of wisdom, information, experience, confidence, insight, relationships, status, etc.) to a mentoree, at an appropriate time and manner, so that it facilitates development or empowerment⁶.”

They identify three categories and seven types of mentoring, as shown in Table 1.

Seven Types of Mentoring		
INTENSIVE	OCCASIONAL	PASSIVE
1. Discipling	4. Counseling	7. Modeling
2. Spiritual Direction	5. Teaching	- Contemporary
3. Coaching	6. Sponsoring	- Historical
← More Deliberate		Less Deliberate →

Table 1 – Types of Mentoring (from Stanley and Clinton)

⁴ Michael J Wilkins, *Following the Master: Discipleship in the Steps of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 40.

⁵ D.A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. F.E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 595.

⁶ Paul D Stanley and J Robert Clinton, *Connecting: The Mentoring Relationships You Need to Succeed in Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1992), 40. In this paper we use “mentee” instead of “mentoree.”

This table concurs with Cunningham that mentoring is a multi-dimensional activity which is difficult to categorize simplistically⁷. The main point here is not in finding the detail of the different types of mentoring, but in appreciating the variety of “mentorings” that are possible.

A brief description of the seven types follows. Intensive mentoring in all its types is a deliberate, purposeful endeavor. Discipling is establishing a younger Christian in the basics of the Christian life, so they will be life-long followers of Jesus Christ. The Navigators are an example of one Christian organization dedicated to disciple making as, for example, evidenced through their long cooperation with the Billy Graham crusades in providing follow up for new believers. The Navigators, among others, have extended discipling to include equipping and reproducing, following 2 Timothy 2:2.⁸

Spiritual direction (or spiritual guiding) stresses accountability and providing insight through questions and appropriate guidance. Whereas discipleship deals with information and the development of Christian habits, spiritual direction is more about helping someone understand themselves and their relationship with God; it is more about experience than ideas⁹.

Coaching focuses more on skills, motivating and equipping a mentee to complete a task or tasks. The coach of a sports team is an obvious example; however, coaching is much wider than sports teams and is very popular in the business world¹⁰. Intensive mentoring, then, is deliberate and purposeful and can be done over many years by a variety of mentors, for a variety of mentees.

⁷ Shelly Cunningham, “Who’s Mentoring the Mentors?: The Discipling Dimension of Faculty Development in Christian Higher Education,” *Theological Education* 34, no. 2 (1998): 40.

⁸ Two books in this vein are: Walter A. Henrichsen, *Disciples Are Made Not Born* (England: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1988); Hull, Bill, *Jesus Christ Disciple Maker* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2004).

⁹ William A. Barry and William J. Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1982).

¹⁰ Madeleine Blanchard, “9 Books on Coaching That Coaches Need to Know About,” *Blanchard LeaderChat*, February 21, 2017, accessed March 8, 2018, <https://leaderchat.org/2017/02/21/9-books-on-coaching-that-coaches-need-to-know-about/>; For an example of Christian approach to coaching, see Keith E Webb, *The Coach Model for Christian Leaders: Powerful Leadership Skills for Solving Problems, Reaching Goals, and Developing Others* (Active Results LLC, 2012).

Occasional mentoring is where a mentor makes special developmental contributions at appropriate times¹¹. For example, Exodus 18:1-27 tells how, for a brief time, Jethro served as a mentor to Moses and helped him to delegate some of his many responsibilities. Counseling is occasional mentoring that is typically initiated by a problem situation and normally ends when the problem has been satisfactorily addressed. Teaching is also occasional, where a teacher seeks to help students understand a particular topic which includes classes, workshops, seminars and sermons. Sponsor-mentoring is where within an organization a credible mentor (usually an individual with authority) seeks to develop a mentee and support their career and personal development. Such mentoring is likely to be informal, initiated by the mentor and not part of the organization's procedures.

Finally, there is passive mentoring where a mentee is inspired by and learns from someone they have possibly never personally met. This mentor may be alive or dead; either way, their example and teaching is an inspiration to the mentee.

Kram's description of mentoring in terms of career functions and psycho-social functions provides a different perspective from Stanley and Clinton, a description which continues to be confirmed in the literature and which adds to the richness of mentoring descriptions. According to Kram, career functions relate to career advancement and include coaching, sponsorship and protection, while psycho-social functions address competence, clarity of identity and effectiveness¹². Her research suggests that successful mentoring involves both career and psycho-social functions.

The mentoring paradigm is changing. Pauck suggests that changing paradigms include: for the mentee – from passive receiver to active learner, for the mentor - from authority to facilitator and for the learning process - from mentor directed and mentor responsible to mentee directed and mentee responsible¹³.

¹¹ Stanley and Clinton, *Connecting: The Mentoring Relationships You Need to Succeed in Life*, 87.

¹² Kathy E. Kram, "Phases of the Mentor Relationship," *The Academy of Management Journal* 26, no. 4 (1983): 608–625.

¹³ Ditmar Pauck, "Development and Evaluation of Intentional Mentoring in a Church-Based Semester Course" (PhD Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2004), 26.

At MEGST, our mentoring is intentional. It includes aspects of discipling, spiritual direction and coaching, depending on the situation, and on the needs and concerns of the mentee. It may, for instance, involve developing good habits (spiritual disciplines), improving study skills such as essay writing or exam technique, or exploring God's call on one's life, and future plans. Mentoring is for three years, with the hope that alumni will continue to be mentors and to seek mentors of their own in their future work and ministry.

