

Pay It Forward:

Guidance for Mentoring Junior Scholars

*Alicia Wilson-Ahlstrom, Nalini Ravindranath, Nicole Yohalem, and Vivian Tseng
The Forum for Youth Investment and William T. Grant Foundation*



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Mentoring and the William T. Grant Foundation

The William T. Grant Foundation supports research to improve the lives of youth. The long-term success of our work depends on the energy, talent, and success of junior scholars, and we view strong mentoring as key supports for them.

Since 1982, the Foundation has invested in the development of promising early-career researchers through the William T. Grant Scholars Program. Scholars propose an ambitious program of work that will expand their expertise and skills; and they rely on the support and guidance of strong mentors to help them succeed. In 2005, we began to provide these Scholars with supplemental awards to support them in becoming stronger mentors themselves. We are also focused on ensuring high-quality training and mentoring for researchers of color. Our goals are for Scholars to become stronger mentors and develop a better understanding of the career development issues facing their junior colleagues of color. We also hope to increase to a modest extent the number of strong, well-networked researchers of color doing work on the Foundation's research interests.

The Forum for Youth Investment has been a partner in our efforts to support Scholars in becoming effective mentors. The Forum is a nonprofit, nonpartisan "action tank" dedicated to helping communities and the nation make sure all young people are Ready by 21[®] – ready for college, work, and life.

This mentoring guide features knowledge gleaned from interviews with Scholars and their mentees, their progress reports to the Foundation, our mentoring workshops, and a review of selected literature.

We hope you find the insights useful for your own mentoring.



Pay It Forward:

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Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Building and Maintaining Mentoring Relationships	6
<i>Develop Explicit Agreements</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Create a Comprehensive Mentoring Plan</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Protect Mentoring Time</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Consider Mentoring in Group Settings</i>	<i>7</i>
Mentoring Across Difference	9
<i>Acknowledge Context</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Encourage and Broker Additional Mentoring Relationships</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Consider How Race and Identity Influence Career Decisions</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Develop Your Own Cultural Competency</i>	<i>12</i>
Supporting Career Development	13
<i>Broker Access</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Create a Career Development Plan</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Develop and Review a Skills Inventory</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Prepare Your Mentee to Assume the Role of Colleague</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Collaborate With Your Mentee</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Discuss Work-Life Balance</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Develop Effective Task Prioritization and Time Management</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Encourage Broad Thinking About Career Options</i>	<i>16</i>
Managing Conflict	18
<i>Anticipate Potential Conflicts</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Revisit Underlying Structures and Agreements</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Identify Solutions</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Seek Outside Help and Support</i>	<i>19</i>
Conclusion	20

Introduction

Having a good mentor early in a scholarly career can mean the difference between success and failure. It is striking that such an important activity in the training of new researchers has few established definitions of effective practice. Many who take on the responsibility of mentoring do so without a primer, drawing on informal resources and personal mentoring experiences. We hope this guide helps change that, by addressing many of the common questions and dilemmas mentors face and identifying specific strategies and resources for developing mentoring skills.

The guide addresses four themes: (1) building and maintaining mentoring relationships, (2) mentoring across difference, (3) supporting career development, and (4) managing conflict within mentoring relationships. While the experiences and reflections of individuals connected to the William T. Grant Foundation's Scholars Program are woven throughout the guide, the strategies and resources included here are relevant for any mentor or advisor, particularly those working in academic settings with graduate students and postdoctoral fellows.

The first theme, building and maintaining mentoring relationships, examines the foundations of a strong mentoring dyad. Early and ongoing communication is essential; a solid beginning supports the relationship and often sets the stage for collaboration after the mentee joins the professional ranks of the research community.

The second theme focuses on mentoring across difference, an important topic that is addressed too infrequently. This guide is only a starting point for acknowledging how and where social and interpersonal differences impact mentoring relationships and research careers. Many types of difference, including gender, sexuality, and social class, can play a role in mentoring relationships. In this document, we focus primarily on mentoring across racial and ethnic differences, but we hope some of the strategies and resources may be helpful for mentors and mentees dealing with other important differences.

Career development, the third theme, is one that may consume a substantial portion of time and energy in any effort to mentor an early-career scholar. Good mentoring can make a critical difference in shaping early career decisions. Several researchers who were mentored by William T. Grant Scholars credit that experience with positioning them to confidently explore a range of options and transition smoothly into their first professional appointments.

Lastly, managing conflict, the fourth theme, is critical to relationship-building. Because conflicts do arise between mentors and mentees, the best defense is to prepare for the possibility in a realistic and straightforward way. Most mentoring dyads survive bumps, big and small, with preparation and discussion about the potential for conflict and a willingness to re-examine communication.

Good mentoring involves ongoing skill development and personal and professional growth for mentors as well as mentees. It is also important to remember that mentoring benefits both members of a dyad. Developing competent junior colleagues that work with you as graduate students and postdocs is valuable to your own research career. We hope this guide will be useful as you hone your scholarship while actively contributing to the development of future scholars.

