

The William H. Stafford American Inns of Court  
Mentoring Efforts and Evaluation  
2013-14

The Stafford Inn of Court strives to fulfill one of the fundamental goals of the American Inns of Court movement by providing opportunities for its seasoned members to share experiences and insights with its less experienced practitioners and law student members. Most of these mentoring opportunities derive from the close associations formed among the members of the pupillage groups or “teams.” At all of our membership meetings, the teams sit together and participate as a group in the programs. Since many of the programs involve competition between the teams, the members of each team quickly establish a camaraderie and esprit de corps. After each program, the teams remain seated together for dinner, during which time they reflect on lessons learned from the program and discuss professional and personal topics of interest. A great deal of bonding and mentoring within each team also occurs during the process of planning and presenting the team’s program for the membership. Each team member is expected to be an active participant in development and execution of the team program and to honor their commitment to the team.

In addition to the monthly team gatherings and those that are necessary to prepare for a team program, the teams are encouraged to communicate and meet informally between meetings. These meetings typically occur over lunch or social hour, and present another opportunity for group mentoring. Through these interactions, team members quickly identify areas of common interest, which facilitates one-on-one mentoring through individual counseling, shadowing, or involvement together in law-related activities. Since twenty percent of our members are law students, the monthly membership meetings and team meetings are oftentimes their only interaction with judges and lawyers. The judicial team leaders and master lawyers play a special role in welcoming these members to the legal profession.

#### Mentoring Evaluation

At the end of the Inn year, the Stafford Inn asks its members to complete a membership survey so that we can identify our strengths and weaknesses as an organization. Part of this survey solicits feedback on the quantity and quality of the mentoring component of our Inn. These evaluations are used by the Executive Council to plan the year ahead.

The evaluation of the Inn’s mentoring for the 2013-14 year showed that approximately 86% of those who responded “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that their mentoring experience has been positive and beneficial to their career and practice. When asked whether the Inn should establish a structured, arranged mentor-mentee program in the future, approximately 61% were in favor. When asked if the Inn should not use a structured mentor program but allow mentoring relationships to develop on their own, the results were almost evenly split between those in favor and those opposed. While the overwhelming majority of those who reported to the survey have experienced benefits of the Inn’s mentoring on their careers and practice, the results also indicate that there is more that the Inn can do in the future to ensure a beneficial experience for everyone.