

# Rowan University Guide to Excellence in Graduate Student Mentorship



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# Foreword

The aim of this guide is to support graduate faculty mentors and all Rowan community members (i.e. faculty, librarians, advisors) who wish to contribute to excellence in graduate student mentoring. Research and teaching mentorship is an essential element of the graduate student experience. However, very little time and resources have been dedicated to helping Rowan community members to develop skills for excellence in mentorship.

Thus, this guide makes recommendations and provides resources for all aspects of graduate student mentorship that are specifically tailored to the Rowan campus community. The team of authors for this guide worked together during the 2023–24 academic year to explore the literature and develop a concise and clear list of best practices for graduate student mentors. This guide will serve to fill gaps in knowledge and understanding for mentors and incorporate the values surrounding graduate education at Rowan University. Our discussions strove to consider the unique context of Rowan University as an R2 public university which has rapidly grown in ranking, enrollment size, and degree and certificate program offerings. The guide is broadly applicable, and some sections will not apply to the role of each mentor in the lives and experiences of their mentees. For example, we offer a section on mentoring for the mentee’s successful classroom teaching. If you are a mentor who has not participated in classroom teaching, then that section would not be appropriate to your mentoring relationship.

This guide references several other graduate schools across the United States who have written and made public similar works. As those materials (listed in the Appendix section) were useful in conceiving this guide, we believe that aspects from this guide may be useful to share with other graduate school programs, graduate school deans, and members of the Council of Graduate Schools.

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# Introduction

This guide was compiled from the work of the 2023–24 Professional Learning Community (PLC) on Excellence in Graduate Student Mentorship to address the needs of both faculty mentors and other Rowan community members who may seek guidance and clarity on their role in contributing to the development of our graduate students and the advancement of graduate education at Rowan University.

The imperative to establish this learning community and to write this guide was driven by Rowan University's expanding research and graduate student output as evidenced by its move to R2 status with an eye towards R1. With these changes, programs from across the University have become aware of the need for increased comprehensive attention to graduate mentoring. In addition, national reports on graduate school education have argued for addressing mentorship as an essential component of graduate student success. For example, the *NASEM Consensus Report: Graduate STEM Education for the 21st Century* suggests that the concept of “belongingness” is critical for graduate students.<sup>1</sup> The report states that, “a shift from the current system that focuses primarily on the needs of institutions of higher education and those of the research enterprise itself to one that is student centered, placing greater emphasis and focus on graduate students as individuals with diverse needs and challenges” is necessary. The role of the mentor and the mentoring environment is crucial for effectively navigating this shift. The report also states that, “Graduate students should learn how to apply their expertise in a variety of professional contexts and seek guidance from faculty, research mentors, and advisors on strategies to gain work-related experience while enrolled in graduate school” further emphasizing the need to understand mentorship (as an individual mentor) and the need for each graduate student to have a mentoring network to fully realize their career and life potential.

The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) and JED commissioned Julie Posselt to write the report *Promoting Graduate Student Wellbeing: Cultural, Organizational, and Environmental Factors in the Academy*. This report calls on universities to provide supportive and collaborative academic environments.<sup>2</sup> The report states that “Wellbeing of academic communities themselves as a potential lever for student wellbeing” reinforces the need for healthy mentor/student relationships in research settings.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, the report claims that “faculty supervisory styles when working with graduate students often leave students with a troubling combination of minimal job control and significant job demands—both of which are linked to mental health problems.”<sup>2</sup> The partnership between CGS and JED went further with the commissioning of a separate report titled *Supporting Graduate Student*

*Mental Health and Well-being: evidence-Informed Recommendations for the Graduate Community*<sup>3</sup> which reinforces the need for healthful mentor-mentee expectations and interactions. Further, Levecque et al.'s publication in *Research Policy*,<sup>4</sup> cited in both CGS reports, quantitatively shows that a third of PhD students are at risk for developing a mental health disease (the report specifically mentioned depression). That work compared increased mental health risks in the PhD population with populations of highly educated employees and those highly educated in general, thereby isolating the impact of PhD training environments on the risk for developing mental health conditions.<sup>4</sup> Mentors and mentorship at the heart of how the PhD environment is experienced by mentees.

Finally, the Burroughs Wellcome Fund (CGT RFP) invests in fostering the values of lifelong learning, critical thinking, and ethical leadership.<sup>5</sup> The importance of training PhD students for careers beyond academia is noted. The CGT RFP states: "Helping trainees understand, acquire, and demonstrate skills that make them ready for complex careers should be the goal."<sup>5</sup> The notion of the mentor as re-creating themselves in their mentee is outdated. Instead, mentors should embrace the idea of empowering the mentee to pursue a career track which fulfills the mentee's career and lifestyle decision-making.

Throughout this guide, we move away from the traditional definition of a senior individual providing advice to a junior individual and instead embrace the concept of what Gail Lunsford and Baker refer to as an "emotional commitment" that is reciprocal and long-lasting and centered around an individual's professional and personal growth. Mentor might refer to an academic advisor, a supervisor, a dissertation/thesis chair, research advisor, or even a peer.<sup>7</sup> Not all of these roles must fit the function of "mentor" as we define it here, although all should take an active part in ensuring a student's development and progression.

