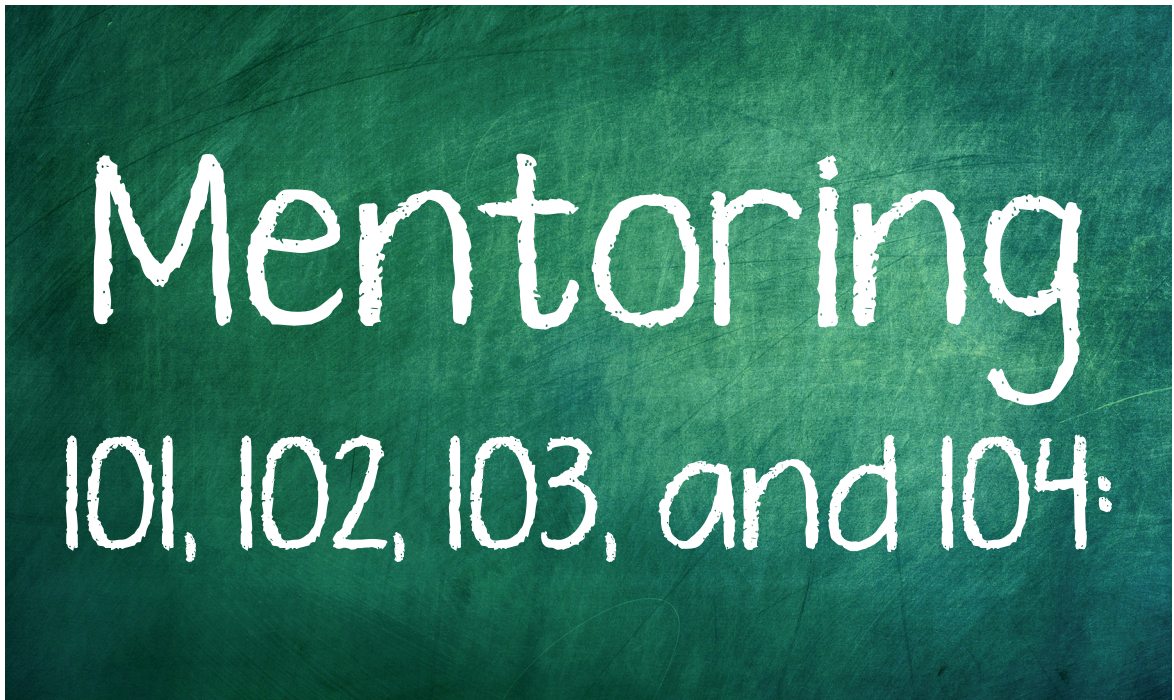


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The Ferguson-White American Inn of Court Mentoring Program

By Robert J. Nader, Esquire and Kimberly Monticello, Esquire

The C.H. Ferguson–M.E. White American Inn of Court in Tampa, Florida has always been dedicated to the goal of mentoring its Pupil and Associate members, and has established a formal mentoring program to accomplish that goal.

During its initial phase, the mentoring program consisted primarily of making sure that each Associate Inn member and each law student or Pupil member had an assigned mentor, and they were simply encouraged to take advantage of that mentoring relationship. Our initial mentors, typically Masters, were asked to initiate the mentoring sessions with their mentees throughout the year. At the end of the year, the mentoring program chair typically performed an assessment of how well the mentoring process worked over the course of the year. These assessments ultimately led to improvements in our current mentoring program discussed below.

In order to ensure that each Pupil and Associate received a consistent experience, our Inn established a more structured mentoring program for the 2010–11 program year, which continues

to be a success today. For the past four years, our mentoring program has solidly established itself to be a firm tradition and part of our Inn. The program has two objectives:

1. Hold group educational mentoring sessions, or modules, for our Pupils and Associates with guest panelists throughout the year.
2. Pair Barristers and Masters (including judges) with Pupils and Associates to create an opportunity for them to meet and collaborate, as mentor and mentee, in order to interact, share common interests, exchange ideas, learn from each other, and discuss questions and concerns the Pupil or Associate may have about the legal profession and the day-to-day practice of law.

Regarding the mentor/mentee component of our mentoring program, each mentee is asked to

complete a form about their interests and goals, as well as any particular activities in which they wish to participate, such as a trial, mediation, or deposition. Based on these initial surveys, the mentees are paired with a mentor whose qualifications and practice area fit the various needs of the mentee. Mentor/mentee pairings are distributed to all participants in the mentoring program, and the pairing list is forwarded to all members of the Inn several times during the year. Mentor/mentee pairs are encouraged to get together at least two times during the year to facilitate and fulfill the program objectives noted above. Our mentors and mentees also receive a list of possible topics for discussion during these one-on-one sessions.

To ensure we continue to serve our mentors, mentees, and members to the greatest extent possible, this year we requested formal feedback from our mentees in the form of a survey. We used Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com) to collect feedback from our mentees about the mentor/mentee pairing aspect of the mentoring program. Our survey included the following questions:

- Did you have the time or find the time to participate in the mentor/mentee part of the mentoring program?
- Did you have the opportunity to meet with your assigned mentor one or more times?
- Do you believe you took advantage of or benefit from the collaborative opportunity provided by the mentor/mentee part of the mentoring program?
- If so, in what way did you take advantage of or benefit from the mentor/mentee pairing opportunity? Please briefly describe.
- What is your personal evaluation of the mentor/mentee pairing aspect of the Inn mentoring program?
- What additional features, if any, would you like to see added to, revised or removed from the Inn mentoring program?

Our group mentoring sessions focus on perfecting writing skills, providing “real world” advice to our mentees for their professional development, and encouraging networking and friendship among the participants. Some of our module topics have included: “Billing 101,” “Interviewing 101,” “Client Development,” and “Office Politics.” Although our mentoring program has been a success, over the years we have been challenged with ensuring solid attendance at the group sessions. As such, over this past year, we added the following to our program:

- scheduling just three modules during the year to facilitate better attendance
- introducing new topics to reflect changes in the needs of our current class of mentees, such as a “Work/Life Balance” module
- inviting guest speakers who are recognized leaders in their topics
- making the group sessions easy to schedule and remember through convenient locations, regular reminders to both mentors and mentees, and appropriate signage on the day of the meeting
- inviting group session attendees to participate and provide input during the module to foster group discussion
- keeping track of attendance at group events

In summary, the Ferguson-White American Inn of Court is extremely proud of its dedication and commitment to mentoring and the way our mentoring program has evolved over the years. Our mentoring program has developed into a formal program with both one-on-one and group mentoring sessions, and we continue to find ways to improve our results.

This article was written by mentor Bob Nader and his mentee, Kimberly Monticello. Bob and Kim have enjoyed getting to know each other through the Ferguson-White mentoring program over the past three years. The goal of any successful mentoring program is to create relationships that flourish beyond the Inn program year. If the relationship between this mentor and mentee is a testament to the success of the Ferguson-White mentoring program, then it has been a tremendous success! ♦

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