



Mentoring Statement of Best Practices

Published April 2024

Table of Contents

UC Graduate College Mentoring Statement of Best Practices	3
Advisor vs. Mentor.....	3
Definition of Strong Mentorship.....	4
Responsibilities of Sound Mentorship	4
Developing the Professional Relationship	5
Departmental Commitment to Mentorship	5
Developing Mentoring Agreements and Contracts	6
Defining Problematic Mentoring Relationships.....	6
Addressing Problematic Mentoring Relationships	6
Providing inadequate direction	7
Dealing with conflicting demands	7
Dealing with conflicting advice	7
Mentee seen as lacking commitment	7
Mentor seen as lacking commitment.....	8
Discovering a mismatch between mentor and mentee	8
Conclusion.....	8
Mentorship Training Resources	8
References	9

UC Graduate College Mentoring Statement of Best Practices

The mission of the Graduate College is to promote a student-centered graduate education by fostering partnerships that: enhance the success of students, staff, and faculty; support professional development for students and mentors; and prepare scholars and practitioners to innovate in research and creative endeavors

A pivotal aspect of this mission is the crucial role of mentorship. Effective mentorship forms the foundation of successful graduate education and training, shaping both the academic and professional paths for students. As a mentor, a faculty member champions students as a guide, advocate, and role model. This holistic approach is designed to prepare students for the wide array of challenges they may encounter in their career and personal development.

Advisor vs. Mentor

These guidelines distinguish between the roles of mentors and advisors, although sometimes these roles can overlap.

- **Advisor Role:** An advisor assists students in meeting program requirements to achieve their degree. Winston et al. (1982) defines advising as “a developmental process which assists students in the clarification of their life/career goals and in the development of educational plans for the realization of these goals” (p. 17). Advisors help students utilize available resources in their departments and within the university to achieve their educational and professional goals. The roles and responsibilities of advisors can vary across departments and disciplines, including administrators, program directors, or advisory committees.
- **Mentoring Role:** Mentors provide holistic development, guiding students beyond program demands to help them transition into fulfilling careers. Mentors ensure students are sound in their professional and personal identities. Graduate faculty mentorship is invaluable, offering support tailored to each student’s needs. Mentor-student relationships are built on accountability, trust, and support, prioritizing student mental health and well-being.

Faculty mentors should recognize that *no individual* can provide all necessary mentoring and are not expected to mentor in all possible capacities. However, understanding various pathways and policies is crucial to directing mentees correctly. Mentors may fill various roles for students, such a role model, intellectual community member, professional development provider,

emotional support, and more. [See the NCFDD's Mentor Map \(PDF\) for an example of many types of roles mentors may fill.](#)

Definition of Strong Mentorship

A successful mentoring relationship is characterized by:

- **Reciprocity and Mutual Respect:** Both mentor and mentee should show mutual respect and reciprocal engagement (Thomas, Willis & Davis, 2007).
- **Clearly Defined Expectations and Goals:** Expectations and goals should be communicated and understood by both the mentor and the mentee (Lechuga, 2011).
- **Acknowledgement of Power Imbalances:** It is important to recognize and address power dynamics between the mentor and mentee (Rosenberg & Heimberg, 2009).
- **Personal and Professional Connection:** Building a strong connection and maintaining a professional relationship is essential (Varrce, 2002; Yob & Crawford, 2012).
- **Tailored Guidance:** Mentoring should be adapted to each student's needs (Johnson, 2002).

Successful mentoring should also be received well by the student, with students taking advice, showing initiative, and motivation.

Responsibilities of Sound Mentorship

Mentors should:

- Co-create and effectively communicate clear expectations.
- Ensure a safe, equitable, and harassment-free learning environment.
- Center development around the student's needs.
- Regularly check in with students about academics, mental health, and well-being.
- Be supportive, accessible, encouraging, respectful, and foster open communication.
- Model and discuss ethical behavior in research and projects.
- Provide consistent and constructive feedback on skills, writing, and presentations.
- Acknowledge student contributions.
- Help students prepare for student milestones and future career goals and successes.
- Engage or participate in training and workshops to develop as mentors.

