UAPB Guide to Mentoring Graduate Students

Introduction

Advising and mentoring are among the most important components of graduate student success. Yet because they are not usually measured and incorporated into the tenure and promotion process, advising and mentoring are not commonly included in the formal training faculty received as they themselves progressed through graduate school. Graduate student mentoring, in particular, is often overlooked in faculty development as new faculty begin their careers. Typically, we assume incoming faculty know how to mentor based upon the mentoring they received as graduate students. However, research clearly demonstrates that the quality of mentoring of graduate students varies widely.

Because high quality mentoring is so important to the success of graduate students, not only during their time in graduate school, but also early in their careers, the Division of Graduate Studies and Continuing Education has prepared this guide to graduate student mentoring. It is our hope that faculty will use these resources and guidelines to become better mentors to our graduate students. Mentoring is a journey upon which you embark and in which you and your protégés will learn from one another. Along the way, we believe you will discover that the mentoring you provide will give back to you a richer experience as a faculty member and broaden your network of collaborators, colleagues, and in many cases, friends.

What is mentoring?

The terms coaching, mentoring and advising are often used interchangeably, however they are not the same. Advising describes the basic exchange of information that guides a student through the mechanical/administrative processes of a graduate program. Advising typically revolves around course selection, registration processes, and meeting deadlines for proposals, comprehensive examinations and defenses, to name a few. Coaching refers to working with someone to improve on specific strengths or weaknesses, public speaking or writing, for example. Mentoring describes a relationship. The International Mentoring Association defines mentoring as:

Mentoring is Three Things at Once

- It is a series of tasks that effective mentors must do to promote the professional development of others.

- It is the intense, trusting, supportive, positive, confidential, low-risk relationship within which the partners can try new ways of working and relating, make mistakes, gain feed back, accept challenges, and learn in front of each other.

- It is the complex, developmental process that mentors use to support and guide their protégé through the necessary career transitions that are a part of learning how to be an effective, reflective professional, and a career-long learner.

Note that mentoring is a relationship in which both members learn from one another and in the presence of one another. This is not always a comfortable role for faculty who believe that they should be the source of knowledge and the student the receptacle. However at the graduate level, students are in the process of becoming colleagues and equals. Part of that transition is the development of mutual respect that develops in the mentoring relationship.

Why should I mentor?

One of the more interesting aspects of this fact is that mentoring is a two-way activity. As your protégés grow and mature, you will find they give back to you in the form of

- asking challenging questions,

- bringing new discoveries to your attention, and

- working with you to understand their implications for your own research.

Being a good mentor enhances your professional reputation as your former students go on to be successful in their own rights. Your reputation as a good mentor will also draw the best students to your program. Your students will tell other students about the quality mentoring they receive from you and recruit students to your program.

Finally, there is a certain level of personal satisfaction in seeing the growth and development of your protégés into accomplished professionals and colleagues.

How do I mentor?

The past thirty years has seen a broad inquiry into mentoring and what makes a good mentor. Mentors are involved in the deliberate cultivation of a caring relationship with protégés. Zelditch (1990, cited in Graduate Student Senate of Case Western Reserve University, 2007-2008) describes mentors as "Advisors, people with career experience willing to share their knowledge; supporters, people who give emotional and moral encouragement; tutors, people who give specific feedback on one's performance; masters, in the sense of employers to whom one is apprenticed; sponsors, sources of information about and aid in obtaining opportunities; models of identity, of the kind of person one should be to be an academic". More recently, Lunsford and Baker (2016) posited that "Mentorships center on an emotional commitment, which focuses on the protégé's personal and professional growth. Mentoring relationships, by nature, are reciprocal and more enduring than relationships with an academic advisor, supervisor, or dissertation chair".

Of course, no one individual can fulfill all of these roles. Properly mentoring graduate students will require a cadre of individuals, some at the faculty level, but including staff and often peers as well. One thing a mentor is not, is a parent or friend. A mentor must be bound by and uphold professional and ethical standards as an example to the protégé. The mentor's role is to guide and support the protégé's development into a competent professional.

Mentoring Diverse Students

The American population, and thus the college student body, is becoming increasingly diverse. At the same time, the professoriate has remained largely white and male. Colleges and universities struggle to hire qualified, diverse faculty in part due to the lack of diverse graduates entering the professoriate. As an HBCU, UAPB is sensitive to the needs of diverse students and recognizes the role HBCUs play in contributing to the diversification of the professoriate. The university recognizes diversity as including age, sex, race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, family status, disability, and national origin.

