MENTORING GRADUATE STUDENTS

Graduate Student Mentoring Committee

TEXAS
The University of Texas at Austin

Quality mentoring relationships are based on reciprocal respect for each person involved and for each person's additional obligations. They are also based on trust, openness, listening, and flexibility.

Good mentors affirm mentees as whole people with lives on and off campus, and they keep in mind the potential effects of personal and familial issues on mentees. They also have an understanding of multiple career pathways. Good mentors work with their mentees to set and respect clear boundaries.

MENTORING BEST PRACTICES

1. Develop Formal Mentoring Initiatives
We urge programs to develop their own mentoring best practices and to establish formal mentoring initiatives while also reviewing any informal mentoring already occurring.

2. Start Early
We recommend having a conversation about mentoring at graduate student orientation and assigning at least one formal mentor at the very beginning of a graduate student's career.

3. Use the Multiple Mentor Model
We encourage programs to use the multiple mentor model, also called the mentor network model or "constellation mentoring." This approach distributes mentoring among faculty and diversifies the kind of support that students receive.

4. Establish Expectations
Mentors and mentees together need to establish a clear understanding of each person's role and responsibilities within the mentoring relationship and of the time and effort necessaryto build and sustain it.

5. Communicate
Communication between mentors and mentees should occur early and often, and mentors, as well as all faculty active in a program, need to know their program so that they are prepared to communicate accurate and helpful information.

6. Support Effective Time Management
Mentors provide regular guidance through each stage of the program to keep mentees on track to meet personal, department, college, and university deadlines.

7. Know the Institution
Mentors help mentees learn to navigate the university landscape, to understand the institution, and to make connections on campus.

8. Empower Mentees
Mentors empower mentees to express their wants and needs and to help them find resources for issues related to micro-aggressions, mental health, and balance between and/or integration of on-campus and off-campus life.

9. Provide Professional Advice
Mentors encourage mentees to be frank about their career goals and to remind them that these goals might and often do change.

10. Prepare for Challenging Mentoring Relationships
Programs should provide graduate students with resources to help them when mentoring relationships are not working, including when faculty refuse to mentor.

ACHIEVING QUALITY MENTORING

Defining mentoring

Programs need to define mentoring, both informal and formal, as their faculty practices it. These definitions need to be clear to all active faculty as well as staff and students. We recommend that all programs have discussions about their culture of mentoring. These questions will help to guide the conversation:

- What distinctions, if any, does your program make between mentoring, advising, and supervising?
- How does your program consider mentoring during the admissions process?
- What assumptions does your program make about mentoring?
- How is mentoring practiced in your program?
- What is the function of a mentor in your program's discipline?
- Does the responsibility for mentoring fall on certain faculty?
- How can we improve our mentoring?
- Do we recognize mentoring during annual performance and merit reviews?
- Do we recognize excellent mentoring with awards?
- How do we observe and solicit feedback on mentoring?

Defining quality mentoring relationships

We recommend that programs have discussions about what constitutes quality mentoring, during which they can address questions such as:

- How do I know if I'm a good mentor?
- What does a good mentor-mentee relationship look like in our program?
- How do we improve a mentoring relationship that isn't working well?
- How do we know if a mentoring relationship has been successful?
- How do we convey to our students what to expect from their mentors?
- How do we incentivize and reward good mentoring?
- If we do not already do so, how can we incentivize and reward it moving forward?

Quality mentoring of all students

Programs need to be attentive to the challenges and obstacles that can be faced by women, students of color, LGBTQ+ students, students with disabilities, first-generation students, and international students and to be familiar with the campus resources available specifically for them. We recommend providing students a list of these resources (the DDCE, Texas Global, the research centers that serve these specific groups of students, etc.) during new student orientation and inviting representatives from the appropriate offices to speak to incoming students.

Developing mentoring best practices guidelines

We recommend that programs compile and make available to faculty, staff, and students in some form the results of the discussions about defining mentoring, both informal and formal, and defining quality mentoring relationships. We recommend, too, that they develop a plan to achieve quality mentoring of all students, including women, students of color, LGBTQ+ students, disabled students, first-generation students, and international students. These guidelines could be included in the graduate student handbooks that the Graduate School requires each program to have.

Quality mentoring is critical to the development and success of students. It improves the overall graduate school experience and helps students intellectually as well as emotionally, culturally, and socially by providing a support system and reinforcing a graduate student's sense of belonging and scholarly identity. Quality mentoring networks and relationships within them produce strong future mentors, too, as mentees take on the mentoring role themselves after they earn their degrees and look for new mentors while moving forward in their professional lives.

