

Better Mentorship, Better Student Experience: An Introduction to Mentorship¹

Debra M. Barry, Heather Nesbitt, and Heather McAuslane²

Introduction

The *Better Mentorship, Better Student Experience* series was designed for both university faculty and graduate students who are currently engaged in, or who want to enter or better engage in, mentorship experiences. However, this series could also serve as a tool for those who facilitate mentorship activities at any level both inside and outside of academia. This series serves as a resource guide for approaching mentoring through building rapport and stronger relationships to provide a more positive experience for both faculty and students. A mentor is defined as an individual who has skills and knowledge in an area and shares this information and experience with a mentee. A mentee is an individual who is looking to expand their skill set and knowledge by working with a mentor. This initial article in the *Better Mentorship, Better Student Experience* series provides faculty and students with a basic understanding of the potential benefits of mentoring and creating a support system. This publication also provides an overview of the *Better Mentorship, Better Student Experience* series in Appendix A.

Role of the Mentor/Mentee

Think about someone in your life who has made an impact as a mentor. Certain key characteristics likely come to

mind, such as *caring, enthusiastic, or knowledgeable.*

Additional descriptors of a good mentor include patient, honest, respectful, good at listening, and accessible (Hund et al., 2019). This relationship may be formal or informal, and it may develop naturally or be guided by a mentorship program. One common theme is that the mentoring relationship requires active participation from the mentor and the mentee/protégé. There is a renewed interest in the empowerment of individuals through mentorship that is centered on personal aspirations and individually centered mentoring (Montgomery, 2017). Academic mentor programs have been formally established for new faculty, graduate students, and even undergraduate students, all with the goal of increasing mentee satisfaction, feelings of competence, and retention in their roles.

Benefits

The mentoring relationship involves the sharing of expertise and experiences and ideally is mutually beneficial. This exchange can help with academic, professional, and personal development of both the mentee and the mentor. Mentored individuals have been found to have higher performance evaluations, higher salaries, and faster progress in their careers than their non-mentored counterparts (Barnett, 2011; Crips, 2010). Mentorship increases productivity and helps in the development of work-life balance (Behling

1. This document is AEC799, a publication of the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date May 2024. Visit the EDIS website at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> for the currently supported version of this publication. © 2024 UF/IFAS. This publication is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).
2. Debra M. Barry, assistant professor, Department of Agricultural Education and Communication, UF/IFAS Gulf Coast Research and Education Center; Heather Nesbitt, graduate assistant, agricultural education, Department of Agricultural Education and Communication; and Heather McAuslane, professor, Entomology and Nematology Department, and associate dean, UF/IFAS College of Agricultural and Life Sciences; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

et al., 2017; EAB, 2019). Mentors can foster connections to resources, provide feedback on academic progress and research, encourage goal setting, and more (Hadjoannou, 2007; Montgomery, 2017). Mentoring has also been found to support graduate student socialization and satisfaction with their program (Montgomery, 2017).

Developing Well-Being in Mentoring

Well-being can be described in many terms, but it comes down to how well a person balances their resources with the challenges that they face (Dodge et al., 2012). It involves psychological, social, and physical aspects. Mentees often seek mentoring because they want to advance their careers, build networks, or develop a specific skill set. Other benefits of a mentor-mentee relationship are increased confidence, personal growth, and self-awareness. These additional benefits impact mentors in the same way (Roberts, 2021).

Mentor relationships can help in professional goal attainment and contribute to overall well-being. The goals and objectives of the mentee should be shared and agreed upon at the outset of the relationship. Consistent communication is critical. Creating a culture of open sharing and positive reinforcement can help to form bonds and build trust. The focus should be on overall growth, including check-ins on experiences and the ability to meet objectives. It is also important to reassess goals and adjust as needed. The relationship should stay professional, but sharing experiences and having a general check-in on overall well-being can be beneficial (Roberts, 2021).

