

Mentoring Students

Office of Undergraduate Research
University of West Florida

What is mentoring?

Mentoring involves a one-to-one relationship in which the mentor encourages and guides the student's personal growth and academic development, while providing support and assistance as the student works through the challenges of undergraduate life.

M. Malachowski, CUR Quarterly, Dec. 1996

Stages of Mentoring

1- Initiation stage: relationship driven primarily by the mentor

- Early stages of project planning, training in specific techniques

2- Cultivation stage: greater, more equal interaction

- More explicit goal setting
- Advice offered and mentee encouraged to take ownership of project

Stages of Mentoring

3- Transformation stage: mentee begins to develop greater autonomy, requires less guidance

4- Separation stage: mentee works more independently

Benefits of Mentoring

- Developing confidence in their field of study
- Developing autonomy through risk taking
- Developing purpose, clarifies interests, educational and career options

More than just advising

The mentor role takes on many dimensions:

“It is as if two separate but related conversations are occurring concurrently; one pertaining to the research project itself and one about the student’s life and personal development.”

Problems Often Encountered

- If students don't receive sufficient guidance from their mentor, they can become overwhelmed and may be reluctant to ask for help.
- Negative interactions with other students in the research group

Items to Consider

- Cover the basics
 - How is your research project/lab organized?
 - What are the specific duties?
- Provide background reading so they can become familiar with the project
 - Explain how to do a library search to find relevant manuscripts
 - Explain databases, what is a journal article?
 - Explain how to create a bibliography?

Items to Consider

- Define student roles- Peer mentoring
- Make your expectations clear (research contract)
 - What preparation does the student have/have they completed research before?
 - How many semesters will the project be carried out?
 - How much time can they devote per week to the project?
- Discuss ethical issues they may encounter (fabrication of data, who owns the research, intellectual property)
- Give them a realistic perspective- research has its ups and downs
- Talk to them outside of research (classes, personal goals, career goals, etc.)

Research Contract

- Outline parts of the project
 - literature review or proposal
 - methodology to be established
 - When does the experiment begin?
 - timeline for project (milestone deadlines)
 - when is a draft summary or bibliography due to the mentor?
 - When is a final summary due?

Research Contract

- Include a response date from the faculty in the timeline
 - Date in which a corrected report is due back to the student
- Both student and mentor sign the contract
- Perhaps include the statement *“If I do not meet these deadlines this will affect my research course grade and may delay my graduation date.”*
- Faculty have the right to terminate the research contract and assign a failing grade if the student does not complete the work.