

WILKES UNIVERSITY-ALLAN P. KIRBY CENTER FOR FREE ENTREPREISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Mentoring: A Guide

What a mentor does involves helping mentees, staff, faculty, alumni, affiliates of WILKES UNIVERSITY and the ALLAN P. KIRBY CENTER FOR FREE ENTREPREISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

- understand how their discipline has evolved as a knowledge enterprise
- recognize novel questions
- identify innovative ways of engaging undergraduate mentees through collaborative research projects
- see their discipline—its questions and methodologies—in relation to other fields
- grasp the impact their disciplines have on the world outside of academe
- assist them in pursuing the kind of impact they desire to have with a degree

Skills development consultant

The pressures for specialization in study can make mentees temporarily lose sight of the array of skills needed to succeed. As a skills consultant, your role is to emphasize the variety of skills, including but going beyond the research skills that effective professionals possess.

Oral and written communication skills: These include clearly expressing the results of one's study; translating field-specific knowledge for use in varied contexts, such as teaching or interacting with the public; and persuading others, such as funders, professional advisors, potential business partners, or customers, of the value of one's business model.

Team-oriented skills: Often, the most innovative learning occurs in teams that problem solve problems collaboratively. Your role is to foster collaborative problem-solving by helping mentees learn through group exercises and projects.

Leadership skills: Mentees often become intellectual leaders in a variety of settings. Effective mentors help mentees build their potential by inviting them to assume leadership roles throughout study, e.g., in seminars, student government, community outreach, disciplinary societies, and department or university committees. These activities help build people skills—listening to others, shaping ideas and expressing priorities—which are indispensable for advancement in any career.

Career consultant

The mentor's role as career consultant has taken on increased importance. Many mentees are choosing positions in a greater variety of educational settings and diverse sectors of the economy.

The mentor imparts a view of careers as an evolutionary process—one that requires planning, flexibility and adaptation to change. Informed of job market realities, an effective mentor finds ways to help mentees develop relationships with other potential mentors. You can find these individuals in other places in the University or among your graduate alumni. You can also find them in schools, community groups, nonprofits, corporations,

government agencies, or industrial laboratories. Wider relationships help mentees gain a realistic and informed view of their career choices and learn how to translate their degree into professional opportunities.

Part of your responsibility as a mentor is to help mentees cultivate multiple mentoring relationships inside and outside the UW. Multiple sources of expertise improve mentees' abilities to marshal the resources they need to meet the challenges of graduate education and careers. Have thoughtful discussions with your mentees and ask them what they need from you to navigate their educational experience, adapt to disciplinary cultures and become productive, fulfilled professionals and colleagues.

Develop your own vision of good mentoring

To develop your own vision for effective mentoring, reflect on your days as a student and answer with candor the following questions:

What kind of mentoring did I receive?

What did I find helpful and unhelpful about the mentoring I received?

How well would the mentoring I received apply to the mentee population today?

How well did my mentors help me progress developmentally through my program?

How do the people and challenges in my field today differ from when I was in school?

How well did my mentors prepare me for my career?

What kinds of mentoring would have been helpful to me?

The answers may help you to define the kind of mentor you want to be and identify the building blocks for developing productive relationships with graduate mentees.

Engage mentees in conversation

A simple "hello" makes a difference. Ask mentees how they are doing with coursework or projects.

Let mentees know they are welcome to talk with you during your office hours, if appropriate.

Talk to your mentees at least once a quarter. Reach out to those who seem remote to find out whether it is their cultural way of being respectful or if it is due to social and academic isolation.

Share coffee or meals with mentees away from the office, if you are able, to engage them in informal discussions without office distractions.

Provide constructive and supportive feedback

Provide mentees with forthright assessments of their work. Do not assume they know what you think about their work.

Provide timely feedback on mentees' work. A delay in responding can create insecurity and hinder their progress.

Be just as specific when you give praise as you are when you give criticism because mentees learn from both. Remind mentees that, with your high standards, you intend to help them improve.

Avoid assuming that mentees who fall behind in their work lack commitment. Talk with them to learn what is going on. They may be exhausted or unclear about what to do next, simply dislike a project or have difficulties with collaborators.

In a timely manner, address any problems that pose questions about a mentee, if a student, as to their ability to complete his or her degree. Putting issues aside may cause more damage later. Completing coursework and passing courses is of the highest priority in a mentee-mentor relationship.

Provide encouragement

Encourage mentees to discuss their ideas.

Encourage mentees to try new techniques and expand their skills.

Let mentees know that mistakes lead to better learning. Share a less-than-successful experience of your own and what it taught you. Reassure mentees of their skills and abilities to succeed.

Many experience anxiety about whether they belong in school.

Teach mentees how to break large tasks into smaller, more manageable ones to avoid becoming overwhelmed.

Foster networks and multiple mentors

Suggest others who can help mentees if there is a need you cannot meet. Wilkes University faculty, graduate mentees, alumni, department staff, retired faculty and faculty from other universities are rich resources.

Introduce mentees to faculty and other graduate mentees with complementary interests on campus and at conferences.

Help mentees connect their work with experts in the community (e.g., graduate alumni) who can provide helpful career perspectives.

Build a community of scholars by coordinating informal discussion groups, projects or occasional potluck meals among mentees who share academic interests.

Look out for mentees' interests

Let your mentees know up front, and in a variety of ways, that you want them to succeed.

Create opportunities for mentees to demonstrate their competencies. For instance, take them to meetings and conferences, or encourage them to make presentations to gain visibility.

Nominate your mentees for high-visibility internships/externships, fellowships, project opportunities when you feel they are sufficiently prepared.

Promote mentees' accomplishments.

Be an advocate for all mentees.

Treat mentees with respect

Minimize interruptions and distractions during meetings with mentees. A common concern among mentees is that mentors do not provide them their full attention while talking. Be aware of your body language. Avoid looking at your watch or e-mail while a mentee is talking.

Remember previous conversations with mentees. Some mentors keep notes on discussions (filing them separately from mentees' records) and review the notes prior to meetings.

Tell your mentees what you learn from them. Such disclosure helps mentees see themselves as potential colleagues.

Acknowledge the prior skills and valuable personal, professional, and educational experiences mentees bring to the relationship.

Provide a personal touch

Be open and approachable. Mentees may need to discuss certain academic and non-academic issues. Knowing they can come to you and that you will care is particularly helpful to shy mentees or those from backgrounds different from yours.

Help mentees find creative solutions to their challenges or problems.

Familiarize yourself with the University's resources so you can refer mentees to multiple avenues of assistance, such as the Small Business Development Center, Family Business Alliance, and the Institute for Public Policy.

Need for role models

All mentees benefit from role models they can admire. People usually identify role models based on shared outlook and connections to similar experiences. Because of the composition of mentors, mentees from historically underrepresented or marginalized groups and women can face greater challenges finding role models. If the composition of mentees is homogenous, help identify and recruit new members who represent diverse backgrounds.

Become familiar with people across the University and other organizations for opportunities as to who can help your mentees.

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