### **Becoming a Member of the Profession**

There is much to learn in an advanced degree program that goes beyond constructing knowledge in one's field. As mentors, we must be aware of the importance of student socialization into the profession and their identity development as members of that profession. In order to facilitate identity development and bring students into the professional cultures to which they aspire, we can:

- Make professional norms explicit
- Invite students to shadow us in tasks beyond teaching and research (e.g., networking at conferences, committee work)
- Create opportunities for anticipatory socialization, meaning that students live the

demands of the job prior to holding the job (e.g., facilitating a class discussion, responding to reviewer comments, overseeing others)

- Provide role support (e.g., present professional opportunities, verbalize respect for the mentee's ideas, share responsibilities)
- Model skills required to obtain positive work-life integration (e.g., time management, establishing boundaries)
- Encourage and assist them in developing larger mentoring networks that include peers, alumni, and other professionals in the field

This guide on mentorship encompasses a range of topics essential for nurturing a fruitful mentor-mentee relationship. It begins by outlining how to establish a solid mentorship foundation and progresses to exploring effective communication strategies tailored to meet the unique needs of each mentee. The guide also provides insights on how mentors can help mentees understand the specific requirements of faculty research projects, and highlights the importance of mentoring in teaching, aiming for excellence in classroom instruction. Additionally, it emphasizes the significance of fostering mentee independence, imparting essential professional development, and guiding mentees through their academic and professional journeys, including curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities. The guide also addresses mentorship in the context of promoting wellness and work-life balance, and concludes with strategies for promoting an inclusive mentoring environment.

*Note: While this mentoring guide aims to offer specifics to mentoring at Rowan, we encourage mentors to explore the mentoring guides available at the end of this guide in Appendix I.*

## Establishing a Mentorship Relationship

Building a strong mentor-mentee relationship hinges on the foundation of understanding your mentee and establishing clear expectations for both parties involved. As a mentor, taking the time to get to know your mentee on a personal and professional level is paramount. By understanding their goals, aspirations, and individual needs, you can tailor your guidance to best support their academic goals. Equally crucial is establishing clear expectations—both for your mentee and yourself as the mentor. These expectations should encompass academic goals, communication preferences, and the overall framework of the mentorship. It is worth noting that the dynamics of the mentor-mentee relationship can vary significantly between mentors and their various mentees because the people involved will always be different. These dynamics may also vary across different fields of study, and recognizing these variations is essential for fostering effective mentorship tailored to the

unique demands and expectations within each discipline. In programs with formal grant-funded or research-centered faculty mentor-mentee relationships, and in those with thesis requirements, mentor-mentee relationships may appear more similar to professional mentorships. Reducing the hierarchical gap between mentor and mentee can strengthen the relationship and better integrate the mentee into the profession. As noted in the introduction, the mentor-mentee relationship is emotional, reciprocal, and focuses on the mentee's professional and personal growth. Involving the mentee in the process of articulating their expectations for you as a mentor is a practical approach to diminishing this hierarchy.

Regardless of academic discipline or program specifics, mentorship involves a broad spectrum of support, encompassing academic, professional, and personal development. Mentors may play a role in guiding students through coursework, offering career advice, and assisting with networking opportunities in order for the student to engage with their research. There are various types of mentoring structures which may exist. For example, a relationship between the mentor and mentee whereby the mentor helps the mentee to solidify the mentee's ideas surrounding their scholarship is one type of relationship. Another would be whereby the mentee works in the laboratory of the faculty mentor or on a project defined by the mentor's prior research and prior publications. Having one or the other type of mentorship (assigned or unassigned; formal or informal) does not diminish the significance of mentorship. In all cases, an individualized approach tailored to engage the diverse needs and aspirations of graduate student learners implores collaborative structures between graduate students and their mentors. It is important that all threads of this collaborative mentorship structure work harmoniously and responsively to move the student from learner to expert.

### **Modalities of Mentor Engagement**

The above highlights two modalities of engagement which are prevalent by discipline. In humanities and sometimes in education, the research mentee selects and leads a topic which may not be related to the direct expertise of the mentor. The mentor serves as a guide to the process of research, but not necessarily a content expert. At the other extreme (inclusive of many STEM discipline relationships), the student engages with the topic area for which the mentor has established national or international recognition and expertise. One important note is that, even for the latter modality of engagement, in the final stages of the dissertation, the student mentee has often surpassed the faculty mentor in their understanding and expertise of the nuances and specifics of their topic, thereby morphing into the style of engagement experienced by, for example, humanities degree seekers described by the former relationship.



**Creating a Constellation of Mentors.** Mentoring is a multifaceted endeavor. Mentees seek guidance in course completion, program progress, research, writing, teaching, acquiring a job, and other facets of academic or professional life. Due to the complex nature of mentoring, mentees are well-served by building a constellation of mentors, a network of individuals that serve the mentee's needs in various ways. For example, a mentee might ask a mentor who is an exemplary teacher for feedback on their syllabus design while reserving questions about on-campus interviews for a mentor most recently on the job market. By taking a collaborative approach to mentoring, mentees reap the benefits of multiple perspectives, skills, and knowledge, and mentors gain the advantage of a shared workload. The National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity has created a [webinar](#) and [mentoring map resource](#) that is helpful in considering the diversity of mentors in one's network. Consider sharing this resource with your mentee.

