ABSTRACT
Formal mentoring is an increasingly popular tool for professional development and socialization, particularly in higher education, where expertise is contextual and dynamic. As it is currently enacted, however, mentoring suffers from a lack of clarity, as each participant – protégé or mentor – seems to have a different understanding of what mentoring is or should be. If mentor and protégé don’t have the same understanding, necessary mentoring may not take place. The challenge for researchers is that the action of mentoring usually takes place in dyadic privacy. Studies of mentoring therefore focus on outcomes and participant satisfaction, without being able to separate the links between mentoring functions and those outcomes. In this paper I propose a model of the mentoring relationship that describes the information practices of mentoring. This model is derived from a study of faculty mentors at a large mid-Atlantic university. The model will extend our understanding of mentoring by applying the concept of information practices to the mentoring process.

Keywords
Mentoring, model, information practices, faculty, higher education.

INTRODUCTION
Formal mentoring is an increasingly popular tool for professional development and socialization, particularly in higher education, where expertise is contextual and dynamic. Unfortunately, little is known about what constitutes a successful mentoring relationship. We know it when we see it, as Justice Potter Stewart famously said, but we cannot define it. As it is currently enacted, mentoring suffers from this lack of clarity, as each participant – protégé or mentor – seems to have a different understanding of what mentoring is or should be, and if mentor and protégé don’t have the same understanding, necessary mentoring may not take place. The challenge for researchers is that the action of mentoring – the mentoring functions as defined by Kram and others (1985) – usually takes place in dyadic privacy. Studies of mentoring therefore focus on outcomes and participant satisfaction, without being able to tease apart the links between mentoring functions and those outcomes.

To solve this challenge, I propose a new lens for the examination of mentoring: information practices. Information transfer is at the heart of mentoring, but mentoring has rarely been studied from this perspective. By examining mentoring through the lens of information practices (i.e., information seeking and sharing in a social context) (Savolainen, 2007), we can study and describe mentoring functions in concrete terms. This will benefit the protégé, who may be uncertain about what to expect from the mentoring relationship; the mentor, who may have no prior experience of mentoring, or who may have had a negative mentoring experience; and the organization, as it develops formal mentoring that includes training for participants and explicit goals and expectations for the mentoring program.

In this paper, I describe the initial findings from a study of the information practices of mentors. These findings are based on analysis of quantitative and qualitative responses to a survey completed, at least in part, by 243 faculty mentors at a large research university. The findings guide my development of a model for representing the information practices of faculty mentoring: The Information Practices Model of Mentoring (IPMM). With this model, I extend the study of mentoring through the application of information practices, and I extend the understanding of information practices by identifying a new arena where it can be applied.

Research questions that informed the study are:
RQ1: What motivates mentors to seek and share information in their mentoring relationships?
RQ2: What barriers to information seeking and sharing do mentors perceive in the context of the mentoring relationship?
RQ3: What kinds of information do mentors share with protégés, and what technologies do they make use of in this process?

I begin with a brief review of previous research on mentoring, including the way that scholarship has shifted from focusing on protégés to focusing on mentors, how research addresses the social context of mentoring, and studies of mentoring as a process for personal learning. I will also briefly review some contextual applications of information practice theory. Next, I will describe the survey used to gather data, its distribution, and the analysis techniques employed. Then, I will detail the findings from my study. Finally, I will describe the Information Practices Model of Mentoring, and end with a discussion of implications for scholars and practitioners, as well as a call for further study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mentoring has been an object of study for more than 35 years now. The benefits of mentoring have been well-documented for the protégé (Carey & Weissman, 2010; Mullen & Hutinger, 2008; Zambrana et al., 2015) and for the mentor (Allen, 2003, 2007; Parise & Forret, 2008; Wanberg, Kammeyer-Mueller, & Marchese, 2006). In fact, there is an increasing emphasis on the mentor’s perspective of the process, driven in part by organizational interest in developing formal mentoring programs (Berk, Berg, Mortimer, Walton-Moss, & Yeo, 2005; Cawyer, Simonds, & Davis, 2002). One area of study that remains to be developed is how the social context of mentoring affects its outcomes. Scholars have suggested various frameworks to address this gap, including applying an ecological systems perspective (Chandler, Kram, & Yip, 2011), conceiving of mentoring as a developmental network (Higgins & Kram, 2001), using social cognitive theory as a framework for examining mentoring (Schunk & Mullen, 2013), and considering mentoring as a community of practice (Mullen & Hutinger, 2008; Smith, Calderwood, Dohm, & Lopez, 2013). However, none of these frameworks have caught on in the research community, perhaps because none is as all-encompassing as Kram’s early conception of mentoring functions as career mentoring or psychosocial mentoring (1985). As suggested by Bozeman & Feeney (2007), this may be so because mentoring research has been more focused on the instrumental than the theoretical.

