



Optimizing Inclusive and Culturally Responsive Mentoring Practices

NMC-Bridge Symposium

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Additional Resources:

- [Mentoring Self Reflection Document](#)
- [Mentoring Compacts/Contracts Examples – UW–Madison](#)
- [Mentoring Alignment Toolkit](#)
- [IDP Templates for Early-Career Investigators](#)
- [Resource guide and selected citations](#)

Click here for [Presentation Slides \(March 2025\)](#)

Workshop Description

Inclusive mentorship is a critical aspect of both personal and professional advancement in academics, government, and business, yet this skill is often learned and perfected only through trial and error. To address this need, this seminar provides an intellectual framework to accelerate the acquisition of mentoring insights to optimize culturally responsive mentorship practices. Specifically, stakeholders will engage with evidence-based approaches to broaden participation of culturally diverse groups in the various sectors of the US workforce, with particular emphasis on science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and medical (STEMM) fields. The curriculum focuses on topics directly related to the training experience of mentees from culturally diverse backgrounds and highlights for mentors the specific ways that their own cultural attitudes and beliefs can have an impact on mentees' training experiences, such as how the mentor evaluates or gives feedback to a mentee. Overall, participants will gain confidence in working with mentees from diverse backgrounds, add new strategies to their mentoring toolbox, and gain access to available resources to support implementation of inclusive and culturally responsive mentorship practices in their professional careers and within their organizations.

Learning Objectives:

In this workshop, participants will:

1. Increase their knowledge and skills of evidence-based research mentoring competencies
2. Reflect upon and identify characteristics of effective communication to improve communication with diverse mentees.
3. Design, align and clearly communicate expectations for the mentoring relationship
4. Increase understanding of and concrete strategies to address equity and inclusion and their influence on mentor-mentee interactions

Definition of Mentorship

Mentorship is a professional, working alliance in which individuals work together over time to support the personal and professional growth, development, and success of the relational partners through the provision of career and psychosocial support.

(from the [National Academies Report "The Science of Effective Mentorship in STEMM"](#))

Principal Facilitator Biography

Kelly A. Diggs, PhD

CEO, Kelly A Diggs Consulting, LLC and Science on a Dime



Dr. Kelly A Diggs is the founder and CEO of Kelly A. Diggs Consulting, LLC, a Virginia SWAM-certified black-owned and woman-owned micro-business dedicated to broadening representation, access, and belonging within the STEMM workforce through evidence-based mentorship and leadership development, justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) training, institutional consulting and strategic planning, and science outreach.

She is also a Senior Principal Facilitator and Consultant with the NIH-National Research Mentoring Network (NRMN) and the Center for the Improvement of Mentored Experiences in Research (CIMER). Since 2014, she has worked with over 100 colleges, universities, non-profit organizations, federal agencies, medical institutes, and even those in the private sector to support culture shifts

in work environments and to navigate conversations about culture, inclusivity, accessibility, and education for research scientists, executive leadership, students, and the general public. Her curricular expertise includes the NIH-funded mentorship education series, *Entering Mentoring*, *Facilitator Training for Entering Mentoring*, and *Culturally Aware Mentoring (CAM)*.

Dr. Diggs earned her BS in Biology from Alabama State University (2005) and her PhD in Biology and Biomedical Sciences from Washington University in St. Louis (2010), where she was the recipient of the NIH-Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Award, Chancellor's Graduate Fellowship, Edward Bouchet Graduate Honor Society, and a National Cancer Institute Postdoctoral Supplement. Dr. Diggs currently resides in the metro DC area with her two children, Matthew and Miranda. In her spare time, she loves to travel, attend concerts, and complete home improvement projects.

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Maintaining Effective Communication

Introduction

Good communication is a key element of any relationship and a mentoring relationship is no exception. As research mentors, it is not enough to say that we know good communication when we see it. Rather, it is critical that mentors reflect upon and identify characteristics of effective communication and take time to practice communication skills in the session and with their mentees.