Building and Maintaining Mentoring Relationships

Good mentoring is not always easy to achieve. It requires work and commitment from both members of the dyad. Mentors and mentees we interviewed underscored the importance of establishing structures for the mentoring relationship. The basic commitment to the relationship already exists – each of you has a stake in developing a productive, mutually beneficial partnership. One of the first tasks is to turn that shared commitment into explicit, fully developed expectations related to meeting times, work plans, work products, and communication.

This section highlights how others have approached building and structuring solid mentoring relationships with their junior colleagues. We discuss strategies for setting expectations, protecting mentoring time, and structuring that time effectively.

Develop Explicit Agreements

One mentor we interviewed took a very intentional approach to setting relationship goals and priorities with her mentee. She devoted the first few meetings to establishing “norms” for the relationship, discussing expected work products and deliverables. Establishing an underlying structure reduced the likelihood of ill-defined or unproductive meetings. The transparency allowed this mentoring team to put most issues squarely on the table, minimizing misaligned assumptions and conflicts related to products, progress, or process. It also paved the way for greater flexibility later on in the relationship. It may be useful to discuss the following areas during your first few meetings:

- When and how often you will meet;
- Norms for communicating with each other, both in-person and via phone or email;
- Plans for how to give and receive feedback;
- Expectations related to work deliverables, including firm deadlines and timetables for completing work;
- Expectations about the quality of work products; and

Creating Mentoring Plans and Agreements

As mentors and mentees begin to establish their relationships, an early task may be to create a mentoring plan and make some agreements about how each individual will contribute to the relationship. Mentoring dyads can turn to a range of resources on graduate and faculty mentoring, including planning templates, toolkits, guides, and sample agreements. Many institutions have their own mentoring toolkits or guides. However, if your institution does not have an appropriate set of resources, the following list may help:

- ***How to Mentor Graduate Students: A Guide for Faculty***
This is a comprehensive introduction to graduate level mentoring, produced by the University of Michigan.
- ***Toolkit for Postdoctoral Scholars and Faculty Mentors***
This toolkit, created by UCLA to guide postdoctoral mentoring arrangements, includes a template for a written mentoring plan and a compact outlining mentor and mentee responsibilities.
- ***Sample Mentors' Expectation Letter***
This sample mentoring agreement outlining responsibilities, benefits, and roles for a postdoctoral appointment was developed at UC San Diego.
- ***William T. Grant Scholars Supplement Grants***
Each year, the William T. Grant Foundation awards supplemental grants to a select few of its Scholars grantees to support mentoring junior researchers of color. The funding announcement for these supplemental grants includes guidance for drafting mentoring plans to support students and postdoctoral fellows of color.

- When and how to revisit, clarify, and/or renegotiate expectations as the relationship progresses.

Create a Comprehensive Mentoring Plan

A mentoring plan serves as a compact between mentor and mentee and is a useful tool for guiding interactions. Mentoring dyads have found it particularly useful to revisit their plan periodically to discuss how the mentee is progressing and whether adjustments need to be made.

Though we recommend that dyads look into their own institutional resources first, numerous templates do exist for mentoring plans. In the sidebar on resources for Creating Mentoring Plans and Agreements (page 6), we provide links to a basic mentoring plan outline, a template outlining mentor expectations (example based on a postdoctoral appointment), and accompanying resources.

In your initial interactions, consider that your mentee may not have been formally mentored before (though they likely had an advisor) and that the mentoring they have received could differ considerably from your own experience. In that context, your mentee may or may not know what they want to get out of their mentoring experience or how to negotiate expectations. Discussing any past mentoring experiences with your mentee — including what worked and what didn't — may be useful for developing your joint expectations.

Protect Mentoring Time

Mentors and mentees we interviewed emphasized the importance of protecting regular meeting times. "My advice for future cohorts," one mentor offered, "would be for them to really protect their work time together. They should have a weekly meeting from the beginning and set clear expectations for each person."

One mentoring dyad used their weekly meetings as joint working sessions — part study hall, part creative collaboration. Throughout their mentoring

relationship, they set aside one day a week to get work done together. "The time really allowed us to get to know each other's work styles better, and we both benefitted from the kind of feedback that the working sessions allowed," the mentor explained. This arrangement allowed them to discuss work plans regularly and make consistent joint progress. It also provided a practical way to keep work commitments, adding positive pressure to make deadlines and move forward. This structured, protected time allowed the pair to work productively, strengthened their relationship, and facilitated a natural transition to a collegial relationship once the mentee accepted her first faculty appointment. Setting aside a full day for joint working sessions may not be feasible for every mentoring arrangement. However, the principles underlying this strategy — protected time and joint work — are important for every mentoring relationship.

Consider Mentoring in Group Settings

Finding ways to be a good mentor in the context of time constraints and heavy workloads presents serious challenges. While it will never replace one-on-one interactions, mentoring within a group context — a research lab, writing group, or seminar — is a strategy to consider as you balance your own career needs. In such group contexts, work toward cultivating peer mentoring relationships among students and postdoctoral fellows that result in mutual support, exchange of ideas, and help building new skills and expertise. Establishing a culture of collegiality and modeling collaborative behaviors can help shape the professional growth of junior colleagues.