A few studies have examined mentoring as a process for personal learning (Lankau & Scandura, 2007), described the narrative aspects of mentoring (Swap, Leonard, Shields, & Abrams, 2001), and evaluated how mentoring influences organizational learning and preserves intellectual capital for an organization (Bozredon & Ingham, 2005). In these studies there is some indirect consideration of the information transfer that takes place in mentoring, but no analysis of actual information practices in the mentoring relationship.

The concept of information practice has been defined as information seeking and sharing in a social context (Savolainen, 2007). As a framework, information practice gives us a way to how social context mediates information seeking and sharing. Information practice has thus far been applied to the study of business PhD students (Boyum & Aabo, 2015) and young activists in Rwanda (Yerbury, 2015), among others. Because information practice emphasizes the contextual aspects of information seeking and sharing (Savolainen, 2007), it is a good fit for the study of mentoring, which is an essentially social practice.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Recruitment

The sampling frame for this study was defined as tenured professors at Mid-Atlantic University (MAU) who are currently serving as mentors to other faculty, or who have recently served in that capacity. The MAU personnel database was queried in September 2014 to develop a list of all tenured faculty ranked at professor, generating a list of 766 email addresses. An email invitation to participate in the survey was sent to all of these addresses. It should be noted that it was not possible to limit the personnel database query to professors with active appointments and to professors with enough time at the university to be eligible to mentor others, so some faculty were invited to participate who were retired, on leave, or otherwise ineligible to serve as mentors. Forty-seven faculty contacted the researcher by email or phone to say that they were not qualified to complete the survey, thus reducing the total number of possible respondents to 719. Faculty were asked about their recent mentoring experience at the beginning of the survey, and any who had not served as a mentor within the last two years were routed out of the survey. Eighty-two faculty responded to the question, “When did you last serve as a faculty mentor,” and 58% (48/82) answered “3 years ago” or “More than 3 years ago,” causing them to be routed out of the survey, and reducing the pool of possible respondents to 671. Thirty-six percent of faculty (243/671) answered at least some survey questions but did not finish the survey; 28% (188/671) completed the survey.

Data Collection

The survey instrument was developed to cover demographic information and attitudes toward mentoring in general. Respondents were also questioned about the ways they shared information with their protégés, as well as about barriers they might have encountered in seeking or sharing information in their mentoring relationships. Finally, respondents were asked about the sources of information they used to learn about mentoring. The survey was pilot-tested by four professors at MAU, and revisions were made to the questions and / or instructions for the survey, according to their recommendations. The survey included both closed format questions and open format questions, in order to capture different aspects of the mentoring relationship. None of the survey questions were required except for the respondent’s indication of agreement with the consent form. The survey was hosted through a web service, and participants were invited to take the survey via email.
Data Analysis
Data collected through the survey were analyzed using a combination of SPSS and Dedoose qualitative data analysis software. SPSS was used to generate descriptive statistics from the quantitative survey responses, while Dedoose was used to analyze qualitative survey responses. Qualitative data was analyzed using a recursive open coding scheme, whereby codes were created and defined as necessary, and then refined as new data was analyzed. These coded data were then reviewed for surprising, interesting or unexpected elements (Creswell, 2007), and the codes were again revised as necessary to focus on these elements.