Learning Objectives

Mentors will have the knowledge and skills to:

1. Provide constructive feedback
2. Communicate effectively across diverse dimensions including various backgrounds, disciplines, generations, ethnicities, positions of power, etc.
3. Identify different communication styles
4. Engage in active listening
5. Use multiple strategies for improving communication (in person, at a distance, across multiple mentors, and within proper personal boundaries)

SESSION EXAMPLE: “In Over His Head” (ASTRO)¹

Tom arrives as a Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) student, excited by the new experiences in front of him. After talking with him, Tom's mentor, Alice, learns that he is a junior at a small college where there are two physics faculty, one of whom knows a bit of astronomy. He has not had any astronomy or astrophysics courses, although he helped set up a new undergraduate observatory on the campus. He has had no experience with scientific computing. Tom is enthusiastic about the numerical simulation project that he has been given. He is attentive during the first weeks as he receives a lot of preparatory information covering a wide array of subjects. His first steps in actually doing the project are slow and a bit tentative, which Alice chalks up to a steep learning curve. He puts in full days and asks a lot of questions, albeit rather elementary ones.

But by the fifth week, Alice begins to wonder if Tom may be in over his head. He isn't progressing with either computing or astrophysics as fast as she had expected. He has become quiet at team meetings now that the conversations have shifted toward ongoing research, and when questions are directed to him about his research Tom answers curtly and without much content. He doesn't talk with the other REU students about his work, especially an REU student in the same research team who is making great progress. Alice is concerned that the summer may be turning into a negative experience for Tom. But when she asks Tom how things are going, Tom says everything “is fine.” He still puts in many hours each day, although Alice is not sure what he is doing.

Alice wonders what to do now, if anything.

Guiding Questions for Discussion:

1. What are the main themes raised in this case study?
2. What could have been done to avoid this situation? What should the mentor do now?
3. What should the mentee do now?
4. How can you make sure your expectations take into account a mentee's individual learning style, background, and abilities?

¹ Robert, S., Asquith, P. (2010). *Astronomy and Astrophysics Research Seminar*. New York, NY: W.H. Freeman & Company.

CASE SCENARIO: “What Did I Do Wrong?” (MULTI)²

I’ve been mentoring students in my discipline for several decades, the majority of whom have gone on to very successful research careers. But there was a group of students who didn’t work out. For example, I had an undergraduate student in my lab who didn’t seem very bright and I doubted that he would make it as a scientist. I encouraged him to move on. The next time I saw him, he was receiving an award for outstanding undergraduate research that he did in another lab. I was surprised. The next time I encountered him was when I opened a top-notch journal and saw a paper with him as first author. I was impressed. Next I heard, he had received his PhD and was considered to be a hot prospect on the job market.

A couple of years later, I had a graduate student who was incredibly bright and a wonderful person, but wasn’t getting anything done. I had tried all of my mentoring tricks, and then borrowed some methods from others. In a fit of frustration, I encouraged the student to take a break from the lab and think about what to do next. While she was taking her break, she received an offer to complete her PhD in another lab. She did, published a number of highly regarded papers, landed a great postdoc, and is now a well-funded faculty member at a major research university.

These experiences have made me realize the power of the “match.” The student, the lab, and the advisor have to be well matched, and all of it has to come together at the right time in the student’s life. I can’t be a good advisor to all students, and where I fail, someone else may succeed. It reminds me to be humble about mentoring, not to judge students, and never predict what they can’t do. Happily, they will surprise you!”

Guiding Questions for Discussion:

1. What are the main themes raised in this case study?
2. How do you establish and communicate your expectations to your mentee when you feel your mentoring relationship isn’t working out?
3. How can mentors proactively work to minimize “bad matches”?

² Robert, S., Asquith, P. (2010). *Multidisciplinary Research Seminar*. New York, NY: W.H. Freeman & Company.