One mentor discussed the advantages of group mentoring. "I used to show students my analyses, and then they'd go off on their own. Some would follow-up in individual sessions, but I realized that a lot of students would go off, hit hurdles in their analyses, and not discuss it individually. They wouldn't know what to do, not realizing I face the same hurdles. So I've used labs to have them observe

my process and talk it through. It's reduced anxiety and made one-on-one mentoring more effective when they do come in. It's opened my eyes to what students do and do not know. That makes meeting time more productive and provides a non-threatening way to make sure the bases are covered."

In another approach, one mentor devoted a portion of group meeting time with her advisees to discussing a common reading related to professional development goals (e.g., *The Compleat Academic*)¹.

¹ Darley, J. M., Zanna, M.P., & Roediger, H. L. III (Eds.) (2003). *The Compleat Academic: A Career Guide* (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Mentoring Across Difference

Given the dearth of people of color in high-level faculty positions, mentoring relationships with junior scholars of color are often cross-racial. It is useful to consider the ways race affects mentoring and career development in these cross-racial relationships. In same-race relationships, it also can be valuable to consider ways to better support junior colleagues of color. The academy can be a very isolating place for any early-career scholar and, due to their limited numbers, scholars of color may experience this isolation more acutely. You can work to mitigate this isolation by helping your mentee develop the professional skills and political savvy necessary to successfully navigate an academic career, while also considering ways to make your institution and field a more equitable place.

Race often has significant social and personal impact on researchers, and it is important to acknowledge this within mentoring relationships. For many of us who care about racial and ethnic diversity, it can be easy to assume that we already “know this stuff.” But it is useful for all of us to question what we think we know and be open to recognizing that we are sometimes wrong. Asking hard questions about your work with students and colleagues is not routinely rewarded in most institutions, but reflecting on these issues can be an extremely worthwhile investment in your own mentoring. The resources highlighted in the Mentoring Across Difference sidebar (page 10) focus on mentoring across difference and becoming an ally and resource for mentees of color.

Mentors can play a vital role in facilitating a more inclusive environment and connecting mentees to an institution’s academic culture. To effectively mentor across difference, mentors must understand the challenges mentees of color often face, help them navigate such challenges, and show them how to adapt the lessons learned to their professional (and sometimes personal) goals. While no two individuals think about racial identity the same way, it is likely that your mentee has thought about his or her racial identity in the context of academia. Mentees we interviewed have experienced each of the following scenarios:

Mentoring Early-Career Scholars

Mentoring is fundamental for ensuring that new scholars enter, progress with, and eventually make important contributions to research. Mentors’ ability to provide thoughtful and effective guidance is critical to scholars’ early development.

One comprehensive resource developed initially for medical researchers provides guidance applicable to those working in other disciplines.

- ***Making the Right Moves: A Practical Guide for Scientific Management for Postdocs and New Faculty***

This resource from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute discusses a range of considerations for researchers responsible for labs and research teams, and emphasizes the value of mentoring as a management tool. It also provides guidance on managing groups in a research setting.

- Mentees described wondering about whether they’d be the only person of color in a cohort and what kinds of experiences they would have as a person of color in their department. At their departmental visits, they experienced relief (or disappointment) at the racial composition of their cohort and/or the faculty.
- While balancing professional and personal pursuits is a challenge for every scholar, mentees often feel there are few models for scholars of color. Concerns related to their racial identities or experiences have been challenged or dismissed by faculty and other students.
- Treatment from a senior colleague was so hostile that a mentee approached a mentor about plans to initiate a discrimination lawsuit. The time spent dealing with those issues took significant time and attention away from their joint work.

Mentoring Across Difference

If you are mentoring across lines of difference, additional understanding and effort is required. It can be difficult for both mentor and mentee to fully appreciate how and when such differences matter, especially since they are not the central focus of your working relationship.

The resources listed here, which are useful for mentoring junior scholars of color, offer a starting point for thinking about difference in the context of your relationship.

- ***Cross-race Faculty Mentoring***
This 2005 article by Christine Stanley and Yvonna Lincoln appears in the journal *Change* (2005) and provides a concrete narrative about a cross-race faculty mentoring relationship, offering specific lessons.
- ***The Truth about Mentoring Minorities – Race Matters***
David Thomas' 2001 article in the *Harvard Business Review* has made its way onto several academic mentoring resource pages. The article outlines strategies for supporting mentees of color, but also discusses why career trajectories can stall or plateau before these scholars advance to the highest levels of the profession.

A deeper investigation into the experiences of scholars of color across the social science disciplines would likely reveal many more examples. Given these kinds of experiences, mentors and mentees suggest that some acknowledgment of race affirms a mentee's experience and can be critical to opening up a supportive and productive discussion of race.

