

Effective Mentoring of Graduate Students: Why it Matters for Them and for You

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Mentoring

- Unique relationship that involves 2 (or more) people that often includes a goal of increasing knowledge and skills;
- Varies in the types of support (emotional, social, instrumental) provided;
- Reciprocal yet often asymmetrical and is dynamic and changes over time (Allen and Eby, 2007).

Specific to graduate students and major professors: *“A mentoring relationship is a close, individualized relationship that develops over time between a graduate student and a faculty member and that includes both caring and guidance”* (Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching).

Structure

- 1:1
- Group
- Formal
- Informal
- Long-term
- Short-term
- Comprehensive
- Targeted

Approaches

- Discussions
- Observations
- Experiences
- Readings
- Review-Feedback-Processing
- Coaching/Advising
- Advocacy

Supporting Attributes

- Mutual respect
- Trust
- Care and Support
- Engagement and Motivation
- Challenge
- Growth Promotion

Effective Mentoring

Supports gaining knowledge, skills, and capacity to function effectively

Helps with managing challenging environments

Increases understanding of procedures and expected outcomes

Develops ways to work effectively on collaborative projects


Builds confidence and competence

Increases engagement and strengthens retention

Enhances overall mental health and wellbeing

Outcomes Associated with Good Mentoring

- Students build skills and make progress on theses/dissertations and other writing tasks.
- Work environment feels energizing and conducive to productivity.
- Work on projects is performed well and on time.
- Students obtain competitive internships and fellowships, as well as better employment opportunities.
- Collaboration with and among the next generation of scholars is strengthened.
- Faculty-led programs of research, and other forms of scholarship, progress and are enhanced.



*Sometimes challenges occur in the work faculty and students are doing together. When **relationships fail**, our **productivity** in research, creative scholarship, teaching, and outreach/extension **is compromised**.*

Some Reasons for Faculty-Student Interpersonal Problems

Faulty Models

- Faculty mentoring the way they were mentored
- Student expecting the mentor to be a friend

Poor Fit

- Clashing personality, communication, and/or work styles

Misaligned Expectations (& Poor Communication)

- Student thinks .5 assistantship = not a serious job
- Faculty thinks .5 assistantship = 40+ hours/week

Isolation

- Lack of integration with other faculty and students

Cultural Differences

- Different expectations for authority, autonomy, and behaviors
- Diversity insensitivity or ignorance

Lack of Training/Skills

- Faculty member has not received training on mentoring
- Student lacks skills needed for the research

*Intentionally Build Effective Mentoring
Capacity and Practices that Maximize
Graduate Students' Development and
Minimize Relationship Failures*

Self Reflection: Think about the mentoring you received while a graduate student...



What kind of mentoring did you have?



What did you like and dislike about the mentoring you received?



How well did your mentor(s) help you progress through your graduate program?



How well did your mentor(s) prepare you for your academic career?



What did you not receive in the way of mentoring that would have been helpful to you?

What Does a Good Mentor of Graduate Students Do?

- Engages students in conversation
- Demystifies graduate school
- Provides constructive and supportive feedback
- Provides encouragement
- Fosters networks and multiple mentors
- Looks out for students' interests
- Thinks about students' mentoring needs
- Treats students with respect
- Provides a personal touch

Basic Strategies that Promote Good Mentoring

1. Assess and clarify expectations.
2. Define roles and responsibilities.
3. Guide student in understanding the departmental context (expectations for Master's/Doctoral program).
4. Tailor activities that capitalize on students' strengths and build new competencies (responsive and flexible approach).
5. Include checks to ensure communication is clear.
6. Keep a written record of plans/agreements.
7. Address personal/interpersonal issues when they arise.
8. Engage with others to help support mentoring efforts.

What do you do to set the stage in your initial meetings with graduate students?

Discuss:

- Student's previous educational experiences
- Student's mentoring style preferences and needs, and why they decided to go to graduate school.
- Your research projects and how they complement or diverge from the student's interests
- Communication and meeting frequency
- Milestones for reaching goals across the program
- Your approach to providing feedback
- Courses and other training experiences they might want to seek.
- People/groups inside or outside the university that might comprise their professional networks
- Authorship on presentations and manuscripts
- Anticipated stresses of graduate school and how they can be managed
- Well-being and mental health resources available to students

<https://rackham.umich.edu/downloads/how-to-mentor-graduate-students.pdf>

Interpersonal Attunement During the Mentoring Process

Consciously work to build a positive relationship with the student by taking time to get to know them and express interest in their success.

In conversations aim to understand what is important to the student, what their concerns are, and what obstacles they (may) face moving toward their goals.

When problems arise, focus on how you can work together to address the problem and potential alternatives for a good solution.

If a student is upset or stressed:

- Remain calm
- Listen and then reflect your understanding of what they are saying
- Try to get a clear understanding of the situation
- Consider whether you can help them address the challenge or if you need to engage others to assist.

What can Departments do?