Activity: Active Listening

Role	Step 1: Share/Listen (2 min)	Step 2: Discuss (3 min)	Step 3: Debrief (5 min)
Speaker	Share a current mentoring relationship challenge.	Develop a plan to resolve the situation.	Listen to feedback from observer, ask questions, provide reflections on experience.
Listener	Practice active listening skills.	Ask clarifying questions and help the speaker develop a plan.	Listen to feedback from observer, ask questions, provide reflections on experience.
Observer	Observe and note tone, body language, facial expression, etc.	Observe and note tone, body language, facial expression, etc.	Report on observations. Did the listener actually understand the problem the speaker described?

Additional Resources:

- [Communication Styles Inventory](#)
- [Strategies to improve Interpersonal Communication](#)

Aligning Expectations

Introduction

One critical element of an effective mentor-mentee relationship is a shared understanding of what each person expects from that relationship. Problems between mentors and mentees often arise from misunderstandings about expectations. Importantly, expectations change over time so frequent reflection and clear communication is needed to maintain a collaborative relationship.

Learning Objectives

Mentors will have the knowledge and skills to:

1. Effectively establish mutually beneficial expectations for the mentoring relationship
2. Clearly communicate expectations for the mentoring relationship
3. Align mentee and mentor expectations
4. Consider how personal and professional differences may influence expectations, including differences across disciplines when working in multidisciplinary teams

Checklist: Common Expectations for Mentors³

Instructions: Below is a list of functional expectations for mentors. Which are your most fulfilling roles as a mentor? Which are your most challenging? (choose up to 3 for each). With your mentee, discuss your expectations and how they might impact your mentoring relationship.

1. Role modeling of appropriate faculty member attitudes, values and behaviors, such as:

- ☐ How to develop and maintain a professional network
- ☐ How to negotiate a difficult conversation with a colleague
- ☐ How to respond to a critical review of an article

2. Direct teaching of academic competencies and norms, including:

- ☐ Academic values and the role these values have in maintaining the academic enterprise
- ☐ Alternative perspectives
- ☐ Unwritten "rules of the game" in the department, discipline, school and university
- ☐ History, traditions, governance, and leaders of the department, discipline, school, and university
- ☐ Management of external funds, academic misconduct, and conflict of interest

3. Direct teaching of research competencies, including:

- ☐ Reviewing and synthesizing the literature
- ☐ Refining a research question
- ☐ Identifying funding sources for research
- ☐ Preparing human subjects approval requests
- ☐ Developing a research design
- ☐ Preparing a data collection strategy
- ☐ Managing data sets
- ☐ Analyzing data and interpreting results
- ☐ Selecting journals for results dissemination

4. Offering the mentee a collaborative role in research by:

- ☐ Analyzing data
- ☐ Recruiting subjects
- ☐ Co-authoring articles and grants
- ☐ Identifying supplemental projects

5. Providing advice for:

- ☐ Strategies for handling difficult work situations
- ☐ The merits of serving on particular committees or review panels
- ☐ Where to send study data
- ☐ Finding and securing resources
- ☐ The pros and cons of different academic appointments

³ Adapted from: Bland, C.J., Taylor, A.L., Shollen, S. L., Weber-Main, AM, Mulcahy, P.A. (2009). Faculty Success Through Mentoring: A guide for mentors, mentees, and leaders. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. pp. 81-84.

- ☐ Pacing work towards promotion
- ☐ Suggestions for balancing "work and life"

6. Reviewing work and career progress by:

- ☐ Critiquing drafts of grant proposals and research papers and presentations for national meetings
- ☐ Reviewing goals, plans and annual performance review and promotion packets

7. Advocating for the mentee's success by:

- ☐ Protecting research time
- ☐ Giving exposure and visibility by providing the junior faculty member with assignments that increase visibility to organizational decision makers and exposure to future opportunities
- ☐ Reducing unnecessary risks that might threaten the mentee's reputation
- ☐ Showcasing mentee's work/accomplishments
- ☐ Recognizing talents
- ☐ Providing opportunities for participation in professional activities
- ☐ Providing access to key people and resources