You can start by discussing the very different *social* experience that your mentee may face as a person of color in your academic institution. Doing so can go

a long way toward connecting with them personally and building trust. What next? The answer depends, in part, on your own racial identity. Mentors of color are often assumed to “get it,” and may be sought out to share their own insights (sometimes on issues with which they have no direct experience). White mentors may have to approach the topic differently, acknowledging their openness to discussing race. Acknowledging how your own racial identity and experiences may shape the dynamics you develop with your mentee is also an important step in encouraging open communication and a productive working relationship.

Acknowledge Context

While your relationship with your mentee will be developed mainly on an interpersonal level, it is also impacted by institutional and cultural systems that influence behaviors, expectations, and privileges related to race. Recognizing that race matters means acknowledging those influences, challenging yourself to understand your own reactions to them, discussing the specific experiences of your mentee, and speaking up on issues that negatively affect your mentee.

One way to respect how issues and experiences of race may be different for your mentee than for most others in their cohort is to acknowledge the narrower band of acceptable behaviors allowed racial minorities. For example, a working style called “assertive” when exhibited by a senior academic might be labeled “angry” when adopted by a junior colleague of color. Don't assume all advice will be helpful, and consider qualifying advice with thoughts such as “this approach worked for me, but may not work the same for you.” This provides guidance without assuming that an approach is right for the mentee.

One white mentor dealt with issues of race in her work with an African American student, whom she saw was not approaching her for help partly because she did not want to affirm negative stereotypes. “This graduate student had a hard time showing her weaknesses, and she was struggling with writing skills. She thought I

was a great writer, and she didn't want me to see her work. So there was this avoidance process that I was slow to recognize because she was bright, personable, and always put such a good face forward. Race made it harder for me to talk initially to her, and harder for her to admit a problem." To address this, the mentor put more energy into building their relationship – trying to better understand the student and building trust. With that foundation, they were eventually able to address the writing challenges. The student gained essential writing skills and the mentor a valuable framework for navigating difference while addressing a common mentoring issue.

Encourage and Broker Additional Mentoring Relationships

One of the best investments of time junior scholars can make early in their careers is to establish several strong mentoring relationships. Having a range of mentors provides multiple perspectives and different skills and expertise. The networking and follow-through needed to establish multiple mentoring relationships can be taught to mentees. Sharing how you have successfully developed relationships with new mentors and what you gained can provide insight and help your mentee approach such relationships strategically. Additionally, when appropriate, you might broker one or more of these relationships with colleagues you think might work well with your mentee. You could also help your mentee recognize and make the most of the resources the new mentor has.

Consider How Race and Identity Influence Career Decisions

Early career decisions are often leaps of faith. Those leaps may feel even greater when race enters the equation. For some mentees, such considerations will be muted; for others, they will factor more prominently. As doctoral students, mentees may struggle with what research to pursue. If they conduct "applied" research or study topics considered outside the "mainstream," they may be concerned that their scholarship will be

marginalized. If your mentee's research focuses on their own ethnic or identity group, they could have similar concerns. At a different point in their career, they may doubt how their scholarship is being received, particularly if there is a scant history of people of color advancing in their department or field.

Wherever your mentee is in their professional development, normal doubts and concerns may intersect with his or her experiences of race. Helping your mentee assess their progress and work and make decisions based on that assessment can counteract those doubts. However, it is also important to validate such feelings and provide an opening for discussing departmental politics, the unwritten rules of your institution, and the skills your mentee needs to navigate them.

The job search is another major decision point in which race and other factors related to identity play a role. When considering various opportunities, your mentee may be wary of jobs in communities in which there are few people of color, or at institutions or in departments with a poor record of supporting diversity. In other cases, cultural values prioritizing family proximity may conflict with the norms of academia that dictate that young scholars should be flexible about the location of academic appointments. Given the realities of the job market, it is important for junior scholars to gain skills and experiences (e.g., developing outside networks, collaborating with colleagues on publications) that will help them navigate less supportive environments, including those with scant histories of hiring or retaining faculty of color. You can be instrumental in helping your mentee sort through these issues, reflect on which environments might be more or less supportive, and identify tools they will need to launch their career in a range of settings.

One mentee decided to limit her job search to her home state given the importance of family proximity. She was worried that her mentor would interpret this decision as "lack of ambition" and was conflicted about how to approach the mentor for advice. The

mentor broached the topic first and was able to help the mentee launch an effective in-state job search. Communicating that you are interested in discussing these kinds of considerations — perhaps by sharing a story of making your own non-traditional career choice or struggling with similar concerns — can help your mentee navigate a non-traditional path or deal with personal constraints as a serious scholar.

Develop Your Own Cultural Competency

Mentors and mentees should work toward a level of comfort that allows both to candidly share their insights and challenges related to difference. Though, as the mentor, you should also seek out other opportunities to become a stronger ally to junior colleagues of color. If your mentee is going through a set of challenging experiences, they may not be in a position to help you figure out how to best mentor them through those experiences. More importantly, it may be helpful for your mentee to know that they are not alone in thinking about and raising issues that affect them personally. The resources provided on page 10 may be useful, but there may also be relevant forums and workshops available at or near your institution. Maintaining and developing relationships in which a variety of culturally connected perspectives are heard deepens your capacity to be an ally.

