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).

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Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching [https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/mentoring-graduate-students/](https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/mentoring-graduate-students/)
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

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Reason</th>
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<td>Faulty Models</td>
<td>• Faculty mentoring the way they were mentored</td>
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<td>• Student expecting the mentor to be a friend</td>
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<td>Poor Fit</td>
<td>• Clashing personality, communication, and/or work styles</td>
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<td>Misaligned Expectations</td>
<td>• Student thinks .5 assistantship = not a serious job</td>
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<td>• Faculty thinks .5 assistantship = 40+ hours/week</td>
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<td>Isolation</td>
<td>• Lack of integration with other faculty and students</td>
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<td>Cultural Differences</td>
<td>• Different expectations for authority, autonomy, and behaviors</td>
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<td>• Diversity insensitivity or ignorance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of Training/Skills</td>
<td>• Faculty member has not received training on mentoring</td>
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<td>• Student lacks skills needed for the research</td>
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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?

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

University of Washington Graduate School [https://grad.uw.edu/for-students-and-post-docs/core-programs/mentoring/mentoring-guides-for-students/what-a-good-mentor-does/](https://grad.uw.edu/for-students-and-post-docs/core-programs/mentoring/mentoring-guides-for-students/what-a-good-mentor-does/)
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.
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...
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.

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

**Online Ethics Center for Engineering and Science**
- https://onlineethics.org/cases/role-play-scenarios-teaching-responsible-conduct-research/mentoring-rcr-role-plays
Helpful Readings