8. Offering encouragement by:

- ☐ Demonstrating enthusiasm and confidence in the mentee's successful future
- ☐ Conveying positive regard
- ☐ Serving as a sounding board
- ☐ Providing a forum in which the mentee is encouraged to talk openly about anxieties and fears
- ☐ Providing moral and emotional support
- ☐ Giving positive feedback

9. Other expectations:

- ☐
- ☐
- ☐

Tools to Align Expectations

Mentoring Compacts (also known as contracts, agreements, or charters) are written documents used to articulate expectations between mentors and mentees. They differ from an Individual development Plan (IDP) which focuses on short and long-term career plans and are focused on expectations for the working relationship on a daily or weekly basis. Compacts vary in their format and level of detail. It is recommended to revisit and revise them over time. Compacts provide mentors and mentees an opportunity to reflect upon, and articulate, their expectations and bring them into alignment.

Written expectations documents like compacts are important equity tools because they (1) make invisible expectations visible, and (2) level the playing field among mentees.

Mentoring Compacts can cover a range of topics, including:

- Research productivity (designing experiments, writing, lab notebooks, timelines, etc.)
- Authorship (policies, timing of decisions, raising questions, etc.)
- Time (work hours, vacation, sick leave, etc.)
- Communication (frequency of meetings, preparation for and follow-up for meetings, method of communication, annual reviews, etc.)
- Respect (being a good team member, contributions to lab climate, acknowledging work of others, use of phones/ earphones in the lab, etc.)
- Professional development and networking (attending meetings, conferences, department/ campus seminars, IDPs, etc.)
- Resolving conflicts (when to bring up issues and with whom, negotiating institutional resources, etc.)

Compacts provide mentors and mentees an opportunity to reflect upon, and articulate, their expectations and bring them into alignment.

SESSION EXAMPLE: Developing Shared Expectations

Developing Shared Expectations

(select and adapt from these suggested topics, as relevant to your discipline)

1. Communication and meetings.

a. *What is the best way/technology to get a hold of each other? What is the appropriate time frame to expect a response?*

b. *When do you plan to meet (be as specific as you can), is an agenda required, how long will the meeting be?*

2. Student's role on project: *Describe student's primary area(s) of responsibility and expectations (e.g. reading peer-reviewed literature, in-lab working hours, etc.).*

3. Participation in group meetings (if relevant). *Student will participate in the following ongoing research group meetings. What does this participation look like?*

4. Tentative papers on which student will be an author or coauthor. *Discuss disciplinary norms around authorship; list the papers and the likely order of student's authorship, e.g., first, second, etc.*

5. Opportunities for feedback. *In what form and how often can the student expect to receive feedback regarding overall progress, research activities, etc.? How much time is needed by the mentor to provide feedback on written work, such as chapter and publication drafts?*

6. Professional meeting(s) that the student will attend and dates: *What funding is available to attend these meetings?*

7. Networking opportunities: *Discuss additional opportunities to network (e.g. meeting with seminar speakers, etc.)*

8. Vacations, absences, and time away from campus. *Discuss expectations regarding vacations and time away from campus and how best to plan for them. What is the time-frame for notification regarding anticipated absences?*

9. Funding: *Discuss the funding model and plans for future funding (e.g. internal and external fellowships, including RMF funding, training grants, GSI, GSRA, GSSA.); discuss any uncertainty in future sources of funding, and contingencies.*

10. Completion of programmatic milestones and other milestones (as applicable).

Academic Milestones	Year 1			Year 2			Year 3			Year	Year	Additional
	F	W	S/S	F	W	S/S	F	W	S/S			Years
Milestones:												
<i>Qualifying Exam</i>												
<i>Preliminary Exam</i>												
<i>Candidacy Exam</i>												
<i>Dissert. Comm. Mtg.</i>												
Other Milestones:												

Place an X in terms designated for milestones. F=Fall, W=Winter, S/S = Spring/Summer. Other milestones might include: Conference presentation; peer-review publication, etc.