While this guide focuses on the role of race in mentoring relationships, it is critically important to keep in mind that other issues, including differences related to gender, social class, and sexuality, are also relevant in mentoring relationships. What is perhaps most important to keep in mind as you navigate this terrain is the value of acknowledging how your experiences differ from those of your mentee. Helping your mentee develop the skills and savvy to navigate the culture and norms of the academic context is crucial, and doing that effectively means understanding and acknowledging how they experience that context and how their experience differs from yours.

Supporting Career Development

It takes a range of skills, developed over time, to effectively guide someone toward a successful career path. Mentors can serve as coach, career counselor, champion, confidante, and critic. Most of us have natural gifts in at least one of these areas, but need mentoring ourselves to master them all.

It is important to provide guidance and support to your mentees as they grow in their careers. Several resources — including journal articles and tool kits developed by universities — outline the essential role of mentors. One resource cited by several dyads interviewed for this guide is an article by David Sackett on the determinants of academic success for mentees. Sackett discusses the value of four things: resources, opportunities, advice, and protection.²

- **Resources:** Mentors should make sure mentees have access to basic resources, which include productivity enhancing equipment and technology (e.g., computer software and applications, office equipment), funding to attend meetings and conferences, and other forms of support that facilitate strong research.
- **Opportunities:** Mentors should seek opportunities for their mentee to participate in professional activities and contribute to the advancement of knowledge in their field.
- **Advice:** Mentors should offer frequent opportunities and a supportive environment for junior colleagues to thoroughly process choices, think through methodological challenges, and weigh the pros and cons of specific courses of action and possible collaborations.
- **Protection:** Mentors should provide a reasonable buffer from the demands placed on new scholars and insulate them from any negative behaviors by other academics. They should help mentees decipher and decode hidden rules and provide effective guidance for navigating the politics of the scholarly community.

2. Sackett, D. (2001). On the determinants of academic success. *Clinical Investigative Medicine*, 24(2), 94–100.

Supporting Early Career Development

Mentors play an important role in supporting the early career development of their mentees. There are multiple dimensions to consider, and the following resources address many of these.

- **On the Determinants of Academic Success**
David Sackett's 2001 article in *Clinical Investigative Medicine* gives a comprehensive overview of the supports mentors can provide to the early-career scholars they are mentoring.
- **Strategies for Success**
This 2010 online resource from the University of Washington's Career Center contains a range of career planning resources for graduate students, including their Graduate School Mentor Memo.
- **The Graduate School Mentor Memo: Collaborating and Co-Authoring**
The University of Washington developed a series of Graduate School Memos, which address a range of career development issues. For example, this 2009 memo focuses on how to structure collaborative projects and provides a quick guide to co-managing the workload and responsibilities of junior colleagues.
- **Graduate Skills Assessment**
This 2003 skills assessment from Michigan State University helps mentees assess their skills, strengths, and weaknesses, and can be used for structuring discussions around skill development and continuing mentoring needs.
- **Information on Nonacademic Careers**
Addressing the growing ranks of PhDs seeking non-academic research careers, this 2001 issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* lists sites providing information on pursuing non-academic career paths.

Beginning with this list, Sackett delineates the qualities of a good mentor and the range of roles that mentors play. In this section, we discuss specific strategies that can help you fulfill these roles, particularly in the context of supporting the career development of your junior colleagues.

Broker Access

Early career development decisions can have a long-term impact on success. Providing information about how to approach career development, generally — and the first job, specifically — can make a difference in your mentee’s career trajectory. You can share your own career story, particularly decision points and instances of accomplishment and failure. Hearing a narrative that highlights the ups and downs of the career development process will allay common concerns of young scholars. Finally, share the tacit rules of being a successful scholar. Demystify the culture of the work environment and provide specific information on topics such as how to approach a scholar whose work interests you and navigating departmental politics.

Create a Career Development Plan

Even first year doctoral students can — and should — begin to articulate their career goals, as this will provide a plan for time spent as a student. Throughout their graduate school tenure, doctoral students should make an intentional plan to prepare themselves for the job market by participating in professional opportunities. Mentors and mentees we talked with recommend an “early and often” approach to career planning — prepare for the next career stage early and update documents (such as your CV) often. For example, one mentor recommends having students attend job talks by other colleagues well before they begin their job search.

At each stage in their training, the mentor can use the mentee’s career plan as a gateway for discussing and analyzing the skills necessary to pursue certain paths. Worksheets and guides for creating career plans are available from many sources. Some are

referenced here, but you should also connect mentees to resources within their own institutions.

Information should flow both ways between mentor and mentee. Just as it is important for mentors to offer information on career development, mentees should be encouraged to initiate dialogue about how their professional goals are developing, changing, and being enriched over time. It is common for emerging scholars’ career plans to shift as they become further acculturated into academia.

