

Mentoring across oceans: Experiences, benefits and pitfalls

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Mentoring is a **collaborative learning relationship** that proceeds through purposeful stages over time and has the primary goal of helping mentees acquire the essential competencies needed for success in their chosen career.

But how do you do that when there are distances in time, space and culture?

[Pfund C. et al. \(2016\) AIDS and Behavior, Suppl 2: 238-48; McGee B.M. et al. \(2016\). AIDS and Behavior, Suppl 2:231-237](#)

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Vignette: Remote mentoring

- A global organization asks for mentors to support emerging young women researchers in their first publication
- You are introduced by email and asked to provide support. The data are already collected
- You ask for a first draft and set up a call with a timezone of 9 hours
- You need to understand her background, experience writing, development goals
- Over time you recognize technical areas where support and mentoring is needed
- Over a year, she developed and publishes her paper (right before she has her baby-double delivery!)
- You continue mentoring to help her on her next steps in public health

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Vignette: Institution, individual

- You work with an institution in Africa to develop capacity in patient centered outcome research including in developing faculty as mentors
- You recognize that there are great capacity in some areas of research, but that models of mentoring are more hierarchical. Also the pathway for academic success is challenging due to competing demands for junior faculty and senior faculty (administrative, teaching, clinic)
- You are also mentoring one of the new students
- And then COVID-19 pandemic happens.....(more later)

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New approaches to mentorship



- The traditional mentor-mentee dyad is being replaced by mentorship teams with mentors playing different roles
- This expands the resources available to a mentee but also requires careful planning and communication
- Mentorship can also be shorter or life-long depending on the goals of the mentee and success (or challenge) of the mentoring relationship
- The focus also goes beyond research mentoring to include other areas

- Aligning Expectations
- Addressing Equity and Inclusion
- Articulating Your Mentoring Philosophy and Plan
- Assessing Understanding
- Cultivating Ethical Behavior
- Enhancing Work-Life Integration
- Fostering Independence
- Maintaining Effective Communication
- Promoting Mentee Research Self-Efficacy
- Promoting Professional Development

<https://nrmnet.net/research-mentor-training/>

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What does research mentoring require from the mentor?

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5 key areas or attributes of effective research mentoring

- Research/scholarship
- Interpersonal
- Psychosocial and career
- Culturally responsive/diversity
- Sponsorship

Blust, C., Byars-Winston, A., Branchaw, J., Hurtado, S., and Eagan, K., "Defining Attributes and Measurable Learning Objectives for Research Mentoring Relationships," *AACSB Observer*, 2016, 20.

5 Key Areas of Research Mentoring

1. Research:

Areas for effective mentoring relationships	Measurable learning objective: <i>Mentors can</i>	Measurable learning objective: <i>Mentees can</i>
Developing disciplinary research skills	Teach mentees to design and carry out a research project; Provide opportunities to observe techniques	Develop the skills to design and carry out a research project
Developing technical skills	Provide instruction in core disciplinary research techniques	Commit to learning and gaining proficiency in disciplinary research techniques
Accurately assessing understanding of disciplinary knowledge and skills	Assess mentee learning of disciplinary knowledge and skills and provide feedback and guidance to address gaps	Self-assess learning of disciplinary knowledge and skills and respond to mentor feedback

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5 Key Areas of Research Mentoring

2. Interpersonal:

Attributes:	<i>Mentors can</i>	<i>Mentees can</i>
Aligning mentor and mentee expectations	Establish and communicate mutual expectations for the mentoring relationship	Establish and communicate mutual expectations for the mentoring relationship
Listening actively	Give their undivided attention and listen to both their mentees' words and the emotion behind the words	Give their undivided attention and listen to their mentors
Provide feedback and support professional communication	Provide input and constructive feedback into mentee professional interactions and communication	Provide opportunity for input, reflect and integrate feedback
Building trusting and honest relationships	Offer honest and open feedback on how the relationship is progressing	Offer honest and open feedback on how the relationship is progressing

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5 Key Areas of Research Mentoring

3. Psychosocial and career:

Areas:	<i>Mentors can</i>	<i>Mentees can</i>
Providing motivation and facilitating coping efficacy	Scaffold research work in ways that yield periodic success; celebrate the successes and offer support after failures	Acknowledge that research frequently involves setbacks and develop strategies to deal with them
Developing mentee career self-efficacy	Foster and affirm mentees' career aspirations, help define and refine goals and milestones	Seek opportunities to explore and prepare for a Career, articulate goals and pathway
Developing a sense of belonging	Create a welcoming and inclusive research environment, especially at transition points	Actively engage and establish relationships with research team members

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5 Key Areas of Research Mentoring