How to Make Mentoring Better

Universities and other organizations should facilitate and support mentoring relationships as well as the development of faculty members' and students' mentoring skills. Several key steps to help elevate mentorship and develop a culture of mentoring are listed below (EAB, 2019; National Academy of Sciences, 2019).

1. Define mentoring and the mentoring relationship. What is good mentoring? How is it defined? What are expectations, best practices, and defining, distinct characteristics amongst specific disciplines?
2. Train faculty and students in mentoring skills through a wide array of evidence-based training options that meet the needs of mentors and mentees.

3. Provide funding that can help support mentor development and establishment of a high-quality mentoring network for students (e.g., training, conferences).
4. Support multiple mentoring structures to best fit the individual needs of the mentees (e.g., mentoring constellations, internal and external mentors).
5. Prioritize mentoring on campuses. Provide pathways to develop faculty mentoring skills and support faculty members in their roles.
6. Recognize that a strong faculty member does not inherently make a strong mentor. Help faculty to learn how to balance their own career expectations and ways they can connect to high-quality mentoring.
7. Recognize and reward good mentoring by providing tangible rewards for faculty who excel.
8. Establish and use feedback and assessment processes to support and improve mentoring. Recognize that student experiences are directly linked to mentoring experiences.

References

- Barnett, E. A. (2011). Validation experiences and persistence among community college students. *The Review of Higher Education*, 34(2), 193–230. <https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2010.0019>
- Behling, L. L., Vandermaas-Peeler, M., Miller, P. C., & Johnson, W. B. (2017). 7 key ways to make student mentoring matter. <https://insidehighered.com/views/2017/10/27/advice-how-most-effectively-mentor-students-essay>
- Crisp, G. (2009). Conceptualization and initial validation of the College Student Mentoring Scale (CSMS). *Journal of College Student Development*, 50, 177–194. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.0.0061>
- EAB. (2019). Why mentors are vital to student success—and 7 ways to make mentoring more valuable. <https://eab.com/insights/daily-briefing/student-success/why-mentors-are-vital-to-student-success-and-7-ways-to-make-mentoring-more-valuable/>
- Hadjoannou, X., Shelton, N. R., Fu, D., & Dhanarattiganon, J. (2007). The road to a doctoral degree: Co-travelers through a perilous passage. *College Student Journal*, 41(1), 160–177. <http://lp.hscl.ufl.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,uid&db=aph&AN=24628946&site=eds-live>

Hund, A. K., Churchill, A. C., Faist, A. M., Havrilla, C. A., Love Stowell, S. M., McCreery, H. F., Ng, J., Pinzone, C. A., & Scordato, E. S. C. (2018). Transforming mentorship in STEM by training scientists to be better leaders. *Ecology and Evolution*, 8, 9962–9974. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ece3.4527>

Kutsyuruba, B. (2022). *The Positive Impact of Mentoring on Wellbeing*. University of Florida Virtual Workshop.

Montgomery, B. L. (2017). Mapping a mentoring roadmap and developing a supportive network for strategic career advancement. *SAGE Open*, 7(2), 1–13. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2158244017710288>

National Academy of Sciences. (2019). The Science of Effective Mentoring in STEM. Online guide version 1.0. <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/resource/25568/interactive/tools-and-resources.html#section1>

Roberts, D. (2021). Mentoring & wellbeing. *Art of Mentoring*. <https://artofmentoring.net/mentoring-wellbeing/>

Appendix A: Better Mentorship, Better Student Experience Series

Better Mentorship, Better Student Experience: An Introduction to Mentorship

This publication is an overview that provides both faculty and graduate students with a basic understanding of the benefits of mentoring and creating a mutually beneficial support system.

Better Mentorship, Better Student Experience: Tips for Mentors

This publication serves as a resource for mentors who are seeking tips and support as they work with their mentees in academia and beyond.

Better Mentorship, Better Student Experience: Tips for Mentees

This publication is designed to help mentees, particularly those in academia, to utilize their mentoring relationships to their full potential.