

A FACULTY GUIDE TO

MENTORING
STUDENT PROJECTS



Introduction

College students reach significant developmental and learning milestones during their college career, particularly in the classroom. In a classroom setting, students cultivate skills related to analytical reasoning, critical thinking, oral and written communication, creativity, ethical decision-making, navigating cultural differences, and more. Projects are great experiences for students to gain tangible skills and often result in positive outcomes related to higher education aspirations. Mentorship by a faculty member has tremendous influence in facilitating that growth. Effective faculty mentorship identifies linkages between curricular and co-curricular/extracurricular experiences, creates opportunities for practical application of learning outcomes, and facilitates student learning and development.

This guide has been created as a support for faculty who intentionally engage as formal mentors of student projects. “Projects,” in this guide, refers to student research or other scholarly activities, internships, and student experiences.

Mentoring for Student Development

The transitions between high school, college, and post-graduation are largely transitions from adolescence to adulthood. Developmental psychologist Jeffrey Arnett calls this period of transition emerging adulthood, “a time in life when many different directions remain possible, when little about the future has been decided for certain, when the scope of independent exploration of life’s possibilities is greater for most people than it will be at any other period of the life course (Arnett, 2000).”

When thinking about how to mentor these emerging adults, it is useful to frame that work within principles of human development, as outlined by Newton and Ender (2010):

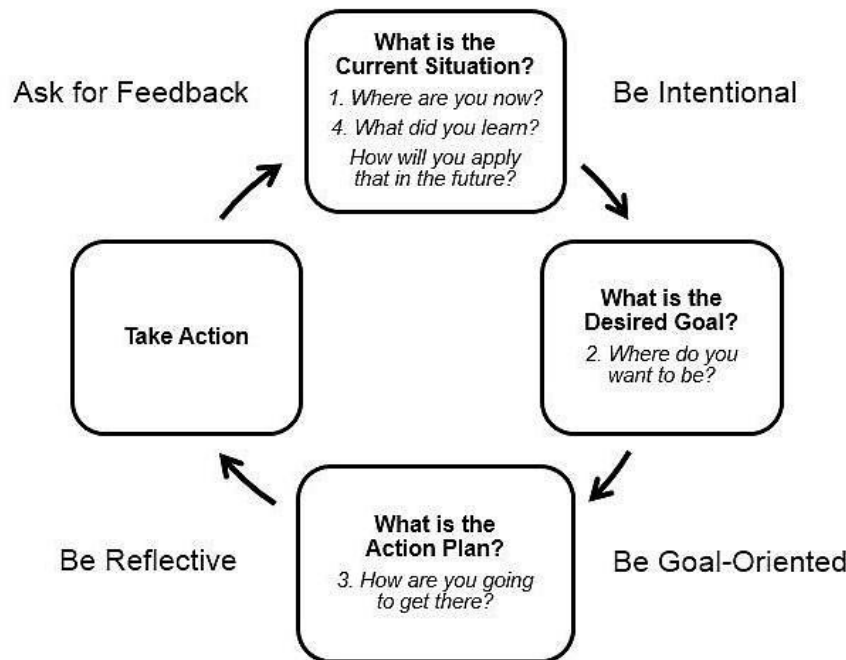
1. Development occurs because of pressure from three sources: outside or situational circumstance, biological changes, and personal values and aspirations. It’s important to remember that each student may grapple with a different set of issues and behave on a different level of readiness to handle these pressures than their peers.
2. Students mature by making gradual changes over time and by facing and overcoming challenges, including identity formation, selecting a career path, forming relationships, finding meaning and purpose, choosing values, and managing conflict. For some students this will be a process of dealing with small changes over time, eventually allowing them to deal with the world around them more easily. For others, the process of adjustment will be more challenging.
3. Maturation is a cumulative process; one must master simple tasks before they can master the more complicated ones. By helping students learn how to solve small problems, you are teaching them the skills that they will need to solve the larger ones down the road.
4. Individuals develop at different rates and each person has a unique way of adapting to personal challenges. Don’t assume that someone else has attained the same capability, experience, and confidence in an area that you may have had at the same point in life.
5. In each phase of maturation, an individual must acquire certain skills, knowledge or behaviors that correspond with that phase to move on to the next one. In other words, in the transition from adolescence to adulthood, students cannot skip over the emerging

adulthood phase.

Effective Mentoring Conversations

At Wake Forest, we define mentoring as: 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).

Mentoring is a developmental relationship fostered by intentional conversations. An effective mentoring conversation is based on the core principle of experiential learning, which is learning through reflection on doing. The mentoring conversation model is built upon the four-phase experiential learning cycle developed by Dr. David A. Kolb.



Mentoring Student Projects

In this section, we describe how to apply the mentoring conversation model in your mentoring relationships with students.