Faculty advisors and mentors should work with their students in an inclusive and caring manner to enhance the students' sense of belonging and opportunities for success. There are a number of issues that are specific to women graduate students, graduate students of color and other marginalized groups. A

short list of some of these issues includes (drawn from a more thorough discussion with suggestions for helping students found in the "[How to Mentor Graduate Students: A Guide for Faculty](#)" from the University of Michigan Rackham Graduate School):

Students Lack for Role Models

Perspectives or experiences not part of current academic norms, theory and research.

Fear of Being Categorized as a "Single-Issue" Scholar

Feelings of Isolation

Burden of Being a Spokesperson

Female Graduate Students

> Assertiveness
> Competitiveness
> Need Positive Feedback and Confidence

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered (LGBT) Graduate Students

> Homophobia
> Heterosexism
> Disclosing

Racial and Ethnic Minority Graduate Students

> Lack of role models
> Stereotyping and the Impostor Syndrome
> Racism

International Graduate Students

> Issues of Culture and Language in the Classroom
> Social Stresses

Graduate Students with Family Responsibilities

> Dual Commitments
> Isolation
> Time Constraints

Graduate Students with Disabilities

> Reluctance to Ask for Help
> Disclosing a Disability
> Effort Exerted Just to Keep Up
> Problems that Arise from Last-Minute Changes

Graduate Students with Different Religious Beliefs

> Absences for religious holidays.

Dietary Customs

Short-term Obstacles to Progress (Sickness, injury, pregnancy, psychological difficulties, or some other unique situation.)

Understanding Temporary Limitations and Reassessing Expectations
Financial Considerations (Stipends and financial aid may be affected.)

Because of the complexity of the task of mentoring, the Division of Graduate Studies and Continuing Education presents below, lists of best and worst practices for graduate student mentoring. While many of these practices were developed for doctoral graduate programs, they are just as applicable to masters level programs. Faculty members or students who have questions or concerns about their own or their colleagues' interactions with students may consult their graduate coordinator, department chair, Dean of their School or the Dean of Graduate Studies and Continuing Education.

Brown University Graduate School Task Force on Doctoral Advising, Fall 2017 (*https://www.brown.edu/academics/gradschool/sites/brown.edu.academics.gradschool/files/uploads/2017%20Best%20Practices%20in%20Advising%20and%20Mentoring%20_BrownGrad_0.pdf accessed 11/20/2020)*

Best Practices for Advising and Mentoring

1. **Understand and respect that each graduate advisee brings different perspectives, experiences and interests.** Different backgrounds warrant thoughtful, individualized advising approaches as well as sincere effort to understand the individual's experiences and interests and how these affect the student's graduate education.

2. **Communicate clearly and frequently with an advisee about expectations and responsibilities, ensuring with each communication that there is mutual understanding.** Give honest, constructive and timely feedback on progress, even when an advisee's progress is less than expected. It is important to discuss a student's weaknesses as well as strategies for addressing them. Students also need substantive engagement with the intellectual dimensions of their work. For advisees who are in the dissertation writing stage, in particular, clear and timely *written* feedback from advisors is especially important. As important as it is, however, written feedback should never replace face-to-face meetings.

3. **Help the advisee develop a timeline for completing academic requirements and meeting professional goals.** Good advisors help advisees plan ahead for academic and professional milestones and work toward clear goals. Doing so includes helping students understand and navigate the basic degree requirements. The goals should also include appropriate progress in research, grant writing, conference presentations and publications. It is best to help students devise a plan that forecasts training, research activities and professional development opportunities at least one year ahead of the current year. Though a plan (individual development plan) may change annually or mid-semester, depending on circumstance, plans ensure that an advisee sees a path and goals to move forward with for the month, semester or year.

4. **Meet regularly with an advisee to review progress, goals, challenges and future plans.** Effective advisors schedule regular meetings with advisees throughout the year. Note that faculty's advising obligations continue through the summer and sabbaticals. When in-person meetings on progress are not possible—such as with a student conducting fieldwork—advisors should attempt to connect through email, video chat or phone to correspond with the student on progress, to give feedback and to work through any challenges with the advisee. It is incumbent on *both* the student and the faculty advisor to

maintain active communication. Although the frequency of meetings will vary by field and by the student's stage in the program, *advisors should generally meet individually with their advisees at least once a month*.