FINDINGS
Generally, faculty responses to the survey tell a story of contradictions. For example, survey responses indicate that faculty members at MAU have a high level of confidence in their ability to mentor, and yet more than half of respondents feel they need to know more about mentoring. Survey responses imply a number of barriers to information seeking by mentors, but very few respondents perceived any such barriers. The survey responses also emphasized that these faculty mentors feel informal mentoring is preferable, and yet more than half of the survey respondents indicated that they were formal mentors, in the sense that they were assigned to mentor an individual by their department chair or other administrator. However, in answering a question about how many formal protégés the respondent had, almost 40% indicated they had no formal protégés. This suggests that respondents were using the concepts of formal and informal mentoring in a way that isn’t congruent with the survey language. Formal mentoring is usually defined as a mentoring dyad that is created through the intervention of an administrator or some other external organizer. Meanwhile, informal mentoring is that which begins by means of an invitation from the mentor or a request from the protégé. Earlier literature (Allen, Eby, & Lentz, 2006) suggests that informal mentoring produces better outcomes for protégés, and some of the respondents to this survey suggested that informal mentoring was more natural and more beneficial. However, relying on informal mentoring is a challenge for members of underrepresented groups, as mentors are more likely to engage with protégés who remind them of themselves, and mentors are less likely to meet the mentoring needs of protégés who are members of underrepresented groups (Dancy & Jean-Marie, 2014). In addition, formal mentoring is a better fit for institutions seeking to develop and socialize their new faculty (Donnelly & McSweeney, 2011) in reliable and consistent ways. Because there is a university-wide policy at MAU that all tenure-track faculty members must receive mentoring, a formal mentoring program is essential in order to be sure that every faculty member is assigned a mentor.

Regarding my research questions, the survey responses do indicate specific barriers and motivations to both information seeking and information sharing by individual mentors. However, survey data also suggests that both barriers and motivations are strongly influenced by the social context in which the mentoring takes place. Survey respondents also had strong opinions about what kinds of information or training would be helpful, but they answered these questions as often or more often with comments about the form of such information, rather than its content.

The survey responses indicate that faculty mentors occupy certain roles in their mentoring relationships, which I have designated the reference resource, the guide to culture, and the advocate (Figure 1). These roles describe the mentoring functions provided by the faculty mentor, and also suggest the nature and extent of information seeking and sharing that the mentor will undertake while occupying that role. As suggested by the arrows connecting information seeking and information sharing to the roles, a mentor who is occupying the role of advocate is likely to be both seeking and sharing information that is richer and of greater quantity than the mentor who is occupying the role of reference resource. Furthermore, the information seeking and sharing undertaken by the mentor takes place within a feedback loop (not pictured), as the protégé reacts to information shared and new information needs become apparent.

The roles may be conceptualized as segments on a continuum, and the mentor may shift from one to another according to the nature of his or her relationship with a particular protégé. For mentors working with more than one protégé, as is the case for 30% (42/142) of survey respondents, the mentor may occupy one role with one protégé and another role with a second protégé. Survey responses also suggest that these mentoring roles are mediated by the social context in which the mentoring takes place.

Figure 1: The Information Practices Model of Mentoring.
Survey Respondents

Survey invitations were sent to 766 tenured professors, of whom 671 had active appointments and/or enough time on the MAU campus to be considered eligible to mentor. Distribution of survey respondents within the 12 MAU colleges generally followed the distribution of those invited to participate, with two exceptions: full professors in the education college make up only 5% of the total number of full professors, while education professors comprised 10% percent of the survey responses. On the other hand, professors in the engineering college make up 16% of the total number of full professors, but these professors made up only 8% of the total survey respondents. The race and gender of the survey respondents generally aligned with race and gender of the entire group of tenured professors.