An expanded network of mentors also increases the possibility of favorable mentor matches in which mentees share similarities with their mentor in regard to identity, interest, personal background, life stage, or personality. A good fit in terms of mentor match helps to provide socio-emotional support alongside knowledge and skill expertise. While all mentees benefit from strong mentor matches, they may be particularly impactful for mentees from underrepresented populations in their field of study.



Links to the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity [webinar](#) and [mentoring map resource](#)<sup>7</sup>.

### **Mentoring Students for Non-Academic Careers**

Mentoring students in non-academic pathways is crucial for their growth and development in the professional arena. While academic mentorship focuses on research and scholarly achievements, non-academic mentoring often prepares students with strong skills and expertise in their profession while providing them with the breadth needed to enhance their entrepreneurial and employability skills. The mentoring relationship equips students with the essential skills such as communication, team work, problem-solving and leadership for their chosen career pathway. Alumni engagement can be deeply important for enhancing the students support network, career advice, and guidance.



### **Getting to know your mentee**

It is important to establish open communications which enable your mentee to tell you about their aspirations (career and otherwise). Strive to understand their goals for graduate school and beyond and avoid assuming that your mentee has aspirations similar to your own.

Understanding your mentee's aspirations will enable:

- Tailored mentorship so that it enables mentees career aspirations to drive the work they do in your research group
- Goal alignment for meaningful training
- Personalized growth planning (including networking opportunities, etc.)
- Retention and satisfaction
- Support, resources, and professional development for the mentee's career path
- Work-life balance for the mentee (and for yourself)

Another important aspect of getting to know your mentee is to learn your mentee's constraints. Through early dialogue, learn and consider how to accommodate factors such as time constraints, limitations on activity type, strengths, and weaknesses. For example, a father of a three-month old child may not be able to attend the national conference on the opposite coast for the entire week of a conference. Several options for reasonable accommodation would be:

- For him to attend for several days to participate in key opportunities at the conference that you (mentor) and he define ahead of time
- For him to contribute to the project, but not attend the conference
- For him to participate in a virtual session of the same or different conference which is similar in scope

All of these are viable options which meet the primary goal of professional and personal growth of the mentee.

### **Setting clear expectations**

When setting clear expectations for the mentoring relationship, it is best to start from the beginning of the mentoring relationship. The need to set expectations later in the relationship may arise and suggestions for having such a discussion (after the relationship has begun and unspoken or spoken expectations have not been met) are included in the chapter on Exploring Effective Communication Strategies and Managing Challenging Discussions.

Some ideas for effective communications are:

- Meet regularly for two-way discussions of expectations
- Use goal setting as a way to measure progress on expectations
- Document in writing expectations and associated goals
- Design check-ins (weekly, quarterly, or bi-annually) which focus solely on examining mentor-mentee goals and expectations

More on these ideas are elaborated below.

### ***Meet regularly for two-way discussion of expectations***

Regular meetings for two-way discussions of expectations and short-term goals serve as a dynamic and agile platform for mentor and mentee collaboration. In these meetings, both the mentor and mentee should be given space to articulate short-term expectations, ensuring alignment and clarity. This ongoing dialogue allows mentees to express their immediate and most pressing challenges, while mentors can provide valuable insights and guidance. Through these discussions, the short-term goals can be refined into smaller, more achievable goals providing the mentee with examples on how to self-guide their research training. Mentees will undoubtedly have a deeper understanding of the mentor's expectations, and mentors, in turn, can adapt their guidance to meet the evolving needs of their mentees. Additionally, short-term goals when set, reviewed, and adjusted, increase the mentee's sense of achievement and progress. This continuous exchange lays the foundation for a strong mentorship relationship, promoting mutual understanding and empowering mentees to navigate their academic journeys with confidence.

### ***Use goal setting as a way to measure progress on expectations***

Defining the difference between goals and expectations, **goals** track direction and measure of progress; **expectations** can include behaviors (not just goals). Examples of expectations include ethical conduct of research, academic integrity in course settings and outside of course settings, and being informed about and adhering to the principles of responsible conduct of research. Goals and expectations should be documented in writing so that both parties can ensure that what is said, and what is heard, are common.

### ***Document expectations and associated goals in writing***

In graduate student mentoring, the use of goal setting is pivotal for fostering a structured and effective mentorship relationship. Setting short-term goals provides a roadmap for the immediate future, allowing mentees to focus on specific, achievable objectives. It is crucial to employ SMART goals—goals that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-

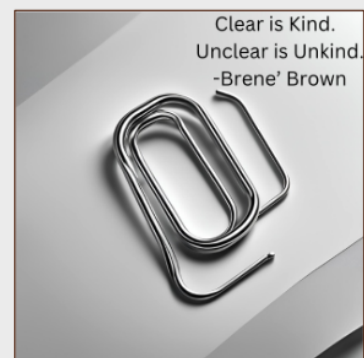
bound. A goal without measurability lacks the clarity needed for effective assessment and progress tracking. For instance, setting a vague goal like “I want to *be more confident*” lacks measurability as it does not provide a tangible benchmark. Transforming this into a measurable goal involves probing questions such as “What does ‘*be more confident*’ look like?” and “How will you know when you have reached that goal?” This iterative process ensures that goals are specific and quantifiable, allowing for a clear understanding of progress and achievement. For example, for the goal of “*be more confident*,” measurable goals such as (i) taking advantage of public speaking opportunities, (ii) active growth of professional network, and (iii) receiving and responding to feedback are all examples of achievements that demonstrate *more confidence* and can be quantified. Ultimately, these short-term goals contribute to the overarching expectations, serving as building blocks toward the long-term outcomes of a successful graduate education and career development.