Define Expectations:

At the beginning of the relationship, talk to the student about the decision-making process that led them to this project by asking questions to encourage reflection:

- Why have you chosen to pursue this project?
- How does this project fit with your academic or career goals?
- What do you hope to accomplish or learn?
- What do you anticipate that could be challenging?
- What would success look like to you?
- What do you expect from me? What can I expect from you?

This is a good time to talk about relationship expectations as well. Effective mentoring relationships are clearly structured with defined expectations. Clarifying these expectations at the

beginning of the relationship reduces the chance of future misunderstandings. Determine how often you will meet, who will set up the meetings, and what you will work on together.

You may find our Relationship Expectations Worksheet (located on the Resources page at the end of this guide) helpful to facilitate this conversation. It's important to note that effective mentoring conversations are two-way conversations; both parties must be willing to share and to disclose alike to build trust in the relationship.

Once you have clarified expectations, work with your student mentee to help them write concrete goals for the project. Depending on the length of your mentoring relationship, the student should have goals that are a mixture of short, medium, and long-term. These are the items you will work on together during the mentoring relationship and will form the basis of your mentoring conversations. For example, a student working on a research project may have as a goal, "Create a draft article to submit for publication by the end of the semester." You may find our Goal-Setting Worksheet (located on the Resources page at the end of this guide) helpful for this process.

Another resource that is helpful in defining expectations and goals is our Mentoring Relationship Agreement (located on the Resources page at the end of this guide). This is a tool to ensure that both mentor and mentee understand their agreements and sets some check-in dates for the relationship. It formalizes both the relationship and the work.

Provide Feedback:

During the relationship, the mentor's role is to push the mentee to take action towards achieving their stated goals. Effective mentors provide feedback based on the wisdom of their personal experiences to support their mentees' growth and development. Throughout the duration of the student's project, the Mentoring Conversation Model works on a micro scale within each mentoring conversation:

- What has happened since we last met (where are you now)? What did you learn? What will you do with this new knowledge?
- What would you like to accomplish before we meet next (where do you want to be)?
- What steps do you plan to take to accomplish those goals (how are you going to get there)? What resources will you need? What barriers or challenges can you anticipate?

As mentor and mentee work through these questions and discuss progress towards the mentee's goals, the mentor can provide feedback on the actions, strategies, and proposed next steps to support the mentee's decision-making and learning.

Reflect on Lessons Learned:

At the end of the student's project, the mentor should push them to reflect on greater lessons learned and application for the future:

- Were you successful in meeting your goals? Why or why not?
- What challenges did you encounter? How did you overcome these?
- What helped you to be successful? How can you use those same strategies again in the future?
- What did you learn about leadership/research/writing/public speaking/working in teams?
- If you were to do this project again in the future, what would you do differently?
- How will you describe this project and what you learned/accomplished to a future employer/graduate school?

This is another opportunity for giving feedback, making connections between the actions the mentee took and their learning, and deepening the relationship between mentor and mentee.

Conclusion

Finally, it's important to remember that effective mentoring creates learning opportunities for both partners. Mentoring relationships encourage students to learn how to build effective personal and professional relationships, set goals for personal growth and learning, ask for and receive feedback, and reflect on experiences and lessons learned for future application. Mentors, at the same time, learn how to build and support effective relationships, provide objective feedback and guidance based on personal experience, facilitate reflective thinking, and take ownership of one's own personal growth and learning.

Resources

Arnett, J.J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist*, 55(5), 469-480; p. 469.

Goal-Setting Worksheet, Mentoring Resource Center, Wake Forest University,
<http://mentoring.opcd.wfu.edu/files/2015/01/Mentoring-Goals-Worksheet.docx>

Mentee Self-Evaluation, Mentoring Resource Center, Wake Forest University,
https://docs.google.com/a/wfu.edu/forms/d/1YINZVafsmYr4GRs3_wj0SvC6Ta_ITcOy2cexaNreE-k/viewform

Mentoring Relationship Agreement, Mentoring Resource Center, Wake Forest University,
<http://mentoring.opcd.wfu.edu/files/2015/01/Mentoring-Agreement-Form.docx>

Mentoring Learning Outcomes, Mentoring Resource Center, Wake Forest University,
<http://mentoring.opcd.wfu.edu/mentoring-learning-outcomes/>

Mentor Self-Evaluation, Mentoring Resource Center, Wake Forest University,
<https://docs.google.com/a/wfu.edu/forms/d/1Xwzb8-iEIWh9Bg5Q5kkZTuGqWsXvBdGMxkMsbbGgAsY/viewform>

Newton, F.B., & Ender, S.C. (2010). *Students helping students: A guide for peer educators on college campuses*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, Inc.

Relationship Expectations Worksheet, Mentoring Resource Center, Wake Forest University,
<http://mentoring.opcd.wfu.edu/files/2015/01/Defining-Relationship-Expectations-Worksheet.docx>