Faculty respondents were generally experienced in serving as mentors. The majority of respondents, 44% (88/198), have served as a mentor for more than 10 years, while another 17% (34/198) have served as a mentor for between 6 and 10 years. Eighty-four percent of respondents (128/152) rated their confidence level as a faculty mentor at somewhat high or very high. Despite this confidence level, more than half of respondents indicated that they felt they needed to know more about the mentoring process at least some of the time (82/148).

Faculty were asked a series of questions about a specific protégé. More than half of respondents (73/127) were appointed by the department chair or other administrator to serve as mentor to that protégé (i.e., they would be considered formal mentors). Almost half of the responding faculty met with their protégé less than once a month (60/125). Virtually every respondent identified themselves as comfortable (39/126) or very comfortable (83/126) in giving information to their protégés. However, nearly 10% (12/127) indicated that they sometimes had difficulty communicating with their protégé, and 7% (9/126) said there were topics they tended to avoid with the protégé.

RQ1: Motivations for Seeking and Sharing Information

Mentors are motivated to seek information in their mentoring relationship when they recognize a gap in their own knowledge. They are also motivated to seek information on behalf of their protégé, as in a situation where the protégé has a question the mentor can’t answer immediately, or when the mentor needs information about some aspect of the protégé’s professional development. Finally, mentors may be motivated to seek information about aspects of the mentoring relationship, especially when the relationship doesn’t progress in the expected fashion. As one respondent noted, “help with difficult cases requires some training” (P217). Another said, “I’ve mentored by the seat of my pants. It would be nice to have some guidance myself” (P154).

Motivation for sharing information is contingent upon a number of factors, such as the frequency of meetings between the mentor and protégé, and where the protégé is in the process of development and socialization. For example, when the mentor and protégé meet with relative frequency, the mentor may be more motivated to share information simply because he or she is more engaged in the mentoring process. Mentors may also be motivated to share information about their own experiences, based on how closely they identify with their protégé. As one respondent described it: “sharing enough of your own experience to be helpful but recognizing that the issues you faced might have changed for younger faculty” (P61).

In other words, the mentor’s information seeking and sharing varies according to the role that he or she is enacting. The mentor’s information seeking and sharing is also mediated by various elements of the social context in which the mentoring takes place.

For example, the mentor whose role is that of reference resource will find it a simple matter to answer a protégé’s questions about how to apply for travel reimbursement, or how to get more paper for the printer. There are more complicated questions about the tenure and promotion process, of course, but nonetheless, these questions can generally be answered either from the mentor’s direct knowledge, or by review of resources such as university policy. The reference resource mentor’s information sharing is more reactive than proactive. As one respondent described it, “being there to help a mentee when they need and want help” (P89). Another respondent described the mentor’s role as, “understanding what they are asking for, not overstepping boundaries, staying concise and to the point” (P20). For both of these respondents, it is up to the protégé to initiate contact. The mentor may be likely to say ‘just let me know if you have any questions’ or ‘my door is always open – drop in any time.’ This puts the burden of organizing mentoring meetings on the protégé, who is likely to be uncertain about the propriety of calling on the mentor, or uncomfortable with wasting the mentor’s time (Follman, 2013). As another respondent said regarding departmental support of mentoring, “too much of the onus is on the junior faculty – to set meetings, to follow-up, etc... something more systematic would help many of them” (P236). Or as this respondent noted, “Mentors differ greatly in how they approach mentoring – some do this well, while others basically check-in, have a cup of coffee, and provide little structured or concrete guidance” (P151).

Mentors who enact the role of reference resource are informal in the structure of their mentoring relationships. For example, 80% (99/123) of survey respondents indicated that their mentoring meetings tended to be unscheduled, as mentor and protégé would drop in on each other. 62% of respondents (76/122) indicated that they were most likely to meet with no agenda. Meeting without agenda means the protégé may be free to discuss anything, but it also is likely to leave the protégé to determine what should be discussed, an unnecessary burden on the protégé. In response to a question about the most important aspects of the mentoring relationship, survey respondents were far more likely to mention listening (34/134) and availability (14/134), which
might be considered aspects of the reference resource mentor, than they were to mention aspects of advocacy.