### **Designing Check-ins which Focus Solely on Reviewing Goals and Expectations**

These meetings will not focus on the daily/weekly tasks, but will focus instead on expectations, goals, and progress towards goals and expectations. These meetings do not need to be a source of stress for the mentor or the mentee, but rather could be done as a group and combined with lunch or dinner to enable the entire team to review progress and celebrate accomplishments towards goals. When done as a group, pre-work by the mentor to ensure that each mentee in the group has at least one accomplishment to celebrate is imperative. If group meetings are used as the idea for weekly, quarterly, or bi-annual check-ins, these group meetings should be paired with one-on-one meetings to immediately follow or precede the group meeting, enabling the communication of lack of progress to be done privately with the mentee or enabling the mentee to express concerns to the mentor for which the entire group should not be privy. Meetings of this type are also important for non-research based mentorship.

These meetings will allow for evolution of goals over time (as well as allow for evolution of expectations over time). For example, expectations for leadership within the research group change over time. The mentor may consider designing an evolution in expectations ahead of time (per student's interest).

These meetings also serve the purpose of clarifying the relationship between expectations and resources (i.e. grants awarded relate to data and outcomes from prior awards). This is a time wherein you can describe the relationship between you and the funder more fully to your mentee.



These meetings enable the mentor to design accountability measures. The mentor can outline how progress and performance will be evaluated and explicitly communicate to the mentee “What does success look like?” and “What are consequences for not meeting expectations?”

It is important that during these meetings, feedback from the mentee about the mentorship is encouraged. Decide, prior to taking on mentorship, how you will handle negative feedback. Deciding at the moment of receiving negative feedback from your mentee could prove

disastrous. Mentors may wish to spend some time discussing with *their own* mentors how negative feedback from their mentee is received, handled, and what were the outcomes. Your ability to receive feedback will ultimately influence how your student mentee receives and engages with feedback that they perceive as negative. You are demonstrating how to manage feedback for your mentee when you encourage them to give you feedback, positive or negative.

In short, these meetings enable you and your mentee(s) to periodically review and revisit expectations to ensure that they can meet the evolving needs and relational dynamics of your group.

Some mentors have established a contract or set of expectations *in writing* that are agreed upon by both the mentor and mentee. An example contract is provided in the appendix materials. Notice that flexibility is necessary in contract and expectation setting to allow for the unique needs of each student.

Setting clear expectations also means understanding the expectations that the mentee may have of you. Here are a few suggestions for setting clear expectations for your mentee and for accepting the expectations that the mentee may have of you. Start by providing clear guidance and expectations, ensuring that you articulate what success looks like for the mentee. Make sure that the guidance you offer is accessible, whether through written documents, meetings, or other formats that accommodate the mentee's needs. Encourage professional development across a variety of topics, such as writing (including revision and editing), publishing (including peer-review feedback), presentation skills, data analysis and interpretation, and handling "bad" data that does not support the hypothesis. It's also essential to foster an environment where feedback is welcomed. Before taking on a mentorship role, consider how you will handle negative feedback, and potentially discuss this with your own mentor. Additionally, understand how the mentee receives and engages with constructive feedback, especially when it may be perceived as negative, to ensure a supportive and productive mentoring relationship.

### **Life-long support of students**

The mentoring relationship is not time-bound and can evolve into a lifelong connection. Students often expect continued support after earning their degree, such as letters of recommendation. It's essential to have ongoing discussions about the student's contributions and progress, using SMART goals to maintain objectivity. This transparency ensures that when the time comes to write a recommendation, the student is aware of their



standing, avoiding any feelings of deception. If you are unable to write a letter, it is crucial to inform the student with a clear and honest “no.” When writing a recommendation, focus on what the mentee accomplished during their time with you. Documenting both strengths and weaknesses, with specific examples, can provide a comprehensive and fair assessment. Utilizing benchmarks during the mentees time training with you will help in documenting their accomplishments and can further support the veracity of your feedback.

A key role of life-long mentorship is providing ongoing support through sponsorship and promotion of the mentee. This includes actively looking out for opportunities that align with the mentee’s interests and career goals, such as recommending them for committees, task forces, or leadership roles. Mentors can play a crucial part in helping mentees build their professional networks by introducing them to influential colleagues and suggesting them as candidates for speaking engagements, panels, or collaborations. Life-long engagement also means offering guidance and feedback as the mentee navigates new stages of their career, whether in academia or other fields. By continually advocating for their mentee and providing resources and opportunities, mentors can help shape the mentee’s long-term success and professional growth.