4. Culturally responsive/diversity:

Areas:	<i>Mentors can</i>	<i>Mentees can</i>
Advancing equity and inclusion	Employ strategies for recognizing and addressing issues of diversity, equity and inclusion	Identify strategies for recognizing and addressing issues of diversity, equity and inclusion
Being culturally responsive	Effectively negotiate dialogue across diverse dimensions	Effectively negotiate dialogue across diverse dimensions
Reducing the impact of bias	Consider your unconscious biases and regularly check that they are not negatively impacting their own or their research team's behavior	Recognize your unconscious bias, regularly check that it is not negatively impacting their behavior, and address it when they observe it

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Lechner and Minter-Gibson, 2018; Good Standard PBL Team, www.bsl.org

5 Key Areas of Research Mentoring

5. Sponsorship:

Areas:	<i>Mentors can</i>	<i>Mentees can</i>
Fostering independence	Continuously assess mentees' development and design increasingly challenging tasks and projects to advance mentees' independence	Push themselves to increase responsibility for and ownership of their research, while asking for support and guidance as needed
Promoting professional development	Identify opportunities for mentee professional development and support their engagement in them	Identify and engage in opportunities to develop the professional skills needed to become a successful scientist
Establishing and fostering mentee professional networks	Introduce and facilitate relationship building between their network of colleagues and their mentees	Actively identify and seek ways to meet and establish relationships with potential future colleagues in the discipline
Actively advocating	Promote mentees' work; provide professional support	Report successful outcomes to mentor; Seek out and accept advocacy

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Mentoring relationships are complex because we expect one or more different roles

- **Mentor:** passing on advice, knowledge, experience,
- **Supervisor:** overseeing tasks, research progress, medium term and day to day goals
- **Coach:** supporting and enabling learning and development
- **Sponsor:** proactively advocating for success

Acad Med. 2016 August; 91(8): 1128–1135. doi:10.1097/ACM.0000000000001026.
Also see "Diversity and Inclusion at SLAC" (<https://inclusion.slac.stanford.edu/>) ; and [Montgomery, B. L., Dodson, J. F., & Johnson, S. M. \(2014\). Guiding the Way: Mentoring Graduate Students and Junior Faculty for Sustainable Academic Careers. SAGE Open.](#)

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This may be complicated in remote mentoring

- Virtual relationships
 - Without initial face-to-face
 - Disruption (COVID-19)
 - Planned blended in person and distance
- Cultural and system differences
- Different incentives at organizations and pathways to independent researcher
- Different backgrounds and understandings of research, research goals
- Different stages of career in mentees
- Mentor team
 - Preferred but need to ensure communication
- What else?

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What about remote mentoring during COVID-19 and beyond

- **Remote mentoring** : developmental relationships at a distance that can be sustained using a combination of synchronous technology (ex. phone, videoconferencing) and asynchronous tools (ex. Email) to support and grow the mentoring relationship.
- **Step 1: Reassess**
 - Ask question, What was working well? Here are there changes needed (independent of the change to remote)
- **Step 2: Realign**
 - Collaboratively identify and define to articulate shared goals for continuing areas of the mentoring relationship that are going well and ways to improve challenging areas.
 - How can this be done in remote mentoring and current context?.
- **Step 3: Reimagine**
 - Together develop a plan you agree on to achieve these goals in the remote work together.
 - Include regular check-in meetings to revisit the plan and adapt as needed
 - Goal is for this plan to beyond the current crisis and be resilient to new challenges
- Also remember what additional psychosocial support may be needed during this (and other) times of stress

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What about cultural differences (a different ocean to cross?)

- Not easy (even when you are on the same side of the ocean)
- Need to bring in lessons emerging and best practices for mentoring across differences
 - Gender, culture, race as examples
 - Adding in language, nationality and identity
- Need to also address issues of implicit bias, differences in mentor expectations, communication styles and protocols
- Know this is needed and bring in needed expertise from both sides of the ocean

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What about building and learning from institutions in lower resourced settings

- Need to ensure equity and equal voice in design of the program
- What are the system changes needed to incentivize and enable mentoring and mentored work
 - Understand processes, policies and regulations
- Strong emphasis understand how to mentor across differences
- Opportunities for bi-directional learning
- What tools can be adapted and adopted
 - Individual development plans, mentor/mentee agreements, training resources
- Embed evaluation-what is going well, what needs to be adapted

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Question to consider: can you identify an example of success for one box and challenge for one box in your roles in your mentoring practices and experience? How would this have differed in remote setting?

	Research/ academic	Interpersonal	Psychosocial and Career planning	Culturally responsive Diversity	Sponsorship
Mentor					
Supervisor					
Coach					
Sponsor/ Advocate					

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Many thanks