11. Anticipated date of defense and graduation:

- 12. Professional goals:** *Identify short-term and long-term goals, and discuss any steps/resources/training necessary to accomplish the goals.*
- 13. Skill development:** *Identify the skills and abilities that the student will focus on developing during the upcoming year. These could be academic, research, or professional skills, as well as additional training experiences such as workshops or internships.*
- 14. Other areas:** *List here any other areas of understanding between the student and mentor regarding working relationship during the student's tenure.*

**UAB CENTER FOR CLINICAL AND TRANSLATIONAL SCIENCE
MENTORING CONTRACT⁴**

This contract is intended to serve as a guideline to facilitate communications between a trainee (mentee) and his/her mentors. It is suggested that the document be thoroughly reviewed and completed by the mentee and his/her mentor individually, and then jointly review and discuss each person's answers in order to reach an agreement. The mentee should re-write the agreed upon answers before the contract is signed and dated by him/her and each mentor. The mentee is responsible for keeping the contract and reviewing/updating it as necessary.

1. What type of assistance does the mentee want from the mentor in achieving their career goals over the next 1-3 years? Where does the mentee hope their career will have taken them in five years?

2. What expectations do the mentor(s) have of the mentee?

3. What expectations does the mentee have of the mentors?

4. How often will you meet?

⁴ Hook, Edward W III and Audrey Wrenn. *UAB Center for Clinical and Translational Science Mentoring Contract*. (<http://www.uab.edu/ccts/TrainingAndEduc/Documents/Mentor%20Contract%20-%203%20pages.pdf>)

5. When and where will you meet?

6. For how long?

7. Who will be responsible for scheduling the meetings?

8. What will meeting topics include?

9. What will be the ground rules for discussions? (E.g., confidentiality, openness, candor, truthfulness, etc.)

10. If problems arise, how will they be resolved?

11. Any concerns the mentee wants discussed and resolved?

12. Any concerns the mentors want discussed and resolved?

13. How will you know when the mentoring relationship has served its purpose and needs to be terminated?

14. We have agreed that our initial meetings will focus on these three topics:

a.

b.

c.

15. Any additional areas/issues you want to discuss and agree to?

Tool: Priorities for Mentoring (“Mentoring for What?”)⁵

To be completed by both the mentee and mentor.

Prompt for Mentee: It is important to become clear about what your priorities are for professional development. This will enable mentor-mentee pairs to make priorities for how they will use their time together. Identify your top 4 or 5 areas of need.

Prompt for Mentor: It is important to become clear about what areas you feel you are most able to support in a mentee’s development. Identify the top 4 or 5 areas you feel most able to provide support to your mentee.

Prompt to Both: Compare your results. A “good” mentor-mentee relationship does not require a match between responses. The results (as indicated by degree of alignment between mentee needs and mentor ability) will help you start a conversation about the areas within which: (1) the mentor can provide the mentee with direct support; or (2) the mentor is better suited to focus their efforts on helping the mentee seek out resources they need from other mentors.

Domain of Mentoring Need	Mentee Need	Mentor Ability	Notes
Oral Communication			
Written Communication			
Managing Difficult Conversations			

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Managing Expectations			
Domain of Mentoring Need	Mentee Need	Mentor Ability	Notes
Work-Life Balance			
Affective (e.g., motivation, self-confidence, emotional support)			
Public Speaking			
Networking with Funding Sources			
Networking with Community Stakeholders			
Networking with Research Community			

Data Analysis			
Methods and Research Skills			
Domain of Mentoring Need	Mentee Need	Mentor Ability	Notes
Frameworks, Models			
Collaborating with Community Stakeholders			
Grant Writing			
Evaluation			
Writing for Community and/or Non-Academic Stakeholders			
Research Resources			

Research Integrity and Ethics			
Authorship			
Domain of Mentoring Need	Mentee Need	Mentor Ability	Notes
Career Options			
Job Opportunities			
Organizations			
Other:			
Other:			

Tool: Mapping Your Mentoring Network⁶

Prompt for Mentor and Mentee: Based upon the results indicated in the worksheet titled “Priorities for Mentoring,” utilize this worksheet to identify the constellation of mentors who will support the professional development priorities of the mentee.