Mentoring Practice

In this section we first consider mentoring in a Bible college setting. This is followed by a review of research on mentoring, an overview of modeling and the hidden curriculum, concluding with a discussion on the importance of the doctrine of prevenience regarding mentoring.

Mentoring in Bible Colleges. Chiroma provides a succinct definition of theological education as, "...the act of preparing men and women for the specialized ministries that God has called them to, within and outside the church¹⁴." Such an education cannot be achieved only through the classroom experience; rather it requires the whole seminary experience including, among others, chapel, care groups, internship, mentoring and modeling.

MEGST is an accredited member of the Asia Theological Association (ATA). The ATA accreditation manual includes mentor modeling in its value of Fostering Spiritual and Ministerial Formation. Additionally, ATA requires that candidates for

¹⁴ N.H. Chiroma, "Mentoring as a Supportive Pedagogy in Theological Training," *Theological Studies* 71, no. 3 (2015): 3. A fuller definition of theological education from ATS (for an MDiv degree) is: A.2.1 The MDiv program should provide a breadth of exposure to the theological disciplines as well as a depth of understanding within those disciplines. It should educate students for a comprehensive range of pastoral responsibilities and skills by providing opportunities for the appropriation of theological disciplines, for deepening understanding of the life of the church, for ongoing intellectual and ministerial formation, and for exercising the arts of ministry. Association of Theological Schools (ATS), "Standards of Accreditation. Degree Standards A2.1" (ATS, 2015), accessed March 15, 2018, <http://www.ats.edu/uploads/accrediting/documents/standards-of-accreditation-161130.pdf>.

a faculty position demonstrate participation in discipleship and mentoring processes¹⁵.

The following three examples from a North American context illustrate a variety of student mentoring approaches. Asbury College provides faculty-to-student mentoring in the context of a three-semester field education course, where students intern in a local ministry setting¹⁶. Calvin College offers to facilitate peer mentoring (six times per semester) and also provides academic mentoring options¹⁷. Dallas Theological Seminary takes elements from both the above examples and uses field mentors (i.e., each intern identifies a person at the internship site who then serves as their mentor)¹⁸.

Among SE Asia Bible colleges, there is little available information on student mentoring. The EAST college in Singapore has listed among its values: developing students through mentoring by faculty and in this regard, all students are placed in a Mentoring Group led by a faculty member¹⁹. SAIACS in India has weekly faculty-student mentoring as part of one-morning session before classes begin. This will include one faculty-student mentoring with the remaining students doing peer mentoring. Each student will likely have one faculty mentoring meeting every 2-3 months.²⁰ In Myanmar, it seems that few Bible colleges in Myanmar who have a formal mentoring course or program.

¹⁵ Asia Theological Association, "ATA Manual for Accreditation" (ATA, January 2021), accessed March 8, 2022, <https://www.ataasia.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/ATA-2021-Manual-for-Accreditation.pdf>.

¹⁶ "Mentored Ministry," *Asbury Theological Seminary*, last modified 2018, accessed March 11, 2018, <https://asburyseminary.edu/students/mentored-ministry/>.

¹⁷ "Mentoring," *Calvin College*, last modified 2018, accessed March 11, 2018, <https://calvin.edu/offices-services/mentoring>.

¹⁸ "Role of Ministry Mentor," *Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS)*, last modified 2018, accessed March 11, 2018, <https://www.dts.edu/departments/academic/internships/roleofministrymentor/>.

¹⁹ "About | Values," *East Asia School of Theology*, last modified September 11, 2013, accessed March 11, 2018, <http://www.east.edu.sg/about/>.

²⁰ "About Us | History and Credentials," *SAIACS: South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies*, last modified 2022, accessed March 8, 2022, <https://www.saiacs.org/about-us/> Includes personal communication with a graduating MTh student and a senior faculty member, 12 March 2018.

Research on Mentoring Effectiveness.

Although our focus is on Bible colleges, we first provide some background on mentoring and its effectiveness by reviewing two mentoring studies in secular universities, in North America and Austria. Campbell and Campbell report on a large survey in which 339 undergraduate students assigned to mentors were compared with students who had no mentors²¹. The selection of mentor and mentee was managed in such a way to also test for the impact of ethnicity and gender (same or different) on the performance of the students. The results showed a statistically significant higher GPA, lower dropout rate and greater satisfaction among the students who were mentored when compared with students who were not mentored. GPA and dropout rate were found to not be related to either the gender or ethnicity of the mentor or the mentee.

The Austrian study where students were invited to join a peer mentoring program again showed that students who had chosen the mentoring program performed better academically than those who did not choose to participate, a result consistent with the above research.²² However, the focus of this study was to compare the effect of different mentoring styles on academic performance, and in this regard, no relationship was found²³.

Research on mentoring in Christian colleges has often addressed the context of faculty mentoring where junior faculty are mentored by senior faculty²⁴. Research suggests that good relationships among faculty are essential for faculty success and,

²¹ Toni A. Campbell and David E. Campbell, "Faculty/Student Mentor Program: Effects on Academic Performance and Retention," *Research in Higher Education* 38, no. 6 (December 1, 1997): 727–742.

²² Birgit Leidenfrost et al., "The Impact of Peer Mentoring on Mentee Academic Performance: Is Any Mentoring Style Better than No Mentoring at All?" *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* 26, no. 1 (January 1, 2014): 102–111. However, there is an argument that those who selected mentoring were perhaps more able and willing students.