The guide to culture is a mentor who is willing to explain departmental or college politics or to give the protégé advice about how to frame a research proposal on a grant application. P173 said that an important aspect of mentoring is, “Being willing to share your insights about the University even when they are a bit uncomfortable.” Another respondent said it was important for a mentor to “[have] a good grasp of what elements are need for the mentee to achieve tenure (e.g., through serving on college-level [or above] promotion & tenure committee)” (P164). The guide to culture can explain why a measure is likely to be voted down in the university senate, or why this faculty member will never sit next to that faculty member. One respondent said the mentor should “[help] understand departmental / university politics” (P97), while another referred to this kind of information sharing simply as “discuss the unwritten rules” (P77). The mentor in this role may share information reactively or proactively, depending on context.

Generally, respondents emphasized that the mentor needed to be able to interpret the promotion and tenure guidelines for the mentee, or that the mentor needed more information about the expectations of college and university administration for promotion and tenure. Mentors also responded with comments about helping protégés understand grant applications, or just department politics, but these comments were far less frequent. Half of respondents (62/126) indicated that they discussed grants often or very often, while only 30% of respondents discussed department politics often or very often (37/125).

Finally, the advocate is a mentor who is willing to spend much more time in support of his or her protégé. As P55 said, “you have to look out for their interests, not yours. You have to advocate for them.” The advocate seeks out opportunities for the protégé to work with highly regarded people in the field, such as in editing a book, or in developing and organizing a symposium. P98 said an important part of mentoring was “being at a status that provides you opportunities, that you can then share with the mentee,” while P81 described this as “helping them to make useful connections professionally and on campus.” P82 recommended, “helping junior faculty to find opportunities for their career development and networking such as including them in a big proposal/funding opportunity, conference organization, participation in academic society, and course developments.” Thus, the advocate may need to seek information in order to fulfill his or her mentoring responsibilities. The advocate protects the protégé from taking on too many committee or other service responsibilities, or as one respondent put it, “protection from time-consuming tasks that will detract from success” (P27). P22 said the mentor should offer “advice on other activities (professional service) that could distract junior faculty from achieving the level of scholarly productivity necessary for tenure.” The advocate also defends the protégé to other faculty during the formal discussions that are part of the tenure and promotion process. P94 put this simply: “defending their work with other faculty.” The advocate is likely to share information proactively.

The idea of the mentor as advocate was mentioned by several respondents, who commented that the mentor should advocate for the protégé with the rest of the department. Other responses referred to the mentor’s responsibility to find opportunities for the protégé to grow as a scholar, and build a network with other scholars.

**RQ2: Barriers to Information Seeking and Sharing**

Survey respondents did not generally perceive barriers to information seeking and sharing. However, responses to other questions seemed to indicate that the barriers exist, whether or not the mentor is aware of them.

Regarding information seeking, only 23% (31/137) of survey respondents had ever received training about being a mentor. Mentors were asked if training in mentorship could be useful, and in a free-response question, they were asked what kinds of training would be useful. There were 95 responses to the question, and 47 (50%) of them signaled an unwillingness to be trained or a disbelief that the training would be useful. Sixteen of these responses suggested that a mentor could not be trained, with the subtext that mentors are born, not made. In many cases, the respondent said this outright: “I think mentoring is a personality trait, you are either good at it or not. You cannot be trained” (P238). Another respondent said, “You either care about people and want to help them succeed or you don’t. If you have spent your life in academics and you don’t know what it takes to be a good mentor then perhaps you should not be one” (P139). A similar response is “Being a mentor must come from the heart. One must want to do it. If one wants to do it, then one has a good idea of what needs to be discussed” (P122). Nine responses suggested in various ways that any training was bound to be bad, as with P97, who said “I don’t have much confidence in the University’s ability to structure and conduct training of faculty members.” These responses indicate a distrust of what may be perceived as administrative interference in a delicate relationship. However, they also reflect a barrier to information seeking, particularly when the mentor cannot imagine there being any value in a mentor training program.

