

A Quick Guide to Mentoring Student Workers

IN THE OFFICE OF PERSONAL & CAREER DEVELOPMENT



**MENTORING
RESOURCE CENTER**

WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY

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Serving as a student worker is one of those student experiences that often is purely transactional in nature: an office has a body of work that needs to get done, and a student has a need for financial support. While each of these needs is important, both for the office and the individual, with a little **thought** and **intentional guidance** *we can put supports and structures into place to make that experience one that is transformational for the student, helping him (her) to think more deeply about academic, personal, and professional goals and how this experience informs his achievement of those goals*, while still meeting the work needs of the office.

This Quick Guide to Mentoring Student Workers offers up some tips and strategies for supporting the student's experience while he is working in our office. While we are not asking you to serve as a formal mentor to your student, the strategies that effective mentors use can be employed as part of any relationship. As such, we do well to think about the definition of effective mentoring and how we can serve in these role with our student workers:

Mentoring is a **purposeful** and **personal relationship** in which a more experienced person (mentor) provides guidance, feedback, and wisdom to facilitate the growth and development of a less experienced person (mentee).

Think about:

- *How can I keep the student's growth and development in front of me, even as he is doing the work?*
- *How can I serve as a facilitator of that growth and development?*
- *How can I be intentional in the relationship that I develop with the student?*

Set Clear Expectations

Effective relationships thrive on clear expectations. At the beginning of the year, sit down with the student worker to talk about expectations for the office, the work, and your relationship. If you have one, share a job description. Talk about how the work the student will be doing fits into the overall goals of the office. Some potential topics for conversation:

- *Expected work attire*
- *How the student's work will be evaluated*
- *How the student should interact with other members of the office, other students, visitors*
- *Office culture and goals*
- *How often you will meet with the student*
- *Expectations around confidentiality*

On a lesser scale, be sure to discuss expectations at the beginning of each new project, so that the student knows exactly what he is supposed to do to be successful. **Don't make assumptions that he knows how to be a professional, or that he understands the work that we do.**

Get to Know the Student as a Person

Mentoring relationships are just that – relationships – and like any other relationship they require trust and a certain level of rapport. It takes time to build those things, and your relationship with the student will develop over the course of the year. One simple way to start to develop the relationship is by **caring about who the student is as a person**. Where is he from and how did he get to Wake? What have been his best and most challenging experiences so far? What is he studying and why? What extracurricular activities does he participate in? What prior experience has he had with our office? These are all great questions to engage the student in conversation, to start to get to know him as an individual, and to demonstrate sincere interest in him, just as you would with any other member of our office.

Additionally, you can start to build trust and set the stage for open communication by **sharing a bit about your own story**, as well. Where are you from and how did you get to Wake? How did you make the decision to work in higher education? What are the best and most challenging parts of your work? How do you spend your free time? Again, these are great conversation topics that encourage mutual sharing and will help to develop rapport.

Set Goals

Once you get to know the student a little better, encourage him to **set 2-3 developmental goals** for the semester. These can connect to the work that he is doing in our office, or can sit outside of it. Some topics for goals might include

- *Exploring values, interests, and strengths to gain clarity on self and direction*
- *Researching industries and developing a career plan*
- *Learning new skills, such as communication, presentation, project management, or leadership skills*
- *Academic projects*

Most likely, the student will not have had experience writing effective goal statements and creating an action plan to achieve them. Work with him to use the SMART goal model to write effective goal statements that are

Specific and Action-Oriented
Measurable
Achievable
Realistic
Time-bound

Encourage him to use the resources provided by our office as he sets personal and professional goals; not only is that a benefit to him for working in our office, it also will help him to develop deep knowledge of the services and resources that we offer.

Build in Intentional Conversations

In a formal mentoring relationship we would encourage mentoring partners to meet at least twice a month for a structured mentoring conversation. Since this is not a formal mentoring relationship, there is no expectation that those structured conversations will happen. That being said, **any effective relationship requires ongoing and regular communication**. Look for opportunities to have intentional conversations with the student about the tasks that he is working on, about his experience in the office and at Wake Forest, and about his progress towards his goals. Focus on asking open-ended questions (questions that cannot be answered with a simple “yes” or “no”) that inspire deeper reflection. Help him to connect his experiences to his goals and look for ways that you can connect him to resources, opportunities, and other people.

Provide Feedback

One of the gifts of mentoring is that it provides a safe space for individuals to do the hard work of personal development. *One important way that we can help to facilitate that growth is by providing supportive, objective feedback.* Great feedback, whether it is positive or constructive in nature, is

Immediate – deliver the feedback as close to the experience as possible

Objective – focus on concrete, objective actions and behaviors

Impactful – clearly states the impact of the action or behavior on others

For example: Yesterday when you were thirty minutes late to work it prevented us from completing the project we were working on.

Or: This morning when you volunteered to cover the front desk it really demonstrated team work and a positive attitude.

You don't need to provide feedback every day. But make sure that you are building in regular opportunities to talk with the student about what he is doing well, and where he can grow and develop. You can also encourage him to seek out feedback from others, which is a skill that he will take with him beyond Wake Forest.

Celebrate Successes

Finally, and importantly, be sure to celebrate successes along the way. This means celebrating the work that we do, and also celebrating who the student is as a person. *A mentoring relationship is all about being personally invested in another person.* We all want to know that what we do makes a difference and matters to other people. Make sure that your student knows that as well.