Mentees should:

- Take ownership of their training and development goals.

- Utilize an [Individual Development Plan \(IDP\)](#) or other goal-tracking device to own their professional development.
- Understand that they can have mentors for different aspects of their personal and professional development
- Identify their needs and be aware of the kind of mentorship relationship they are participating in. (see Mentor Map)
- Strive to attain their intellectual potential and be receptive to mentor's advice.
- Regularly update their mentor on progress.
- Initiate regular meetings.
- Discuss work hours.

Developing the Professional Relationship

Faculty mentors should assist in developing students from dependent learners into autonomous professionals. Key points include:

- Helping students transition from structured undergraduate education to the open-ended nature of graduate research and training.
- Assigning concrete tasks and deadlines to maintain short-term focus while guiding long-term independence.
- Acting as a consultant and/or sounding board as a student progresses.
- Encourage communication and networking skills.
- Helping the mentee understand how their objectives fit within the program, department, and career options.
- Supporting varied career paths, whether in academia or other fields.
- Identifying resources to help students grow professionally and personally.

Departmental Commitment to Mentorship

Departments should:

- Seek feedback from students
- Develop shared mentoring expectations through mentoring plans.
- Create structured activities for faculty and student interactions.
- Support professional socialization through departmental committees and presentations.
- Promote and reward successful mentoring practices.

Developing Mentoring Agreements and Contracts

Having a written agreement (i.e., contract) ensures mutual understanding between mentors and mentees. A successful relationship requires commitment from the student, advisor, graduate program, and the institution. A written document provides the underlying principles towards the establishment and maintenance of such relationships. Whereas the Graduate College offers guidelines for mentorship relationships, the agreements between mentors and mentees are personal and at the discretion of the program. The agreement should align with the mission of The Graduate College and each respective program. Agreements should also clearly outline the expectations between mentor and graduate students and the behaviors that the mentors and graduate students agree with.

[A helpful example of a mentorship agreement can be found from the UC College of Medicine here.](#)

Defining Problematic Mentoring Relationships

Although most mentors and mentees report positive experiences, negative experiences commonly arise. When negative experiences are not addressed, problematic mentorship may develop. You can review this article from *Inside Higher Ed*, “[Principal Investigators, Improve Your Graduate Mentoring](#),” for more information. Signs of problematic mentorship may include:

- Someone withdrawing from the relationship or the program.
- A sense of putting more into the relationship than it is worth.
- Emotional outbursts in response to mistakes or failure to meet expectations.
- Using invalidating comments or passive aggressive slights.
- Mentor-mentee participation in activities or tasks that do not support professional goals.
- Dismissing students’ time, work, and personal boundaries where students are motivated by fear of “saying no”

Addressing Problematic Mentoring Relationships

Whereas mentoring relationships are crucial to growth, there are situations in which expectations are unmet. Communication and mediation are strongly encouraged in those situations before following any protocol to report. Here are a few examples:

Providing inadequate direction

Problem: Providing too much or too little help can hinder a mentee's progress toward independence.

Mentor Strategy: Balance is key. The mentor should monitor their level of involvement to ensure it promotes independence without leaving the mentee feeling unsupported or without guidance. Mentees should be encouraged and enabled to communicate openly about their preference for guidance support. Regular check-ins can help aid communication.

Dealing with conflicting demands

Problem: Faculty are often given multiple tasks and can become overwhelmed by competing demands from multiple mentees. Similarly, students may be overwhelmed by the demands of their programs.

Mentor Strategy: Mentors and mentees should recognize the potential for conflicting demands and develop strategies for balancing work and life demands while also prioritizing communication and maintaining a supportive relationship.