Regarding information sharing, respondents were asked how comfortable they felt in giving information to their protégé. Only 3% (4/126) responded with ‘neither comfortable nor uncomfortable’ or ‘very uncomfortable’. Of the remainder, 66% (83/126) responded with ‘very comfortable’. Only 9% (12/127) of respondents indicated that they sometimes have difficulty communicating with their protégé, and 7% (9/126) said there were topics they avoided discussing with their protégé. Despite this largely positive attitude toward information sharing, there are barriers implicit in the mentor’s role. For example, if the mentor is acting as a reference resource, there could be a barrier to sharing
information about something like developing more comprehensive research agenda, because the relationship between mentor and protégé doesn’t allow for such a potentially difficult discussion of the protégé’s contribution to scholarship. The barrier is there, but invisible to both mentor and protégé. Another barrier to information sharing can arise when the mentor waits to be asked, rather than volunteering information. Some respondents suggested that it was necessary for the protégé to be receptive to mentoring: “the mentee has to have a personality that accepts mentorship” (P98); “Having a mentee who actually listens and interacts positively with the mentor” (P164). P31 noted, “Unfortunately, sometimes mentees do not listen to advice or take ownership for their careers and that is probably a situation from which the mentor should disengage.” This would seem to suggest that for these mentors, at least, personality conflicts with the protégé have created a barrier to information sharing.

The survey also asked respondents if the provost, dean or department chair could do anything to improve mentoring programs on campus. Responses to this question formed another example of the contradictions mentioned earlier. There were 102 responses, with nearly a third (31) saying that campus mentoring needed better administration, but without the burden of additional bureaucracy. P139 said, “give faculty better support and less burdensome bureaucracy.” P91 said, “Mentoring needs to be taken seriously, and given appropriate weight in APT [promotion & tenure] and salary decisions. I doubt very much anyone on this campus would be promoted on the basis of excellent mentoring.” These responses do not strictly address the research question about barriers and motivations, but they do reflect the distrust of administration mentioned earlier. That distrust, a reflection of social context, suggests a barrier to information seeking, especially if the mentor assumes that any information provided by the administration will be of low quality or not useful.

Like the mentor’s role, the social context can create a barrier to information seeking and sharing for the mentor. One respondent noted that the department “does not push it [mentoring] but allows individuals to engage in mentoring if they wish” (P11). Information practices by either the mentor or the protégé can involve a certain amount of risk-taking. P21 said, “It is my perception that it is not a high priority in my unit.” In such a department, the risks of seeking information about mentoring – lost social capital, for example – might outweigh than the benefits.

RQ3: Types of Information Shared or Sought
Mentors are most likely to share information about research, publications, tenure, teaching, and grants, but they share that information in very specific ways. Survey respondents also indicated that they were most likely to share information with their protégés in face to face meetings, with email as the second most likely technology to be used. Two groups of survey questions addressed the kinds of information shared with protégés. The first group asked only about the frequency of discussion of various topics, ranging from tenure to work-life balance. Research was the topic mostly like to be discussed, with 79% (100/127) of respondents indicating they discussed it often or very often. Publications (91/126) and tenure (86/124) were the second and third most popular topics, at 72% and 69%, respectively. However, the second group of survey questions asked mentors about similar topics, but in ways that emphasized the mentor’s more active involvement with the protégé. So, while the first group of questions asked ‘how frequently do you tend to discuss publications with this mentee’, the second group of questions asked ‘how frequently do you review or edit this mentee’s manuscripts.’ Only 12% (15/126) of respondents said they edited a protégé’s manuscripts often or very often, as compared with 72% (91/126) of respondents who said they discussed publications with a protégé often or very often. This variation in response to these two groups of questions seems to highlight the difference between the reference resource mentor and a mentor who is more of an advocate for the protégé, and more proactive in assisting the protégé with elements of academic life.