5. **Encourage openness about any challenges or difficulties that impact graduate student experience and work with the advisee to resolve any challenges and/or identify resources for support.** Good advisors welcome communication about these challenges and help students to address concerns and challenges when they arise. Doing so can lessen, if not eliminate, the negative impact on the advisee's intellectual, professional and personal development. Good advisors are approachable and do not dismiss any concern before hearing about it. Good advisors create environments that foster help-seeking and more importantly, minimize barriers to communication and honesty.

6. **Listen to and support an advisee's scholarly and professional goals.** The role of a faculty advisor is to provide thoughtful guidance, clarity and support to advisees, providing them with opportunities to develop skills, training and experiences to achieve their goals. The advisor must realize that an advisee's goals will not always align with an advisor's own goals for the student. Good advisors do not place their own personal and professional goals over advisees' goals.

7. **Be knowledgeable about departmental and Graduate School policies.** Work with the program's graduate coordinator to explain these policies to students; check in with the graduate coordinator and the Graduate School for any clarifications. Graduate students, especially those who have never had previous exposure to graduate school, normally will not understand specific jargon, policy and terms used in graduate school. Good advisors will help advisees decode or demystify these aspects of graduate education.

8. **Be aware of institutional resources that can provide support to advisees in times of academic, professional and personal challenges and whom you, as advisor, may consult for further guidance.** Advisors guide and help advisees in their scholarly and professional pursuits. Along with this, they provide support through challenges and obstacles in the pursuit of their goals. Hence, advisors should be familiar with resources and individuals within the department and the institution who may be helpful to a student depending on the particular concern. A good starting point for both advisors and advisees would be the Graduate Student Resources page.

9. **Prepare an advisee to be competitive for future careers inside and beyond the academy.** Preparing an advisee for the "next step" involves:

> a. Fostering community and collaboration among graduate students, undergraduates and postdocs, as well as with others beyond the department. Doing so includes supporting students' social and professional networking in order to create an environment in which students can thrive.
>
> b. Recognizing an advisee's contributions to research in publications or presentations; when relevant, acknowledging their service outside of their research—e.g. service as mentors to undergraduates and graduate student peers and as members of University or departmental committees.
>
> c. Promoting advisees' participation in conferences or meetings to present their work.
>
> d. Connecting an advisee to one's own professional networks, former students and collaborators.
>
> e. Supporting opportunities for a student to cultivate professional and technical skills that may open up a broader range of career outcomes.
>
> f. Being realistic, open and honest about career prospects and options available to a student.

g. Having honest conversations with advisees about devising realistic back-up plans for any unexpected changes and challenges in their trajectory and in their lives.

h. Collaborating with an advisee to find resources and networks that support career development in careers outside of academia.

i. Directing an advisee to additional resources that bear on careers with which the advisor is not familiar. Career Services offers extensive resources on a wide range of careers that build on advanced graduate education.

A Mentoring Model for Enhancing Success in Graduate Education

Wilhelmina Wright-Harp and Patricia A. Cole Communication Science and Disorders Volume 35 4–16 Spring 2008 https://pubs.asha.org 09/03/2020

From Table 4. The Five-Tier Mentoring Program. Mentoring Step Strategies

Commit to the mentoring process.

> • Reserve adequate time to provide quality mentoring (e.g., the mentor and protégé should meet a minimum of once a month).
> • Communicate between meetings (e-mail, phone contacts, etc.) and develop as well as implement time-directed goals.

Establish mentoring venues.

> • Discuss possible mentoring venue options and determine the most feasible venue.
> • Utilize a variety of mentoring venues, including:
>> o face-to-face meetings,
>> o tele-mentoring,
>> o written communication,
>> o e-mentoring,
>> o cyber-mentoring (e-mail, audio-conferencing, videoconferencing).

Serve as a role model.

> • Mirror an excellent professional image.
> • Allow the protégé to "shadow" you.
> • Convey a passion for the culture of the profession.
> • Provide hands-on clinical and research experience.

Employ successful tools.