²³ In this study, the three different mentoring styles identified and tested were motivating master mentoring, informative standard mentoring, and negative minimalist mentoring.

²⁴ Joe W. Lund, "Successful Faculty Mentoring Relationships at Evangelical Christian Colleges," *Christian Higher Education* 6, no. 5 (October 1, 2007): 371–390; Nan Thomas and Thomas Trevethan, "A Christian Theology of Mentoring," *Intervarsity - Graduate and Faculty Ministries*, last modified February 11, 2009, accessed February 27, 2018, <https://gfm.intervarsity.org/resources/christian-theology-mentoring>.

moreover, it results in good models for the students²⁵. Fewer studies are available on mentoring of students in Christian colleges. Yoder reports on a two-year study of faith-mentoring in a Christ-centered liberal arts college, addressing the questions of how to be faith mentors and what to do to nurture the faith of students²⁶. An in-depth study of three ECWA Seminaries in West Africa who have mentoring programs showed that mentoring contributed to the development of the students in the areas of spiritual formation, character and ministry formation²⁷. In addition to arguing for the necessity of integrated mentoring, it showed that mentoring was practically possible. Interestingly, despite its recognized value, faculty respondents did not see mentoring as effective, citing insufficient documentation, mentor supervision, mentoring procedures and training for mentors.

In summary, while there are question marks over the effectiveness and value of aspects of mentoring such as dyad pairings²⁸ and mentoring training, there is little doubt that mentoring has a positive impact on both mentee and mentor.

Most of the literature reviewed on mentoring deals with voluntary mentoring where, for instance, a faculty mentor will choose a mentee. A mentor is more likely to choose the best mentee they can find, which increases the likelihood of a positive impact creating the so-called “Matthew effect” where the rich tend to get richer, so to speak. At MEGST, while the allocation of mentors and mentees is done carefully to find suitable pairings, it is not voluntary.

Modeling and the Hidden Curriculum

Jesus Christ is the preeminent example of Christian leadership development. He had an apprentice-master relationship with his disciples; they learned from him as they lived with him. Jesus himself was very clear about the impact: “...but everyone who

²⁵ Thomas and Trevethan, “A Christian Theology of Mentoring.”

²⁶ Bob Yoder, “Strengthening a Christian College as a Faith Mentoring Environment,” *The Journal of Youth Ministry* 11, no. 2 (2013): 87–129.

²⁷ N.H. Chiroma, “Critical Evaluation of Mentoring Programmes in Theological Seminaries of the Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA)” (PhD Thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 2012).

²⁸ Lund, “Successful Faculty Mentoring Relationships at Evangelical Christian Colleges.” Although, in his in-depth study of three faculty mentoring pairs from Mid-Western Christian Colleges, Lund reported a unanimous preference for same gender pairings and an ambivalence regarding mixed or same gender pairings.

is fully trained will be like their teacher²⁹”. Writing in the context of developing leaders for pastoral ministry, Douglas takes this to mean that the mentor is in fact replicating herself in the mentee³⁰.

A recent study of 161 teams in the corporate sector examined the impact of leader humility on team interactions and performance³¹. The study concluded that humble leaders, by their way of life, develop humble followers. In the context of ethical leadership, Brown and Treviño refer to this phenomenon as social learning theory where, in organizations, people tend to follow the example, not the teaching, of their leaders³². This underscores the power of modeling; how we are far more likely to learn from the example of others’ actions than from what they say. Media commentator Marshall McLuhan succinctly captured this idea in his aphorism, “The medium is the message.”

Argyris has identified the two foundational concepts of espoused-theory and theory-in-use which underscore this idea³³. Espoused-theory is what we say, and theory-in-use is what we do. He states, “...people consistently act inconsistently, unaware of the contradiction between their espoused-theory and their theory-in-use, between the way they think they are acting and the way they really act.” Herein lies the challenge. While we may think we are doing what we say, people are learning from what we do, which can often be a different and almost always unintended message.

Applying this to a Bible college context, we arrive at the concept of the hidden curriculum, which is much more influential than the explicit educational curriculum with its courses³⁴. The hidden curriculum is the messages we communicate through

²⁹ Luke 6:40 (NIV).

³⁰ Scott M Douglas, “Developing Leaders for Pastoral Ministry,” *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 8, no. 2 (September 2014): 85.

³¹ Bradley P. Owens and David R. Hekman, “How Does Leader Humility Influence Team Performance? Exploring the Mechanisms of Contagion and Collective Promotion Focus,” *Academy of Management Journal* 59, no. 3 (June 1, 2016): 1088–1111.

³² Michael E. Brown and Linda K. Treviño, “Ethical Leadership: A Review and Future Directions,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 17, no. 6 (2006): 597.

³³ C. Argyris, “Teaching Smart People How to Learn,” *Harvard Business Review* 69, no. 3 (1991): 99–109.

³⁴ Perry W.H. Shaw, “The Hidden Curriculum of Seminary Education,” *Journal of Asian Mission* 8, no. 1–2 (2006): 23–51.

how we teach, rather than what we teach; that is, the medium (the teacher and the way things are done) are an integral part of the message.

We can explore these ideas in the context of mentoring, both positively and negatively. Positively, the mentee will learn from the life, behavior and actions of the mentor and, to a lesser extent, from what is spoken. This can also occur in the other direction where the mentee influences the mentor. The negative impacts are less obvious. If, for example, a college teaches a course on mentoring with little or no practical mentoring, the message may well be that when these students graduate, they will also teach courses or seminars on mentoring. Or, perhaps a college introduces faculty mentoring of students. Part of the (unintended) message may be that you must be a faculty member, or at least a teacher or person of higher position, in order to be a mentor.