Dealing with conflicting advice

Problem: When students have multiple mentors, it is not surprising to receive conflicting advice. Whereas, students could benefit from being exposed to multiple perspectives, it could lead to confusion.

Mentor Strategy: Acknowledge that conflicting advice is inevitable and support the mentee in navigating it. Encourage the mentee to discuss the advice with peers and other mentors and help them weigh the options based on their career goals and preferences. Provide a safe space for the mentee to express their thoughts and make informed decisions that are best for them and their goals.

Mentee seen as lacking commitment

Problem: A mentor may perceive a mentee as lacking motivation, which can lead to frustration and potential roadblocks in developing in their academic career.

Mentor Strategy: It is important to understand the ebbs and flows of life that could impact students' wellbeing and motivations. Mentors should seek to understand the underlying cause

of perceived lack of commitment. Engage in open discussions to understand the mentee's perspective and career aspirations.

Mentor seen as lacking commitment

Problem: A mentee may feel their mentor is not sufficiently committed to their development, leading to frustration and perceived lack of guidance.

Mentor Strategy: Student needs vary, and mentors should be aware of their own capacity and communicate this when possible. It is strongly encouraged to maintain channels of communication to reassess levels of commitment. If possible, propose alternative ways to maintain regular contact, such as brief phone meetings or frequent email exchanges. Reinforce the commitment to the mentee's development by setting clear expectations and timelines for interactions.

Discovering a mismatch between mentor and mentee

Problem: A mismatch can occur due to conflicting personalities, differing goals, or other reasons, making the mentor-mentee relationship unproductive.

Mentor Strategy: Identify mismatches early and address them promptly. If a mismatch is evident, facilitate a transition to a more suitable mentor. If necessary, other parties (e.g. program directors, department chair) may assist in finding a better match, ensuring the mentee's needs and career goals are met.

Conclusion

The University of Cincinnati Graduate College is here to support faculty in their mentoring journeys. Please feel free to consult or direct students to the [Graduate College Resource Guide](#) for additional support or information. Faculty can also email the Grad College at gradconnect@ucmail.uc.edu with any questions/concerns regarding their mentoring experiences.

Mentorship Training Resources

[Center for Improvement of Mentorship Experiences in Research \(CIMER\)](#)

[The Science of Effective Mentoring in STEMM | National Academies](#)

References

- Johnson, W. Brad. "The intentional mentor: Strategies and guidelines for the practice of mentoring." *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2002, pp. 88–96, <https://doi.org/10.1037//0735-7028.33.1.88>.
- Lechuga, V.M. Faculty-graduate student mentoring relationships: mentors' perceived roles and responsibilities. *High Educ* 62, 757–771 (2011). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-011-9416-0>
- Rosenberg, Anna, and Richard G. Heimberg. "Ethical issues in mentoring doctoral students in clinical psychology." *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice*, vol. 16, no. 2, May 2009, pp. 181–190, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cbpra.2008.09.008>.
- Thomas, Kecia M., et al. "Mentoring minority graduate students: Issues and strategies for institutions, faculty, and students." *Equal Opportunities International*, vol. 26, no. 3, 3 Apr. 2007, pp. 178–192, <https://doi.org/10.1108/02610150710735471>.
- UW Institute for Clinical and Translational Research. (n.d.). Strategies to address mentoring challenges. <https://ictr.wisc.edu/mentoring/strategies-to-address-mentoring-challenges/>
- Varrce C. Mentoring: A professional obligation. *Creative Nursing*. 2002;8(3):4-9.
doi:10.1891/1078-4535.8.3.4
- Winston, R. B., Ender, S. C., & Miller, T. K. (1982). *Developmental Approaches to Academic Advising*. New Directions for Student Services. Jossey-Bass.
- Yob, Iris M. and Crawford, Linda, "Conceptual Framework for Mentoring Doctoral Students" (2012). Center for Faculty Excellence Publications. 2.
https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/cfe_pubs/2