Develop and Review a Skills Inventory

At the start of the mentoring relationship, consider conducting a skills inventory with your mentee. The assessment should include their current skills (including both technical and “soft” skills such as collaboration and conflict resolution), strengths, gaps, and areas for growth. It should be based on long-term career goals, but should be revisited on a regular basis, especially if the mentee’s career interests shift. The inventory can address skills needed for careers outside of academia as well. This process will also help mentors identify mentoring needs and target resources to achieve short- and long-term career development goals.

Prepare Your Mentee to Assume the Role of Colleague

Over time, your support should help your mentee assume the eventual relationship they will have with you — that of a peer. The nuances of this shift are not always apparent to students. Demystifying the process by exposing behind-the-scenes dynamics can help.

One mentee, now a faculty member, credited his ability to pursue independent research and manage a research project to his mentor’s support. He described the “tremendous head start” he had when it came to the varied tasks and responsibilities expected of new faculty. His mentor was particularly thoughtful about taking him to proposal writing meetings, review panels, and other decision-making forums, which gave him an

insider's view of processes most graduate students don't see. Several mentees expressed the value of the mentoring experience in shifting their view of themselves from students to independent researchers.

Collaborate With Your Mentee

Collaborative work between mentors and mentees can take on many forms, from writing the technical sections of a report to serving as a conference panelist for a jointly written paper. Prior to collaborating on a project, mentor and mentee should discuss the parameters of the collaboration, including division of labor, opportunities for growth and new skills acquisition for both parties, and ways to maximize the learning experience for the mentee.

Collaborating on a project is a chance to deepen working relationships and an opportunity for mentees to develop new skills and expertise. Sackett suggests that mentors examine everything that comes across their desk for its collaborative potential and appropriateness for their mentee. He further advises that mentors continually help mentees build new skills and prepare for higher levels of contribution. For example, Sackett recommends that as soon as competence allows, mentors share authorship with junior colleagues.

With the appropriate training in place, mentors can support mentees in generating and testing new ideas and increasing their research productivity and overall professional skills. Collaborative projects also serve as an opportunity to develop a variety of other skills including organization of time, project management, and writing.

Your mentee's ability to learn (with your guidance) from projects and assignments will be enhanced if you think through your roles together. Crucial conversations in the process include delineating who will author which parts of an article; processes for editing drafts, managing data, and resolving intellectual differences; and discussing how credit will be given. Assigning the work of submitting journal articles, corresponding

Addressing Work-Life Balance

Balancing life and work will be a career-long pursuit for your mentee. You can provide guidance to help them think about this and develop strategies.

In recent years, a number of articles and resources on this issue have been published. University campuses have also increased their response to work-life balance issues. A few are listed below.

- ***Balancing Life and Work: Three Perspectives from Tenured Faculty at the University of Virginia***

This 2005 guide aimed at junior faculty introduces strategies for structuring time to maximize professional opportunities while maintaining a healthy balance between work and life.

- ***New Faculty Success***

This blog, written by Kerry Anne Rockquomore, an African American sociologist from the University of Illinois at Chicago, provides weekly advice to advanced doctoral students and new faculty on managing the transition from graduate student to professor. Focused on the challenges faced by scholars from underrepresented groups, the blog provides practical guidance on managing the myriad responsibilities of new faculty while balancing personal commitments.

with editors, handling revisions and resubmissions, and reviewing page proofs can also be useful.

Discuss Work-Life Balance

As new members of academia, mentees often struggle with balancing work obligations with their personal lives. And, as you know, the need to effectively

manage this balance will only increase. Even if they had a career prior to entering graduate school, academia is very different from other professions. It is not structured around a traditional work day, and your time and responsibilities are not managed by someone else.

You should acknowledge the difficulty of achieving balance and offer your mentee concrete strategies for doing so. Ideally, these conversations will help your mentee understand the connections between the variety of topics that are often presented as discrete issues in career services workshops — time management, effective use of technology, parenting while pursuing an academic career, learning when to accept and decline requests, planning courses, etc. Your candid insights and reflections on attaining a work/life balance will be invaluable to your mentee. Modeling how you manage all of these issues, and offering up your missteps and lessons learned, will add a critical perspective that is often left out of professional conversations.

If your mentee seems to be having unusual struggles in balancing their scholarly activities with their personal life, approach them as early as possible. Until they have achieved effective solutions — better childcare, financial assistance, or counseling, for example — they are not going to be able to take full advantage of their time with you. One of the great assets of academic environments is the exposure scholars and students have to a variety of ideas and models. Encouraging your mentee to seek out a range of resources and individuals for help may mitigate challenges that could hamper their productivity.

Develop Effective Task Prioritization and Time Management

Mentees are in the process of developing work habits that can help them become productive, successful scholars. To minimize mistakes, mentors should help mentees develop work plans that include big picture goals and the necessary interim steps.