Mentors responded to a question about communication methods with significant emphasis on face to face meetings with protégés; 73% (93/114) said this was the communication method they used most frequently, while 24% (30/124) said email was their most frequent communication method. This is in line with findings from an earlier study that asked a similar question of protégés (Follman, 2013).

DISCUSSION
Information practices is a new lens for the study of mentoring. To evaluate the mentoring relationship in terms of the information transfer that takes place is more concrete than earlier means of evaluation. Because we are able to describe mentoring more specifically, we can more effectively articulate expectations for mentoring, and also give mentors who may be inexperienced with the process a better idea of how it might work. The definition of mentoring has long been a challenge for scholars and practitioners. In fact, a recent literature analysis identified 40 different definitions of mentoring that have been used in empirical literature since the eighties (Haggard, Dougherty, Turban, & Wilbanks, 2011). If we can’t define the process, we can’t describe it, and we certainly can’t teach someone to do it effectively. At this point, organizations and individuals begin to fall back on the idea that mentors are born, not made.

In this paper, I have proposed the Information Practices Model of Mentoring. The model is based on data collected from faculty mentors at MAU, and structured according to information practices – that is, information seeking and sharing in a social context. The model extends our understanding of mentoring through the application of information practices. It gives us a way to characterize and describe mentoring in terms of the information seeking and sharing undertaken by the mentor and the protégé, and it helps us understand how information practices in the
mentoring relationship are affected by the social context in which the mentoring takes place. Further, the model extends the concept of information practices by demonstrating another context where it may be applied.

According to the terms of this model, mentors may be understood to enact various roles in their mentoring relationship. While the roles may be considered as segments of a continuum, through their reference to the types of information transferred, they give us a shorthand means of describing a very complex relationship. The more we can ascribe qualities to the aspects of the mentoring relationship, the more we are able to understand it and describe it even if we have never experienced it directly. While the model was informed by the data collected for this study, the data also show that the model is an appropriate means for describing the mentoring relationship in general.

CONCLUSION
What do we gain from using the lens of information practices to examine mentoring? The Information Practices Model of Mentoring gives us a way to describe what is otherwise a very complex and private interaction between mentor and protégé – a way to unpack the black box of mentoring. Because the focus of the model is on the information transferred, rather than relationship qualities or mentoring functions or career outcomes, the mentor benefits from receiving an explicit set of guidelines and expectations – and as the mentor benefits, so does the protégé. Contrary to the beliefs of some, we are not born knowing how to mentor. However, when ‘how to mentor’ is described only in terms of the protégé’s outcomes, or the satisfaction that participants feel, we can hardly blame mentors for developing their own individual understandings of what it means to be a mentor.

The limitations of this study are that it was completed within a single institution, and at a single point in time, and with a comparatively small sample size. These limitations also affect the generalizability of the Information Practices Model of Mentoring. The plan for future research is to develop a survey instrument based on the model, and validate it through application at other institutions and in other contexts. The model may then inform the development of mentor and protégé training programs.

Faculty mentors are usually deeply committed to the development of their junior colleagues. Studies report that senior faculty who serve as mentors enjoy the opportunity to connect with new members of their departments, as well as the exposure to new scholarship. However, mentors may be challenged by a lack of information about the expectations of their protégés and their department. Some mentors experience frustration with their lack of knowledge (Eby & Lockwood, 2005) and may be tempted to give up. Others may mentor in the way they were mentored, without reference to what is best for the protégé. These mentors will benefit from information about mentoring that is couched in concrete terms. As the mentor benefits, so does the protégé, as well as the organization at large. The Information Practices Model of Mentoring will improve our understanding of mentoring and facilitate the development of future mentors and their protégés.

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