- **Assess fit** and consider alternative assistantship assignments.
- Ensure students know **where to find information** on forms and procedures.
- Make sure new students who have yet to select a MP have people (GPO, DH, advanced grad students) checking with them to ensure the new students have support and guidance.
- Provide **clarity on the nature of the work** in the Master's/Doctoral program and how the program is organized (what happens when).
 - Set **overall goals** to be achieved and **key milestones** to be met while in the graduate program.
 - Have a **common core expectations and procedures** with room for flexibility that accommodates variation across faculty and students, for example:
 - Assistantship pay (same across levels)
 - Order of key milestones toward degree (same for all)
 - Working for assistantship v. working for degree (clarity)
 - Onboarding/supports for graduate students (provided to all)

What can Departments do? (contd.)

- **Discuss as a faculty** the mentoring and support needs of graduate students and ways to help faculty provide good mentoring.
- Establish general **expectations/guides** for mentoring; discuss mentoring students with diverse abilities and needs.
- Encourage **early discussions about expectations/roles** among faculty and students who will be working together.
- Offer **seminars** for new graduate students and for continuing graduate students. **Gather input from students** on their mentoring needs.
- Have a **strategy/process to address problems**.
- Encourage **multiple forms of mentoring** and help diversify student connections with faculty and other students. **Engage the full committee** in supporting the mentoring process.
- Gather **input on mentoring from outside** the department/college.



What can the College do?

Onboarding for new faculty.

Provide mentoring training and resources for faculty.

Provide professional development for students and for faculty.

Provide mentoring supports for faculty members' own career development.

Recognize and reward effective mentoring.

Mentoring advisory committee composed of faculty and graduate students.

Mentoring point person (assists with mentoring/relationship needs/issues).

Work with departments to support effective mentoring.

Onboarding and Ongoing Support for Graduate Students

- Multi-day Onboarding Session for all graduate students when they begin the program that covers all major topics from HR to DEI to life as a graduate student to requirements of the graduate school and of the department....
- Seminar on teaching
- Seminar on learning about department's research
- Summer internship with 1-2 faculty (those most interested in as MP)
- Wait to choose MP until second year (GPO MP for 1st year)
- Sessions/courses during graduate program that focus on professional development, grantsmanship, career preparation...

Expanding Access to Mentors

DH, GPO, ADR: Offer regular opportunities for graduate student input. Clearly communicate availability to graduate students to offer assistance/guidance/support when needed.

Committee members are selected to provide input on thesis/dissertation, qualifying exam....AND to provide additional mentoring support for the student (made explicit). Examples:

1 of the committee members serves as a secondary mentor for the student.

For MS students (at end of thesis proposal meeting); for PhD students (at end of oral exam and dissertation proposal meetings), student and MP each have some time to discuss with committee (without MP/student present) any needs or concerns and receive input.

Annual review of doctoral students also can include input from committee (and others who have worked with student) that identify mentoring needs or potential problems to be addressed.

Current Efforts in CHS to Support Mentoring

CHS Research Advisory Committee

Graduate Students

Onboarding and Mentoring Departments/Research Teams

Professional Development and Training Sessions (College)

Professional Development Courses (Departments)

CHS Graduate Student Research Symposium

Graduate Writing Assistant

ADR Individualized Supports

Faculty

College Onboarding for New Faculty

Professional Development and Training Sessions (College)

Mentoring in Departments (organic)

Peer Mentoring Groups & Mentoring Network

Mentoring Pairs Program

ADR Individualized Supports

Additional Resources

Auburn University Graduate School

<http://graduate.auburn.edu/faculty-staff/faculty-toolkits/>

See Mentoring link that connects to a wide range of resources

Seminars provided by Kevin Coonrod, Auburn University Ombudsperson:

- Basic Conflict Management Techniques
- Teamwork: building Results Collaboratively and Amicably
- The Art & Productive Capacity of Active Listening
- Identifying Underlying Interests: Tips from Nature, History and the Cinema
- Working with High Conflict People
- Understanding Bullying and Mobbing

University of Michigan

- <https://rackham.umich.edu/downloads/student-mentoring-handbook.pdf>
- <https://rackham.umich.edu/downloads/how-to-mentor-graduate-students.pdf>

Pennsylvania State University

<https://gradschool.psu.edu/graduate-program-resources/mentoring-matters/>

Emory – Laney Graduate School

https://www.gs.emory.edu/includes/documents/sections/professional-development/mentoring-guide_student_final.pdf

https://www.gs.emory.edu/includes/documents/sections/guides/mentoring-guide_faculty_final.pdf

Council of Graduate Schools

- https://art.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/344/2019/11/CGS_OPS_Mentoring2016.pdf

Online Ethics Center for Engineering and Science

- <https://onlineethics.org/cases/role-play-scenarios-teaching-responsible-conduct-research/mentoring-rcr-role-plays>



Helpful Readings

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- Thomas, K.M., Willis, L.A., & Davis, J. (2007). Mentoring minority graduate students: Issues and strategies for institutions, faculty, and students. *Equal Opportunities International*, 26, 178-192. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02610150710735471>