## Exploring Effective Communication Strategies and Managing Challenging Discussions

Effective communication between a mentor and mentee is the bedrock of a successful and enriching mentorship relationship. It establishes a shared understanding, fosters trust, and enhances collaboration. Clear and open communication ensures that expectations are transparent, feedback is constructive, and the mentorship journey is a dynamic and responsive exchange of ideas and insights, ultimately contributing to the mentee’s academic and professional growth.

### **The right track in communication**

The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) published a handbook written by M. King and D.D. Denecke titled *On the Right Track: A Manual for Research Mentors*<sup>9</sup> which describes four points to the “right” type of communication: right attention, right boundaries, right empathy, and right empowerment. Each of these areas should be developed by the faculty mentor to ensure open communication.

1. **Right attention** means that there is regular (perhaps scheduled and perhaps open door) candid, frank communication. It is incumbent upon the advisor to model the norms in communication style. Too formal could hinder the student from being open, however, too informal could lead to problems within the relationship.
2. **Right boundaries** means that interests are managed. The mentee should not feel that personal boundaries or spaces (whether in time or in subject matter) are broached. This must be done with open and honest communication about these boundaries. For example, if the mentee has childcare obligations after 3:00pm, then the advisor should understand those boundaries and work to navigate the relationship using the hours that the mentee is available. This only works well if both parties are honest about their respective boundaries and life commitments.
3. **Right empathy** means giving negative feedback with empathy. Try the “sandwich approach” to feedback which places the critical feedback between two encouraging points (where the critical feedback is the meat and veggies and the encouraging points are the bread). This could help, early on, if feedback is easily received and acted upon by the mentee. If, however, feedback has been ignored, as Swartz suggests in the article “[The 'Sandwich Approach' Undermines Your Feedback](#),”<sup>8</sup> then a more direct approach should be used. Critical feedback is never easy to deliver, but as Brene Brown states “To be unclear is to be unkind,”<sup>10</sup> this feedback helps the mentee’s growth in their career. Communicate clear and high expectations to *all* students.

In some instances, feedback in the form of connecting students to campus resources will be important. You may want to connect students to resources like the [Rowan Writing Center](#) where graduate students can get feedback on their writing from peers. Additionally, be familiar with all of the mental health and wellness resources that your campus offers. At Rowan, the [THRIVE](#) six dimensions of wellness is employed to help students grow.<sup>11</sup> All graduate students are placed into a THRIVE canvas shell which guides the resources offered on campus. Be clear on the usefulness of these resources and let students know that it is okay to pursue support in a variety of forms.

4. **Right empowerment** means providing explicit expectations and timelines. This will give the student the tools that they need in order to make informed decisions, gauge their own progress, and navigate their academic career while at Rowan. It is important to empower students. One way that this can be accomplished is by introducing your

mentee to their degree program handbook—where they can read and refer to exactly what they need to know and do in order to be successful in the degree program.

With these four “right” communication tools in your hands, you and your mentee are ready to embrace growth in the right direction.

Additional ideas to consider:

- Ensure that your communication style does not engender a sense of favoritism within a mentee group.
- Remember that overstepping or acting as a parental figure could work well for some students and could be uncomfortable for others. Try to gauge your mentee’s sensibility in response to your communication style.
- Always recall that the role of a mentor is to evaluate. Too informal in the day-to-day sense could cause the mentee to feel personally unsupported during evaluation. Maintain the mentor-mentee boundary as appropriate.
- In a setting where critique is not being delivered, have a discussion about communication style—and particularly about style of delivery of critique. Clearly articulate to the mentee your style of giving feedback. Ask them how they prefer to receive feedback. Mentees vary—and so for some mentees, your information delivery style may be perceived as too harsh, and for others the same style of delivery for feedback may not be perceived as harsh. Open discussion about your style and approach can help all mentees to feel supported.
- Communicate the message, early and often, that your purpose is not to “weed out” students; we, at Rowan, want all our graduate students to succeed. This can be a surprisingly impactful message for many students.

### **Writing letters of recommendation on behalf of your mentee**

When communicating with others on behalf of your mentee—for example, when asked to write a recommendation letter—always consider whether it is in the best interest of the mentee for you to write the letter. Be clear in stating that: “I am not the right person to write the letter because...”. The term *ruinous empathy* refers to the kindness displayed by someone well meaning but ultimately unhelpful. Be aware that ruinous empathy could harm your mentee’s applications and career. Regular, candid and honest communication will fix these issues. Mentors are expected to provide a recommendation letter with the job (or fellowship) application packet of the mentee as they move ahead in their careers. If you, as a mentor, are unable to write a supportive letter, then stop and consider “if the student is unworthy of a letter, then why were they able to complete the program itself?” Often and with reflection,



letters can be mitigated to describe the strengths and weaknesses of the mentee. For example, if the disconnect was in professionalism, then the letter from the mentor could indicate such honestly and without sacrificing the positive aspects of the mentee. Sharing letters with your mentees is an approach one could take when writing a less than enthusiastic recommendation letter. This way, at least the mentee can decide if it is more important to have a lukewarm letter from the research mentor OR not to have a letter from the research mentor at all.