In concluding this section, we return to Scripture to restate the force of modeling. Put simply, Christianity is an imitative faith³⁵. Jesus' command to his disciples was to love one another. "As I have loved you, so you must love one another³⁶." He did not say, "Love... as I have told you." Paul wrote the Colossian church exhorting them to, "Forgive as the Lord forgave you³⁷." Regarding servants who had been freed, the people of Israel were commanded to, "Give to them as the Lord your God has blessed you³⁸." The message is clear: do this, as it has been done it to you. We want to be able to say to our students, "Mentor others as you have been mentored."

Section 3 will recount the process of preparing for mentoring at MEGST.

Preparation for Mentoring

This section describes the development of the mentoring program prior to the first implementation in Semester 1, June 2017.

³⁵ Keith R Anderson and Randy D Reese, *Spiritual Mentoring: A Guide for Seeking & Giving Direction* (Intervarsity Press, 1999).

³⁶ John 13:34 (NIV).

³⁷ Colossians 3:13 (NIV).

³⁸ Deuteronomy 15:14 (NIV)

Initial Stimuli for Mentoring

Two events contributed significantly to the development of a mentoring program. First, in 2015 MEGST undertook a wide-ranging survey of alumni covering graduates from 1998 to the February 2015 graduation. 137 alumni were interviewed, representing 43% of all MEGST graduates. Second, at the beginning of the 2016 academic year MEGST initiated a curriculum review, where each department presented a review of their course offerings. And, as noted in the introduction, reading *Transforming Theological Education* by faculty and revisiting the MEGST vision statement also contributed.

This resulted in the introduction of a new mentoring course. One question from the alumni survey was significant. The question was, “What could MEGST have done to better equip you for your ministry (academically and/or practically)?” The top four responses (which accounted for 76% of all responses) are presented in Table 1.f

Courses should focus more on preparing students for their future ministries/careers	96
More opportunity for student participation in classes, e.g., group work, discussions, role plays	67
More mentoring	53
More opportunities for spiritual growth	32

Table 1 – Responses to Q19 of 2015 MEGST Alumni Survey

Starting with the “More mentoring” response, the August 2016 faculty meeting identified that a mentoring course had the potential to address all the first four responses. While the first two responses can and should be addressed in every course, mentoring is a genuine opportunity for active student participation and there was little doubt that future ministry discussions would occur as a natural part of mentoring. Further, spiritual growth is one of the main goals of mentoring.

Developing a Mentoring Course

An obvious option for a Bible College wanting to include mentoring in the curriculum is to add a new taught course on mentoring. However, for reasons set out in Section 2, the course was structured as a “doing” course. It was to be an additional course, but one which would not place additional requirements on students. To achieve this, one of the three morning chapel services became the “mentoring” time. Mentors and mentees would meet in this time and fulfil the requirements of the course without requiring any additional time commitment from students or faculty. We considered this to be very important, as the “non-formal” obligations of students are often considerable, including home cell, Chapel services, care group meetings, cleaning and special events such as prayer and sports days, spiritual awareness week and mission week.

The first version of the mentoring course involved faculty mentoring students, but it quickly became apparent that this would rapidly become an onerous or superficial endeavor. With 15 faculty and 60 students this would significantly increase faculty load and could not be accommodated in the 1-hour morning slot allocated in lieu of the Chapel service.

The final version for the three-year mentoring program resulted in a radical restructuring, where students were involved as mentors. Specifically, Year 1 students would be mentored by Year 3 students and Year 2 students would be mentored by faculty. After two years of being mentored, final Year 3 students have the opportunity and responsibility of being mentors to the Year 1 students. This makes the faculty workload more reasonable but, more importantly, it creates the opportunity for students to learn to mentor for themselves. If we had required mentoring to be done by faculty, students may conclude from our example that you have to be a teacher before you can be a mentor. That is not the story we wanted to be telling.

For each semester, students were required to keep a journal of their mentoring experiences and learnings. Student assessment for each semester comprised a grade for participation and engagement (25%) and a reflective essay (75%) based on their journal (see Appendix 1).

Equipping and Preparing Faculty

Two mentoring workshops were held for faculty, many of whom had relatively little prior experience of mentoring. The first workshop for faculty in September 2016 was developed from the results of a simple questionnaire completed by faculty prior to the workshop. The focus of this two-hour workshop was on foundational concepts of mentoring and how mentoring could contribute to the MEGST vision. This was followed by a second workshop in April 2017 which, had a practical orientation with role plays where faculty assumed roles of either faculty or student. It was considered important for faculty to experience mentoring for themselves and to appreciate what it might be like not only for them as mentors, but also as student mentees.

Mentoring Allocations

Since MEGST had no history of mentoring, the 2016-17 academic year involved establishing the mentoring program. It was clearly not possible, with no mentoring history, for Year 3 students to immediately begin mentoring Year 1 students. Therefore, in Semester 1 faculty mentored Year 3 students. Then in Semester 2 faculty mentored Year 2 students and Year 3 students mentored Year 1 students. As part of the core Christian Leadership course for Year 3 students, one class on mentoring was provided and, additionally, mentoring was also discussed from time to time in class.