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The Graduate School

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Texas Career Engagement

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More information on mentoring—
including research, articles and other resources—for faculty members and graduate students is available at: gradschool.utexas.edu/mentoring

"Mentoring functions as a vehicle for passing along strategies of success and transformation but only by virtue of significant investment [of] time and energy."

John Riofrio, "Trusting Vulnerabilities" (2014)
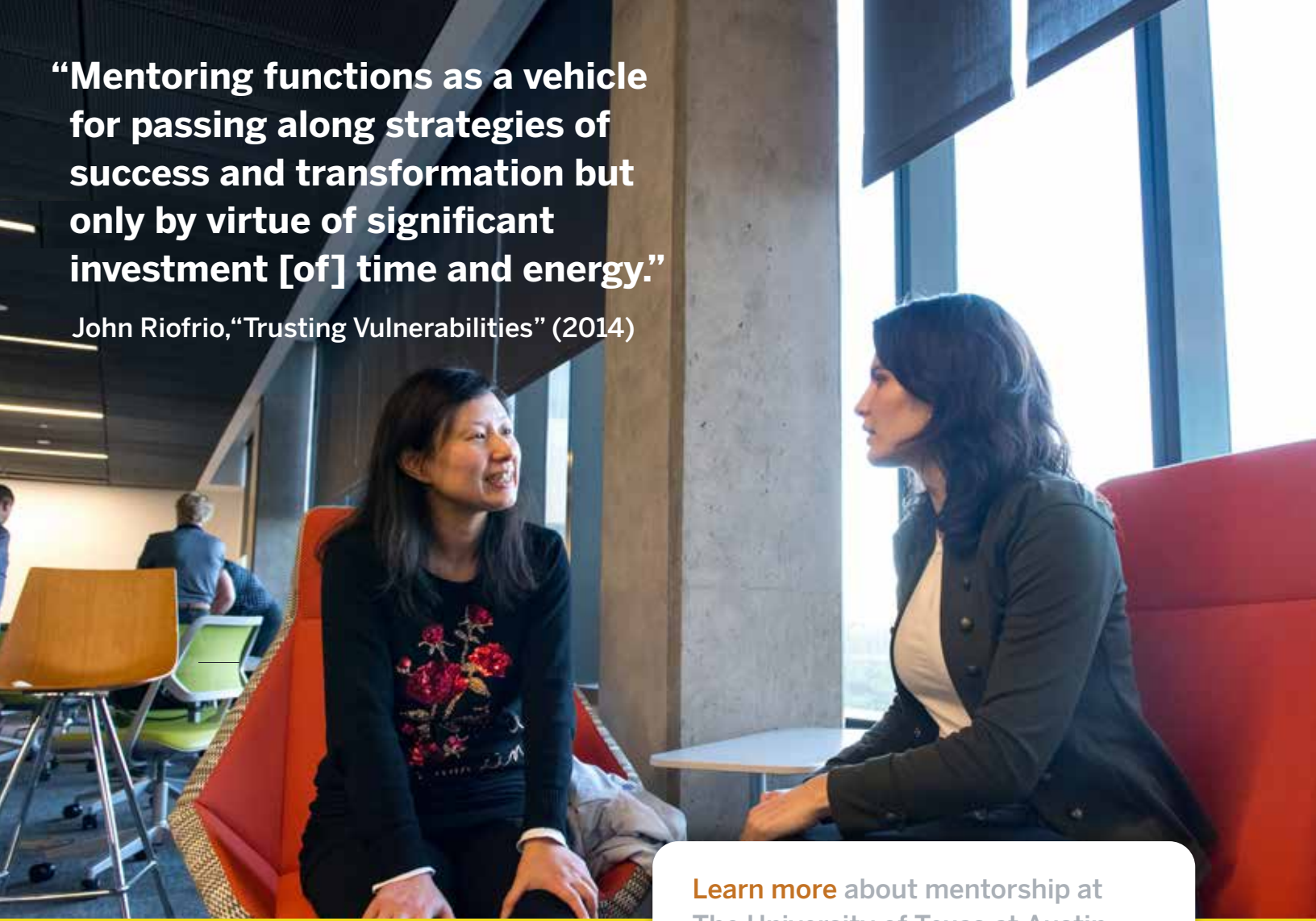
Learn more about mentorship at The University of Texas at Austin Graduate School

gradschool.utexas.edu/mentoring
gradmentoring@austin.utexas.edu

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