### **Communication in the midst of conflict (conflict resolution)**

The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) published the handbook *Setting expectations and resolving conflicts in graduate education* written by K.L. Klomparens, J.P. Beck, J.L. Brockman, and A.A. Nunez (2008).<sup>12</sup> This work describes an interest-based approach (i.e. elevating the interest of the mentee, mentor, and project above the specifics of the conflict). The basic assumption about conflict they take is that it is neither good nor bad—it just is present. Work on this topic presented by Katharine Stewart, Sr. Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs at NC State at the Council on Graduate Schools Annual Meeting in 2023,<sup>14</sup> reminds us that conflict exists when the expectations of one party (whether communicated or not) is not being met by the other party (whether by intention or not). This means that the potential for conflict is ever present in mentor/mentee interactions (even if things appear to be going well, there could always be uncommunicated and unmet expectations beneath the surface). This could be true for either party in the mentoring relationship. Therefore, clear and open communication is crucial to avoiding conflict. Some points to remember when working through conflict are:

- Many issues in graduate education are non-negotiable, such as those dictated by law, regulations, or grantor requirements
- Conflict is neither good nor bad, but how conflict is handled could have negative results
- Mentor-mentee power differential exists, and always will
- We cannot expect 100% retention, and we will lose some mentees from our mentorship or from the university when conflicts cannot be adequately resolved

The goal in conflict resolution is for both parties to be able to move forward in achieving their common goal(s). Best approaches for conflict resolution are:

1. Separate people from the issue
2. Focus on the interests of stakeholders and the options that will advance the shared interest/common goal for as many stakeholders as possible
3. Establish on-going discussions which move towards resolution

The following are examples of conflicts whereby the expectations (stated or not stated) of one party are not being met by the other party (reference: Katharine Stewart presentation at CGS, Dec 2023):<sup>13</sup>

- Time off is required by either party during the semester
- Authorship debates
- Changes to committee composition
- Differences in expectations for dissertation progress
- Funder's requirements could delay publication
- Work expectations during winter, spring, or summer break periods
- Arguments over data or code ownership (upon graduation)
- Confusion regarding fellowship/assistantship expectations

The key to resolving conflict is to objectively learn what expectations are not being met and move towards a resolution, compromise, or collaborative solution. The mentor-mentee relationship is not well served by discussion that results in one party yielding to the other, as this often leads to lingering and/or hidden resentments.

Some additional points about conflict resolution:

- Focus on interests and learning about expectations and goals, rather than emotions.
- Have transparency in the process—sometimes, it will be helpful for mentees to be involved in the process of finding a solution.
  - The mentee will be more accepting of a solution (even if it is not the one they hoped for) if they feel they were included and treated fairly during the process of finding a solution (i.e. this is known as procedural justice).
  - The mentee will learn how to resolve conflicts through your modeling.
- Context is important and sometimes there can be some issues that cannot be worked through with the mentor/mentee pair. If both parties are unyielding on the topic and a

compromised solution cannot be reached, then it will be important to dissolve the relationship in the most amicable and non-disruptive way possible.

- Sometimes, there are competing interests between mentors and mentees. It is important to reflect on your own interests as a mentor and seek objective third parties to help manage the conflict. In some cases, both mentor and mentee need help in how to navigate challenging confrontations. Just know that it is okay to ask for help!
- Remember that there are sometimes cultural communication differences. Sometimes a mentor or mentee will not be willing to indicate that expectations are not being met (as it is not acceptable in their cultural background to do so). It is ever important for the mentor to take the lead in opening the discussion, allowing the mentee to know that it is fine to openly express their concerns.

### **Document issues before or as they arise**

One way to handle and mitigate conflict is to meet regularly and to summarize the meeting in writing. Both the mentee and mentor can use this technique, i.e. put everything in writing via email and summarize the discussion back to the other party.

Some mentors may decide that it is prudent to write a brief summary of *all* meetings (not just those where conflict in expectations are discussed). A useful approach is for the mentor to ask the mentee to write a meeting summary or an agenda and minutes. When mentees write these and you revise them, what was communicated in the discussion becomes clearer and must be agreed upon by both parties. In addition, the mentee learns how to document meetings and these documents will help both mentor and mentee track the outcomes of potential conflicts.

What do mentors do with mentorship meeting notes? It is at the discretion of the mentor whether they need to be shared with their own supervisor (and that will depend on the nature and severity of the conflict). The mentee may share the notes with a trusted person as well. If the conflict is mild, a safe, secure repository such as google docs or email to self could be used. The research mentor should always document pervasive issues both with the mentee and with their own supervisor or the degree program coordinator. Check for whether the university or program provides guidelines for the specific issue in conflict, and note that the university guidelines and program specific guidelines should always be adhered to. A few examples of related university policy include “[Grade Dispute Policy](#)”, “[Managing Conflicts of Interest](#)”, “[Openness in Research Policy](#)”, and “[Copyright Policy](#)”. This is by no means an exhaustive list and you can check with the School of Graduate Studies (SGS) Dean’s Office for policy guidance and/or policy searches which are relevant for a particular dispute..