The allocation of mentors to mentees was a challenge. The preferred situation was for men to be with men and women with women; however, with only three women faculty this is not always possible. Therefore, in two instances each semester, a senior, married male faculty member mentored a woman student, always in a public setting. Fortunately, the mentoring allocation of women and men for Year 1 and Year 3 students worked easily; however, this will not always be the case. Further, as noted in Section 2.2, care must be taken to respect differences in age and tribal background.

Mentoring Practice

This section comprises three parts. First, the Semester 1 experience is described. The main focus is on the Semester 2 experience and especially the novel experience

of Year 3 mentors with Year 1 mentees. For this second part a thematic analysis is undertaken based on the students' reflective essays. The final section is a summary.

Semester 1 – Faculty mentoring Year 3 students

A simple questionnaire was given to both faculty and students at the end of Semester 1. Question 1 assessed the perception of how valuable the mentoring sessions were, using a 7-point Likert scale, where a higher score meant more valuable. Specifically, mentors assessed how valuable they thought the mentoring was for their mentees, and mentees assessed how valuable mentoring was for them. The scores were 5.57 for faculty and 5.33 for students. A paired means t-test showed there was no significant difference in assessed value.

Question 2 asked participants to identify two good things about the mentoring experience, while Question 3 asked for the identification of two things that could be done to improve the mentoring experience. For Question 2, both groups identified a good relationship between mentor and mentee and both affirmed the timing and length of meetings was good. For Question 3, faculty suggested they needed to pray and prepare more before meeting, to make the meeting time more flexible and to have more mentoring training. Students suggested improvement in the relationship with more openness and trust and, similarly, more flexibility in meeting times.

The responses were by and large positive, no doubt helped by newness of the situation and the commitment from faculty to make mentoring a success.

Semester 2

A thorough analysis of Semester 2 responses, based on students' reflective essays, was undertaken using thematic analysis.

Themes. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research approach. Themes, according to Braun and Clarke, "capture something important about the data... and represent some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set³⁹." In this case the data set was MEGST student reflective essays; specifically, 21 Year 3

³⁹ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (January 1, 2006): 82.

mentors and 23 Year 1 mentees⁴⁰, and 17 Year 2 mentees who were mentored by faculty.

Identifying themes is a subjective approach that relies on researcher judgement. Quantitative measures such as the number of times a theme occurs can help establish the importance of a theme, but the importance of a theme is not only related to the frequency of occurrence. Themes can be established inductively (from the bottom up) as they are discovered and then refined through careful reading and re-reading of the data set. This is like a grounded theory approach where emerging patterns or themes in the data are discovered.⁴¹

For our data set an inductive approach is taken. The essay structure is relatively open and does not contain specific, directive questions. Moreover, the context of students mentoring students is less common in a Bible College setting, and especially so in Myanmar where such activity is expected to be led by the teacher; therefore, there is almost no available or relevant research on this context.

The approach used follows Braun and Clarke⁴²:

1. The researcher familiarizes himself with the data.
2. Initial codes are generated from the data.
3. Codes are collated into potential themes.
4. Themes are reviewed, amended and named and clearly described.
5. A report is made from the analysis.

Findings for Year 3 and Year 1 students Four themes identified from the reflective essays from Year 3 and Year 1 students are discussed below. It should be remembered that these Year 3 students have received one semester of being mentored by faculty and now, in Semester 2, they are already mentors to Year

⁴⁰ Two of female mentors each had two mentees.

⁴¹ Isabelle Walsh et al., "What Grounded Theory Is...A Critically Reflective Conversation Among Scholars," *Organizational Research Methods* 18, no. 4 (January 7, 2015): 581–599.

⁴² Following Braun and Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," 87. The thematic analysis was undertaken before the literature review of Section 2.

1 students. The Year 3 students had about 4-5 hours of prior instruction on mentoring as part of their Semester 1 Christian Leadership course⁴³.

Theme 1: Experiential Learning.

Experiential learning is learning by doing. It is not the common Myanmar academic “transmission” learning of the classroom where the student learns ideas and concepts from the teacher. Rather, it appears as visceral learning where the mentee (and the mentor - to a lesser, yet significant, extent) is personally involved. In this mentoring situation, there is also learning from example, where the mentee learns from the example of the mentor (and, again, the mentor learning from the mentee).

3MR06 stated, “I copied what (my mentor) did during mentoring in the last semester.” In a close situation such as this one-on-one mentoring, the power of example is amplified.

Mentoring is learning together; for both mentees and mentors speak of learning from the other person. Here are echoes of Proverbs 27:17, where “one person sharpens another”. One mentor (3MR14) described how his spiritual life was “zero” when he started mentoring and how this dramatically improved through the example of his mentee (and a chance meeting with another student). Interestingly the mentee (1ME14) of this same mentor described how he, “...was inspired through his (mentor’s) lifestyle and behavior...”. This example is consistent with the comments of some mentors who observed that it is not possible to truly encourage someone else in their relationship with God, if their own relationship with God is not so good. This creates a responsibility which pushes mentors toward excellence and away from mediocrity.

Comments suggest that most, if not all, students had no prior experience of mentoring and therefore, no examples to learn from. This is somewhat problematic. These students have typically completed a BTh or BDiv degree, are active in their church and in their Christian walk. Yet ironically, although mentoring / discipling is a familiar concept to them, it remains a decidedly unfamiliar practice. 1ME03

⁴³ The coding for quotations is Year (1, 2, 3)_Mentor or Mentee (MR, ME)_Respondent Number (01, 02...).

observed, “There are a lot of church pastors and ministers in Myanmar who are mostly doing pulpit ministry and they have no time to listen to the needs of their church members.”