> • Provide a time-ordered mentoring schemata.
> • Develop and adhere to a program of study.
> • Provide a mentoring plan update.
> • Require skills/professional development workshops and seminars.
> • Require attendance and presentations at scientific and professional meetings.

Monitor protégé's progress.

> • Conduct monthly individualized mentoring sessions.

- Provide updates (monthly, mid-quarter/semester, end of the quarter/semester, midyear, year-end).
- Review the following areas in each session.
    - o Coursework
    - o Lab/internship experience
    - o Research
    - o Professional development
    - o Concerns/challenges

Graduate Advising and Mentoring: Worst Practices.

The Dignity Project. Responsible conduct in graduate and professional education. University of Minnesota (http://sos.umn.edu/resources-dignity-project accessed 11/20/2020)

Why Does it Matter?

Hostile, intimidating, or offensive behavior on the part of an advisor or mentor can seriously interfere with their students' ability to be successful.

Such behavior can harm students in multiple ways, even causing them to consider leaving the University. Most importantly, this type of harassing behavior harms current students in terms of their progress and successful completion of their degrees. This destructive type of behavior damages the reputation of the University - with prospective students, alumni, employers of our graduates, and the public at large. It also dampens the morale of the members of the University community who observe such behavior or experience the consequences.

Faculty members often develop close professional relationships with students, especially advisees, and a vibrant and engaged relationship between faculty and students is often mutually beneficial. Faculty should, however, be sensitive to the power differential in these types of relationships, which can be intimidating to students. Since faculty/student interactions often include situations that are ambiguous, included below are examples to consider. It is the responsibility of the faculty member to set and observe appropriate boundaries. Although you may not be directly involved in these type of situations, you may know of faculty members who are. Any faculty member can advocate for a student and encourage best practices by fellow faculty members.

Things to Avoid in Faculty/Student Interactions

Asking a student with an RA or TA appointment to work extra or late hours

Students should be expected to work the hours for which they are paid. Students may volunteer to work extra hours to gain more experience (e.g. grant writing), gain authorship on a paper or to help meet a deadline - you should not automatically expect a student to work these extra hours. Please remember that international students should be treated with the same consideration regarding work schedules.

Threatening, intimidating, or shaming.

Such behavior, even when used in a "joking" manner can create a hostile environment for students. Be careful when using sarcasm or "teasing" since it can be demeaning or degrading for the student.

Remaining silent in the face of inappropriate or abusive behavior.

If you have knowledge of inappropriate or abusive behavior but remain silent, this sends the message that you condone such behavior, and also allows for the potential of further harm to students. In the bigger picture, the result of such silence is an unhealthy campus community.

Encouraging students to engage in unhealthy behaviors.

It is important to remain aware of the messages conveyed within the context of the advisee/mentor relationship. Informal gatherings outside of class can help build a sense of community, and mentors should give appropriate consideration to propriety within such contexts. For example, it is never appropriate to pressure students to drink alcohol. Similarly, being drunk in the presence of students does not send a good message about what is considered suitable behavior by a faculty member.

Asking a student to drive you somewhere.

This includes the airport, home, or to meetings. Such a request does not fall under a student's duties. A situation when this may be acceptable is when the student has the same destination.

Asking an advisee to house-sit, take care of your children or pets, help you move, or do other errands.

While some students may not mind assisting with such tasks, others may only agree to do these jobs because they feel obligated or worry that saying no will somehow have a negative impact on their relationships with faculty members. To avoid problematic situations, a faculty member may consider posting a flyer requesting assistance, for pay, to help ensure that respondents really want the job and that they are fairly compensated. Yes, these practices do still occur.

Making a student the target in a faculty dispute.

Placing a student in the middle of a dispute can hinder the student's academic success. For example, it is not appropriate to withhold comments on papers or projects, or otherwise delay academic progress because of disputes you may have with another faculty member.

Using inappropriate comments or questions.

Remember that 'Academic Freedom' is not license to simply say anything you choose. Think carefully before telling off-color stories or jokes. Comments or jokes pertaining to sex, gender, or a student's home country or culture might be considered harassment. Asking a student about his or her "love life" or making comments about a student's appearance or religious practice can be inappropriate and unwelcome. Students may not feel empowered to speak up about such comments despite feeling uncomfortable about them.

Where can I find out more about mentoring?

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