By working with mentees to set short-term goals, you can support the development of their project management skills and create opportunities for them to help manage the types of projects they will likely encounter in a productive career. Introduce mentees to your strategies for creating boundaries and routines that help you manage your own responsibilities. Sackett describes a priority setting activity that every new scholar should be introduced to as they learn how to manage a growing set of tasks and responsibilities. The process includes listing the following:

- List 1: Things I'm doing that I want to *quit*.
- List 1a: Things I've just been asked to do that I don't want to do.
- List 2: Things I'm not doing that I want to *start*.
- List 3: Things I want to *keep doing*.
- List 4: How I plan to shorten Lists 1 and 1a and lengthen List 2 over the next 6 months.

Periodically reviewing such a simple list with your mentee — and sharing yours with them — may reveal more about being a successful scholar than any number of professional workshops could.

Encourage Broad Thinking About Career Options

While research careers can develop outside of academia — in think tanks, nonprofit organizations, or the public sector — it is useful for mentors who are working with junior scholars to keep in mind that many students enter PhD programs with a very narrow understanding of their career possibilities.

Even when mentees have a good grasp of the options, they may feel internal or external pressure to pursue the traditional tenure-track academic career. “My family already didn't fully understand all that getting the PhD entailed. When I didn't take a traditional professor position at a university they had heard of, they really didn't get it,” one mentee explained. If a

mentee does express interest in learning more about research careers in non-academic settings, be open to the discussion. This can be difficult, as there may be a sense, on both sides, that a lot has been invested, and anything other than an academic career would be a disappointment. As the primary career consultant for your mentee, you should offer guidance in sorting through these issues.

Some young academics of color contemplate career options outside of academia or even outside of research because they are isolated or unsupported. It is important to ensure that mentees are pursuing a career that is truly a good fit for their skills, interests, and strengths, rather than opting out of academia because they lack adequate support. If a mentee expresses an interest in pursuing a non-academic research career, helping them connect with other potential models and mentors, particularly if you are unfamiliar with non-academic careers, is important. A wider network will broaden their understanding of their options and help them translate their research skills into other settings.

Occasionally, the thought that a career outside of academia or even outside of research might be a better fit comes not from the mentee, but rather from the mentor. You may sense your mentee is not well-suited for the competitive environment of the academy, or that they may be happier in a direct service rather than a predominantly research role. If you are trying to determine if your instincts match your mentee's unspoken thoughts, broach the conversation using trust, skill, and tact. However the discussion develops, mentors need to be equipped with strategies to help mentees think broadly about their career goals. While it is not your role to make decisions for your mentee, you can share information about the realities and nature of the work and environment and help mentees connect that information to their individual situations. Being frank about the competitiveness of many academic environments or particular barriers mentees might face is crucial.

To ensure students receive wide-ranging advice on careers, help them pursue a healthy balance

of professional development opportunities. To do this, you may have to increase your awareness of opportunities outside of the academy. One mentor supported her mentee in pursuing a United Nations fellowship — a position that became permanent after the fellowship ended.

The resources of the university — career services, job databases, etc. — should be reviewed in the normal course of discussion with your mentee. Additionally, online resources, such as *Re-envisioning the PhD*, may suit the needs of candidates interested in career opportunities outside of academia.³

³ *Re-envisioning the PhD* is available [online](#).

Managing Conflict

Almost all mentoring relationships experience conflict from time to time. Ideally, these situations are buffeted by trust, open communication, and strategies and structures that support the goals of the relationship. However, issues can occasionally jolt the dyad out of a productive space. This section describes strategies that can help get things back on track if the relationship or specific agreements break down.

Conflicts, major and minor, occur more frequently than mentors and mentees might imagine. Specific challenges such as missed deadlines or meetings are often symptoms of broader problems. Conflicts may stem from relational issues or mismatched expectations, but whatever their roots, they can all hamper the quality and productivity of the relationship. In some cases, dyads have successfully addressed problems by going back to basics — revisiting original agreements and trying out new strategies for working together. When dyads we interviewed have been successful at reversing a difficult dynamic, the solution has always involved reconsidering what and how mentor and mentee were communicating with each other.

Anticipate Potential Conflicts

Most serious conflicts reveal themselves in minor ways before they become full-blown problems. Attending to such cues and taking the time to think through and talk about a concern before it escalates will help preserve a productive working relationship. Mentors and mentees who have experienced challenges can often identify missed opportunities to broach the issue which could have led to a quicker or more productive resolution.

One potential source of conflict stems from the need for many mentors to balance the roles of mentor and supervisor. Supervision and mentoring are not mutually exclusive. Good supervision requires some level of mentoring, yet it typically focuses on deliverables first, with professional growth a secondary goal. The priority in mentoring starts with the overall development of the mentee, and specific tasks serve as tools for assessing and developing skills. When the mentor wears both hats, managing this subtle but

Communicating through Conflict

Building an effective working relationship takes time and effort. Occasionally, it may require a difficult conversation about interpersonal or professional concerns. Seeking the advice of other mentors can be invaluable.

Many useful resources advocate similar approaches to communicating about difficult issues. Here is a basic approach discussed in the book *Crucial Conversations*.