Theme 2: Genuine Relationship

Both mentors and mentees regularly commented on the good relationship that had developed between them, which seemed to happen rather quickly, within 3 or 4 meetings. Year 3 students had received some training, in being mentored by faculty in Semester 1 and through a class on mentoring in the Christian Leadership course. In the mentoring class, the importance of modeling vulnerability was explained; that is, if we want mentees to share honestly with us, we should first set the example and be willing to share about our own lives.

It appears that this instruction has been helpful. Commonly used words by mentors and mentees were “honesty”, “trust”, “respect” and “keeping secrets.” The last of these is significant. 3MR16 noted, “Actually, she (my mentee) wanted to tell what she felt but she feared to speak out her secret. So, I give the trust to her by promising to keep her secret things...”. And 3MR13 wrote, “... because if a person is not faithful, we cannot tell the secret things.” Trust is an essential component of any mentoring relationship.

Some mentors went beyond what was expected, such as one who cared for their mentee who was sick for two weeks. Praying for their mentee outside of the mentoring time was common and was also noted by a few mentees. Many genuine relationships developed over the 14 weeks of mentoring.

Theme 3: Being Heard

The healing that comes from being listened to, from being heard, is significant. In much of their education, Myanmar students have few opportunities to be truly ‘heard’. Being heard is much more than giving a correct answer to a question, as this is the main ‘way’ in which students are heard in their high school education. And this being heard is not only an issue in educational institutions for, as 1ME03 noted earlier, many pastors appear to be too busy to listen to their people. 1ME19 succinctly observed, “It is hard to solve problems and troubles alone.”

In the mentoring class, mentors were reminded that mentoring is much more about listening than talking. The Year 3 mentors had already learned this from the example of their faculty mentors in the first semester.

The impact of being listened to is well explained by 1ME14. "...I felt scared and shy to share with my mentor, but when I shared it with him I felt myself freedom and light." The English idiom, "A problem shared is a problem halved," emphasizes the main idea. The freedom that comes from a trusting context where a mentee can share and be listened to (and not judged nor criticized), can be a significant step toward healing. A comment from 1ME04 reinforces that people do not want to be heard until they trusted their mentor, "...she cared and was concerned for me... so it was easy to tell my problem to her."

It seems that active listening of the mentor to the mentee is like a gift or blessing to the mentee. Guidance and advice can follow listening, but they not should precede it, for active listening provides the necessary context for any subsequent guidance. It is not expected that our mentors were practicing all aspects of active learning, however the phrase "listened patiently," noted by some mentees, is indicative of an active listening posture.

1ME18 captured one of the main ideas of this theme, "The mentor learns by listening and the mentee learns by sharing."

Theme 4: Structure and Uncertainty

Year 3 students had been mentored by faculty during Semester 1. Year 1 students knew that mentoring would happen for them in Semester 2. These students were somewhat thrown into this mentoring situation. Not a lot of instruction was given; however, some guidelines were provided (see Appendix 2).

This situation is perhaps analogous to Jesus sending out the twelve disciples, as recounted in Mark 6:7-13. The disciples had already spent some time with Jesus, they were given a few instructions and then they were sent off. They learned fast, they learned together in pairs, they learned as they went.

Here, again, is experiential learning. MEGST has provided a simple structure for mentoring. Instead of Chapel on Thursday morning, mentor and mentee would meet for about half an hour. We did not overly constrain them, we did not observe them, we did not place high expectations on them. We did, however, trust them to make good use of the time and opportunity they were given. What happened was largely the responsibility of each pair of students. For every pair (mentor and mentee) their reflections consistently speak of God at work in their lives. In effect this simple structure can be seen as a ‘God-space’, a space where mentoring could be practiced, and where God was at work. As 1ME07 wrote, “I realized that it is God who helps and guides *both* of us (italics mine).”

Another analogy may be appropriate. Richard Foster explains, “God has given us the disciplines of the spiritual life as a means of receiving His grace. The disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that He can transform us. ... They are God’s means of grace⁴⁴.” The structure of mentoring at MEGST can be viewed as a discipline of grace. Students regularly meet together, placing themselves before each other and before God, so that He can do his work through them. Other than establishing the place and time, direct teacher involvement in Year 3 – Year 1 mentoring is minimal.

Thus, students have freedom (little instruction) with its commensurate ambiguity. Yet, amid this uncertainty (which is amplified by their almost complete lack of any prior formal mentee or mentor experience), God is working and both mentor and mentee are being ‘built up in Christ.’

One further observation can be made. After six weeks of mentoring, a survey of the Year 3 mentors was undertaken in one of their classes, where students were asked to anonymously write down what they had been learning as mentors and what challenges they were facing. The most common response (for 10 out of 21 students) was that they were grappling/struggling with how to answer questions they did not know the answers to. This is a big issue because the Myanmar education system is predicated on knowing the right answers to questions. Interestingly, this issue did

⁴⁴ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 6.

not surface in their final essays, suggesting a greater tolerance of uncertainty and, possibly, a growing realization that having the ‘right’ answers was not always necessary, or that giving the ‘right’ answer may not always be the best thing to do.