### Research Progress and Degree Progress: Understanding the Distinction

It's important to differentiate between research progress and degree progress when mentoring graduate students. While advancing the knowledge of the field is a significant aspect of research, the primary goal for students is to earn their degree. Conflict can arise when research results do not support the initial hypothesis. In these situations, it is common and appropriate for mentors, particularly in laboratory settings, to have students redesign and re-test the hypothesis. Issues can arise, however, when a mentor rigidly insists that an experiment must be repeated indefinitely until a specific outcome is achieved, frustrating the mentee and potentially damaging the mentoring relationship. Instead of guiding the student to thoughtfully adjust the hypothesis, the mentor demands that the original hypothesis be met to fulfill degree requirements. This approach overlooks the fact that a key aspect of the student's training is learning to conduct robust and reliable research, which includes reporting findings even when they do not confirm the hypothesis.



Mentors should remember that the development of methodological skills and the ability to collect and report data accurately are just as valuable as achieving groundbreaking results. It's essential to consider what a feasible "off-ramp" might look like for the student, preserving their dignity and self-esteem. The focus should be on the student's learning process and growth rather than on achieving a particular outcome. Uninteresting or unexpected results should not prevent a student from completing their degree. By emphasizing the importance of the research process itself, rather than the ultimate findings, mentors can help students progress toward their degrees while maintaining a positive and constructive educational experience.

## Tailoring Mentorship to Unique Needs of the Mentee

Embarking on a journey of mentorship requires a nuanced and personalized approach, recognizing the diverse and unique needs of each mentee. Tailoring mentorship to the individual characteristics, aspirations, and challenges of the mentee is a cornerstone of fostering a supportive and effective learning environment.

Among the diverse needs of mentees, certain commonalities form the foundation for effective mentorship. Universally, mentees share a fervent desire to succeed in their academic endeavors, whether within a program, laboratory, or research context. They seek guidance in elevating their understanding of their respective field of study, support in identifying and achieving goals, and a commitment to being held to high standards. The need for professionalization is a common aspect of training for all students. All mentees will need to be mentored in things like crafting job cover letters and curriculum vitae, establishing individual goals (and tracking goal progress), and networking. These are common threads in mentorship. Additionally, a shared reliance on guidance for coursework, articulated program expectation, and a broader understanding of research principles are also common among mentees.

Conversely, individual differences abound, ranging from communication styles and professional goals to levels of independence, motivation, and time management skills. Factors such as primary language, levels of experience and preparation, abilities, personal life circumstances, and learning styles contribute to the uniqueness of each mentee (and their needs from the mentor-mentee relationship).

Identifying the unique needs of your mentee and developing a strategy to work with the mentee with their needs in mind will be helpful in encouraging the mentee to meet their fullest capacity. While the mentor should treat all mentees with equal time and attention, there is no harm in working with your mentee to identify ways in which they would like to grow and developing a plan to do so. Techniques such as recommending time management skills (for example, on Sunday the mentee maps out everything needed for the week and develops timeslots to fit everything), recommending networking events for students whose primary language is not English, accommodating flexibility for mentees who have lifestyle, financial, or ability status differences, or helping the mentee to understand and maximize outcomes for their own learning styles may be useful.

In the context of mentoring multiple students simultaneously, achieving a balanced and tailored development approach requires a thoughtful strategy to ensure that no mentee feels left behind. Invest time in getting to know each mentee individually, recognizing that this process may take varying amounts of time for different individuals. By engaging in self-reflection, mentors can encourage mentees to articulate their learning goals and areas they wish to develop, extending beyond the scope of their research tasks. Explicitly addressing your commitment to working within the unique needs of each mentee fosters an understanding among the entire group about potential variations in interactions. Seeking direct feedback from mentees, once the mentorship relationship has evolved, becomes a valuable tool for continuous improvement. Reminding mentees of the diverse “constellation” of mentors that should exist in their network will help them to maximize their learning and training within diverse perspectives. Each mentor in the “constellation” should offer distinct contributions to the mentee. Mentor matching, including affinity group affiliations, emerges as another aspect which could benefit the mentee. Ensure that you, as the mentor, and your mentee are aware of additional mentorship resources available (both on campus and through professional societies or regional trade groups) and can help the mentee to proactively seek guidance that aligns with their own unique needs, goals, and aspirations.

## Guiding the Mentee to Understanding the Project Needs in Project-Based Mentorships

As the research mentor, it is crucial to recognize and address your own needs within the context of the project, distinct from the broader community of stakeholders. While it is essential to accommodate the needs of your mentees, it is equally imperative to navigate the balance between meeting their requirements and ensuring compliance with the project's conditions and the expectations of the funder, as well as any teaching and research requirements. Open communication is key, and expressing the impact of student performance on your role and responsibilities is vital for maintaining a collaborative and mutually beneficial mentorship. Sharing successful grant applications with your mentee can further illuminate the project's significance and its implications for your job and responsibilities. Determining the appropriate time to discuss these considerations with mentees is part of their professional development, as it aligns with the realities of sponsor deadlines and the professional demands associated with entering the field.