Domain of Mentoring Need	Mentor – At My Institution	Mentor – External to My Institution	Mentor – Community Partner	Have No Mentor	Do Not Need a Mentor
Oral Communication					
Written Communication					
Managing Difficult Conversations					
Managing Expectations					
Work-Life Balance					

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Affective (e.g., motivation, self-confidence, emotional support)					
Domain of Mentoring Need	Mentor - At My Institution	Mentor - External to My Institution	Mentor - Community Partner	Have No Mentor	Do Not Need a Mentor
Public Speaking					
Networking with Funding Sources					
Networking with Community Stakeholders					
Networking with Research Community					
Data Analysis					
Methods and Research Skills					

Frameworks, Models					
Collaborating with Community Stakeholders					
Domain of Mentoring Need	Mentor - At My Institution	Mentor - External to My Institution	Mentor - Community Partner	Have No Mentor	Do Not Need a Mentor
Grant Writing					
Evaluation					
Writing for Community and/or Non-Academic Stakeholders					
Research Resources					
Research Integrity and Ethics					

Authorship					
Career Options					
Job Opportunities					
Domain of Mentoring Need	Mentor - At My Institution	Mentor - External to My Institution	Mentor - Community Partner	Have No Mentor	Do Not Need a Mentor
Organizations					
Other:					
Other:					

Tool: Process of Mentoring (The “How” of Mentoring)⁷

<u>EXPECTATIONS – GENERAL COMMUNICATION</u>	<u>NOTES</u>
Through what channel will we communicate? (e.g., email, text, cell phone, other)	
What is our expectation for a timely response?	
Are there certain days of the week or times of the day we prefer to communicate? Are there “sacred” times during which no communication should occur?	
To what degree is the content/context of our conversations confidential?	
What should we do if confidentiality is a concern?	
How should we handle conflict if it arises?	
<u>EXPECTATIONS – PROJECT MEETINGS</u>	<u>NOTES</u>
How often should we meet and for how long?	

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What channel should we use for these meetings (e.g., Skype, Zoom, other)?	
What should a mentor do in preparation for a project meeting?	
What should a mentee do in preparation for a project meeting?	
How goal oriented or free form should our meetings be?	
If one of us needs to cancel, what should we do?	
How should we follow-up on meetings? (e.g., communicate advice taken, information promised, support offered)	
<u>EXPECTATIONS – FORMAL FEEDBACK</u>	<u>NOTES</u>
In what form and how often will a mentor give the mentee feedback on project progress?	
How much time should be allowed to review short documents?	

How much time should be allowed to review longer documents? (e.g., grants, manuscripts)	
<u>EXPECTATIONS – WORKING WITH OTHER MENTORS</u>	<u>NOTES</u>
What other mentors will be involved in the mentee’s experience?	
How will the mentor interact with other mentors (if at all)?	
<u>EXPECTATIONS – COLLABORATION</u>	<u>NOTES</u>
Co-Authorship: Will we consider it? Under what circumstances?	
Grant Collaboration: Will we consider it? Under what circumstances?	
<u>OTHER EXPECTATIONS</u>	<u>NOTES</u>

Articulating Your Mentoring Philosophy and Plan

Introduction

Reflecting upon your mentoring relationships is a vital part of becoming a more effective mentor. This is especially important immediately following a mentor-training session so that you can consider how to implement changes in your mentoring practice based on the training. Reflection on your mentoring practice at regular intervals is strongly encouraged.

Learning Objectives

Mentors will:

1. Reflect on the mentor-training experience
2. Reflect on any intended behavioral or philosophical changes across the mentoring competencies
3. Articulate an approach for working with new mentees in the future

Mentoring Action Plan

Competency	What can I do differently in the future?
Maintaining Effective Communication	
Aligning Expectations	