Findings for faculty and Year 2 students

Before discussing this second data set, it is necessary to reflect on the different nature of the mentoring here. Year 3 and Year 1 student mentoring is close to a peer-to-peer situation. However, this is not the situation with faculty and Year 2 students as there is typically a considerable “distance” between teacher and student. 2ME17 captures this idea when discussing expectations; “I think that the mentors or the teachers will be main person for this course.”

We begin with the four themes identified earlier while also allowing for other new themes to emerge. In this way, we can more easily compare and contrast the two different groups.

Theme 1 (Experiential Learning) was rarely referred to directly, but many spoke of learning much from their mentor. It would seem that the learnings of Year 2 mentees, when compared with the Year 1 mentees, had a larger component of “advice” learning; that is, learning from the advice of their mentors. That is to be expected with teachers as mentors and should not be downplayed as advice (wisdom) is an important component of mentoring.

Theme 2 (Genuine Relationship) and Theme 3 (Being Heard) were clearly present for this data set. Responses brought these two themes together, highlighting the strong link between trust and speaking one’s “secrets.” 2ME09 provided an interesting insight on this. He wrote, “...during my BTh time (prior to coming to MEGST) we take a counselling class. In that period, we share all about our problems to the counsellor and he or she gives advice in order to solve the problems.” Later he added, “In my BTh time, I never explain all my difficulties to the counsellor because for me this part is very hard to do.” This suggests that perhaps the counselling was mechanistic in orientation and there was no trusting relationship in which to safely and honestly share.

Theme 4 (Structure and Uncertainty) was rarely touched on. On reflection, this is not surprising given the context. Because the mentor is faculty, there is much less uncertainty, for faculty can be expected to lead the sessions and are assumed by Year 2 students to be experienced in the work of mentoring – although this is not always the case.

Theme 5: Centrality of the Mentee

We have discussed how the teacher is considered to be above the student. In the classroom it is the teacher who sets the agenda and who determines what is to be learned, at least in the eyes of the students. However, a clear message comes through from the students that, through this mentoring, the “distance” between teacher and student is decreased. For instance, 1ME13 identifies some positive effects of this. “Personally, I seldom talk with my professors because I felt unconvinced to speak with them... When I have a chance to have a conversation with my professor (i.e., faculty mentor), it is a very exciting and interesting moment for me... (now) I begin to speak not only with my mentor, but also with other professors...” And 1ME08 wrote, “I thought the mentor would be the most important person, but no. The mentee is the main person.”

In general, many students communicated surprise with how well they related with their ‘mentor professors’, which appears to have positive ramifications for faculty-student relationships generally. This is an unintended yet pleasing outcome. It does not mean that respect for teachers has gone; rather that the distance between teacher and student has diminished, which must reflect the way faculty mentors went about their mentoring.

In summary, mentoring was a positive and valuable experience for both faculty and Year 2 students. The significant additional insight was how these mentoring sessions reduced the perceived distance between faculty and students as faculty gave attention to students, effectively making the mentoring sessions about the students, not about themselves.

Discussion

The positive tone of the student essays is encouraging. As discussed in Section 2, modeling and active listening were clear characteristics of student experiences. Students developed as followers of Jesus, in understanding and some practical skills and habits. Over half the Year 3 students explicitly stated that they would seek to practice mentoring after they had graduated.

The ‘gift’ of listening cannot be underestimated. And it is essential because God is always at work in the lives of his people. In the context of mission, George Johnston wrote, “... Christ has already preceded the preacher; he is already there, and we must try and catch up with him⁴⁵”. Johnston drew on John 1:9 where Christ, the true light, lightens every man without exception. Eugene Peterson provides a helpful explanation, this time in the context of pastoral ministry.

“...that God has already seized the initiative. The traditional doctrine defining this truth is prevenience: God everywhere and always seizing the initiative. He gets things going. He had and continues to have the first word. Prevenience is the conviction that God has been working diligently, redemptively, and strategically before I appeared on the scene, before I was aware there was something here for me to do⁴⁶.”

This conviction that God has long been at work in the life of every mentee, requires active listening on the part of the mentor so that they can contribute to what God has been and is doing. Topornycky and Golparian explain that to listen actively is the act of hearing a speaker, avoiding premature judgment, reflecting understanding, clarifying information through restating a paraphrased version of the speaker’s message and asking questions, summarizing, and sharing⁴⁷. Such listening creates the opportunity for the mentor to “get in” on what God is doing in the life of the

⁴⁵ George Johnston, “Christian Mission and Christ’s Prevenience,” *Theology Today* 20, no. 1 (April 1, 1963): 31.

⁴⁶ Eugene H Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1993), 60.

⁴⁷ Joseph Topornycky and Shaya Golparian, “Balancing Openness and Interpretation in Active Listening,” *Collected Essays on Learning and Teaching* 9, Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (2016): 176.

mentee. Are lives being changed for good? Yes, the early evidence would suggest this is true.

Conclusion

The 2017 version of the mentoring course at MEGST has been positively received and has impacted the lives of those involved. Mentors have modelled some vulnerability and thereby encouraged mentees to do likewise. That, and signs of mastering active listening, have been two encouraging outcomes.

Since 2017 we have had two further years of mentoring at MEGST, with largely positive feedback. At one point it was suggested that we stop mentoring and reclaim an additional Chapel service. A student and alumni survey in November 2018 encourage the college to continue, as shown in Figure 1 which shows the percentage of students who said that mentoring should continue.