- **Examine yourself first:** Ask what you really want to happen differently and think about the role you might have played to contribute to the problem. Assume competence and commitment on the part of your mentee.
- **Confront with safety:** Make the interaction as safe as possible by starting with facts rather than opinions, describing the gap between what was expected and what was observed. Then ask a genuine question about the mentee's viewpoint—listen for motivation and ability.
- **Agree on a plan and follow-up:** Outline a plan for who does what by when, and follow-up, noting potential barriers. Stay flexible while working through the solutions.

An expanded, independent summary of these ideas can be found [online](#). The book expands on the outline above: Patterson, K., Grenny, J., McMillan, R., & Switzler, A. (2002). *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

significant difference can be critical to a productive relationship. Past experience suggests that thoughtful, upfront discussion is crucial for ensuring that supervisory and mentoring roles are compatible.

Balancing supervision and mentoring requires that mentors provide space for counsel, information, and support while also establishing appropriate professional boundaries and maintaining high work expectations. This may require establishing ground rules for how feedback is given and received, and checking in frequently to tie project goals to the larger professional development needs of the mentee. A good start might be a conversation that lays out a “roadmap” for the work ahead. Discussion of external obligations and institutional or departmental requirements will help define the parameters of the work you are supervising. If others also supervise the mentee, you can serve as a confidante to help your mentee effectively interpret and incorporate feedback they receive from your colleagues.

Revisit Underlying Structures and Agreements

In thinking about the potential for conflicts, the “ounce of prevention” adage is useful. What underlying structures and agreements are guiding the mentoring relationship? Conflicts between dyads typically improved when both individuals reconsidered when and how they were communicating. Keeping the prevention adage in mind, mentors and mentees that experience conflict might first return to basics: Have we been following our agreements? Do we share the same expectations? What have we done to deepen our understanding of each other’s working and communication styles?

While revisiting these basics may not get at the entirety of problem, it has helped reset several relationships that hit a difficult patch. Your overall goal is to mutually assess what is going well and what is not, including an understanding of how expectations play into the underlying conflict. Making an effort to review institutional guidelines and resources for mentoring arrangements may also help to troubleshoot a strained relationship.

Identify Solutions

Once you have identified the problem, you and your mentee must work together on solutions. Working together requires tackling the issues directly and increasing understanding and communication on both sides. One potential source of conflict involves mentee underperformance. In this type of situation, it is easy for mentors to simultaneously express frustration and fail to clearly communicate what the mentee should be doing differently. The mentee may have a sense of their own underperformance, but lack the tools to change it. Their failure to reach out for help could be due to pride, a misapplied sense of independence, coping with stereotype threat, or other personal barriers.

Both mentor and mentee have an obligation and opportunity to examine behavior changes that could help resolve the problem, but doing so requires a high level of mutual trust. This can be difficult, particularly if part of the conflict is interpersonal. Resources focused on changing an unproductive or negative dynamic between mentor and mentee offer strikingly similar advice, encouraging active reflection from both individuals. In the sidebar on page 18, we provide a brief summary of the basics for getting a rocky mentoring relationship back on track.

Seek Outside Help and Support

If you find yourself in a difficult patch in your mentoring relationship, it may be helpful to reach out to others (outside of the mentoring dyad) for support and advice, and for your mentee to do the same. Mentoring can be hard and often solitary work, but there are models for handling difficult situations. Colleagues and peers in other institutions can often provide invaluable support and broader perspectives. You should also encourage your mentee to seek out support, such as other faculty, their peers, student support groups, and campus counseling services. If the conflict is very contentious, you may need to enlist another faculty member to help connect the mentee to resources that can appropriately assist them in resolving the issue.

Conclusion

Mentoring can be both tremendously rewarding and frustrating. There are few things as gratifying as helping a bright, talented young scholar flourish. In the long-term, the investment of time in mentoring can also allow you to be more productive and to find your work more fulfilling. Like any relationship, mentoring can also bring its share of frustrations. Over the course of your career, you may face different mentoring challenges. Successful scholars are often sought out by potential mentees even while they seek to advance their own careers. The need to balance the various mentoring needs of junior colleagues and the multiple roles you play (e.g., supervisor, advisor) may add complexity to your mentoring relationships.

Moments of frustration are often good catalysts for growth as a mentor. Seek out supports similar to those you have encouraged for your mentee. Just as your mentee has likely developed a career plan and discussed their goals with you, try to articulate your own goals and motivations as a mentor and get regular feedback. Asking your mentees to discuss how well you provide resources, opportunities, advice, and protection can be invaluable in terms of honing your skills. Faculty peers can also provide valuable feedback and support as you continue to grow as a mentor. Lastly, one of the best ways to build your mentoring skills is to continue to seek out competent mentors of your own.

Creating the time and space to reflect on your mentoring may feel like a luxury, but it is critically important. We hope this guide helps you reflect on and continuously improve your mentoring skills. Your investment will likely benefit not only your mentees but their future mentees as well.