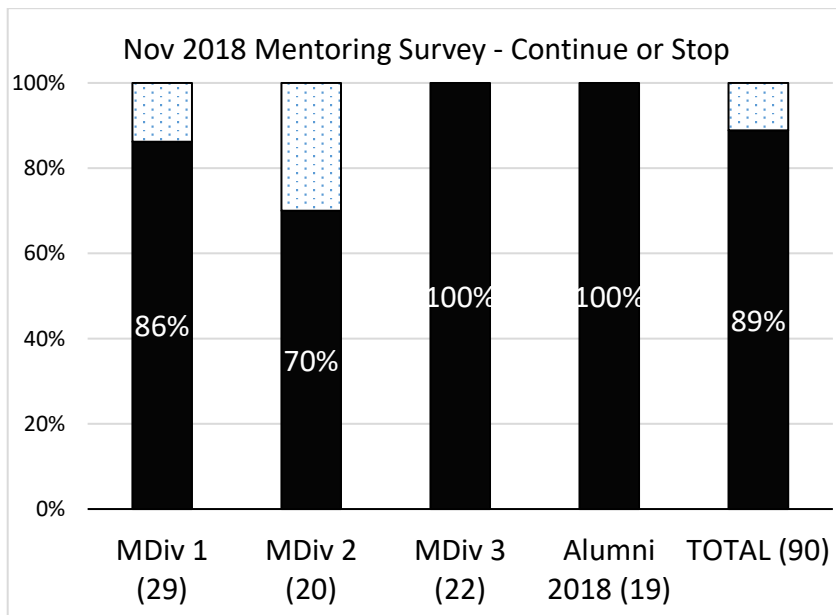


Figure 1. 2018 student feedback on whether mentoring should continue or stop.

In 2020 and 2021 MEGST has been teaching online; because of COVID and then because of the military coup. Mentoring was undertaken online in 2020 and did not

occur (in any formal way) in 2021. Casual observation and through informal feedback from students and faculty, confirm that online mentoring is clearly very different from face-to-face mentoring. It is more difficult to organise and appears to be less valuable.

The challenge before MEGST is to uphold the Biblical command to make disciples and to model it. And it is clear that the message is founded in the modeling (what we do) and then reinforced in the speaking (what we say). Students who have been mentored and who have had the opportunity to mentor others are now well equipped to go on and mentor others. However, it will take some courage and persistence to do so, as mentoring is not commonly practiced among Christians in Myanmar and, it should be added, in much of the world.

In summary, so far this has been a very encouraging adventure. Our goal remains to establish a mentoring culture, where mentoring simply becomes part of who we are as a college.

Appendix 1 - Essay Structure for MDiv Students

Year 1+2 students. Your reflective essay will be marked by your mentor and will then be moderated (checked) by the Director of Mentoring to ensure consistent grading across all students.

- i. Name, Mentor name, number of meetings together.
- ii. Discuss your initial expectations of what you thought mentoring would be like. Compare this with your experience of what actually happened.
- iii. Describe 2-3 significant learnings (which may be ongoing) from your mentoring sessions. Explain clearly what you are learning. This can include: personal challenges, study skills learned, relationship issues – with other people and/or with God and understanding yourself better. Give examples.
- iv. Explain how you will prepare for a whole year of being mentored next year. What can you do to make sure you learn as much as possible? What attitudes may you need to change?
- v. Summarize your experience of mentoring by writing 300-500 words in the form of a letter to a close friend.
- vi. What can MEGST do to improve the mentoring experience? List at least two realistic suggestions.

Year 3 students. Your reflective essay will be marked by the Director of Mentoring.

- i. Name, Mentee name, number of meetings together.
- ii. Discuss your initial expectations of what you thought being a mentor would be like. Compare this with your experience of what actually happened.
- iii. Describe 2-3 significant learnings (which may be ongoing) from your mentoring sessions. Explain clearly what you are learning about being a mentor. What things do you think you do well? What things do you think you need to improve? Give examples.
- iv. Summarize your experience of being a mentor by writing 300 words in the form of a letter to a close friend.

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- v. Explain how, with God's help, you can continue to mentor (and be mentored) after you graduate from MEGST. Briefly write your plan for this.

Appendix 2 - Mentoring at MEGST – Guidelines and Expectations for Faculty and Students

Expectations of Mentor and Mentee

1. Appropriate Respect – for each other.
2. Appropriate Honesty – tell the truth.
3. Confidentiality – what is discussed in the meeting stays in the meeting.
4. Trust – earn the trust of each other and create a safe place to talk.
5. Timeliness – be on time for meetings.
If not, advise the other person in advance and arrange another meeting time to catch up.
6. Willingness to journey together – especially if not going so well.
7. Preparation – prepare for each meeting.
8. Believe that God is at work in your conversations.

Expectations of Mentor

1. Listen more and talk less (about 20% of the time).
2. Take notes, so you remember what talked about. Review notes before meeting and pray.
3. Provide goals/actions for mentee and help them be accountable.
4. You won't know everything; when necessary find other resources (information/people) to help the mentee.
5. Actively care for your mentee.

Expectations of Mentee

1. Be willing to grow and learn, even if it is difficult.
2. Follow through on agreed actions (accountability).
3. Take notes, so you remember what you talked about.

4. Actively listen to your mentor.

What to do if Mentoring Relationship is not working?

First, this is OK. This will happen in some mentoring relationships.

Second, contact the Director of Mentoring. Preferably, this is an agreed action by both Mentor and Mentee. If not, either mentor or mentee to contact the Director of Mentoring.