Project needs extend beyond the mentor and mentee, involving a diverse set of stakeholders. These include funders, whether from industry or government, whose support is vital for project execution. The institution's historic performance on funded work (particularly when the funder is a foundation) plays a crucial role in impacting future funding accessibility. The project's reputation could have far reaching impacts. This must be articulated to the mentee, so that they engage as stakeholders in the success of the project. Additional stakeholders impacted by the performance on the project include other committee members, both internal and external. Students who teach in the classroom and receive mentorship in this aspect will be heavily impacted by the level of their mentorship (and this could lead to whether or not they could attain academic positions). Patients (in the case of clinical or medical students) and community members are also integral stakeholders. They will impact the reputation of the institution through completing surveys or even blogs, thus underscoring the importance of beneficial outcomes and collaborative research. All of these factors should be introduced to the mentee so that they see themselves as a member of this broader community of stakeholders early and come to align your expectations of them and the project needs with the impact on these stakeholder ecosystems. Other benefits of engaging the mentee with this community include professional development, collaborative opportunities, and access to real-world problems leading to potential employment opportunities. Challenges may arise in managing diverse stakeholder expectations, but, overall, helping your mentee to understand and navigate this broader community of stakeholders is an essential aspect of their growth and career goals.

# Mentoring for the Mentee's Classroom Teaching

This section of the mentoring guide is for those who are both instructional faculty members and also mentors. Much of the content will not apply for mentors who are not (or have not in their past) have teaching experience.

## **Balance research and teaching responsibilities**

Effective mentoring for teaching careers in academia requires open, honest conversations about balancing teaching and research, understanding the academic landscape, and strategically aligning one's activities and goals for a fulfilling and successful career. A discussion should occur between the mentor and mentee covering topics such as:

- What percent of your time do you spend on teaching responsibilities (counting course prep, delivery, grading, etc.)? Is this too much or too little (in your opinion)?
- Who supervises your teaching? Who supervises your research? Are you comfortable having a discussion about “right sizing” your responsibilities with either?
- How might you, as a graduate student, use your teaching experience to enhance your work as a researcher?

A critical component of these discussions involves helping mentees effectively articulate their career goals. They must then, over their time as a student, begin to map those goals to current activities while also considering time management. Mentors play a crucial role in guiding their mentees through this process. The mentor can help the mentee to consider the diverse set of possibilities for teaching upon completion of their doctorate or master's degree, consider possibilities of how research reinforces teaching and vice versa, and to understand the supporting structures which can help them to grow in teaching. These discussions do not necessarily emerge naturally in a pedagogy course nor in a lead instructor/TA meeting. If your mentee is going into academia, talk with them about the various types of universities and colleges (R1, R2, small liberal arts colleges, etc.) and positions that can be pursued (for example teaching-track or research positions). These are often difficult conversations, (particularly, those conversations about balancing time and expectations of the lead instructor and the research advisor). However, with your help, the mentee may align their career goals and their current use of time more effectively helping them become more successful in pursuing their desired career.



## Useful Resources for Further Discussion on Teaching

Further discussion on teaching could include topics such as:

- Teaching philosophy
- Pedagogy, Learning Objectives, and Effective Assessments
- Classroom Management and Inclusive Teaching
- Integrating technology into the classroom

The [Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning](#) can be a useful resource for workshops and guidance. Assigning your mentee reading and then having discussions of that reading could be a fun way to introduce ideas on classroom teaching to your mentee.

Experiential Engineering Education ([ExEEEd](#)) at Rowan offers a course for Engineering students but invites other graduate students to enroll. If a mentee wishes to pursue a pathway that involves teaching, channel the mentee to take this or another similar course (either at Rowan or online).

## Professional Development: Guiding Your Mentee Towards a Rich Career

For some disciplines such as education, pursuit of professional and skill development is a given. Mentors in other disciplines may not have professional and skill development at the front of their mind when advising mentees. For example, when professors have the task to fulfill grant obligations and requirements within a time window specified by the granting agent the project may take over conversations between them and their mentee. For those disciplines, most often in the laboratory-based STEM fields, research mentors may be challenged when they perceive that their students are spending too much time pursuing professional and skill development away from their research lab or topic of study. Consequently, it is important to clarify for the mentor and mentee why pursuing professional and skills development is important for the mentee. However, it should be at the front of mind for all mentors because professionals want mentees to join the field with a high level of success—and professional development is one of the means to fulfilling those aspirational goals.

Sometimes students are not interested in professional development—for example, going to and presenting at conferences or developing interpersonal and communication skills. Students must then be incentivized to do so because they do not see the value for their career



until it is too late. Early conversations about professional development could help them understand its importance. This actually goes back to earlier topics (see Meeting Expectations). The importance of determining and advising broader long-term goals and attaching professional development to this and recognizing that skills and professionalism is also part of the goal.

For this document, our working definition of professional development is *translating* discipline specific skills and broader communicative skills in ways that make someone marketable. Professional development could include development of specific skills that are transferable across fields of study, such as interpersonal and communication skills. It could also include development of skills specific to a field of study, such as computer coding and software training. Here, we offer a list of professional development examples:

- Conference attendance
- Poster presentations
- Podium presentations
- Methodology for research in your field
- New discoveries in your field
- Workshops (on pedagogy, grant writing, data analysis)
- Letter writing (including cover letters and thank you notes)
- Resume formatting
- Elevator pitch delivery—including the three minute thesis (3MT) at Rowan
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion training
- Software training
- Leadership skills and opportunities for practice
- Mentor skills and opportunities for practice
- Syllabus design
- Learning a new language
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

This list is not intended to be exhaustive, and we invite you to fill in the blank with additional examples of professional development that you consider to be impactful. A later section in this document on wellness and work-life balance will discuss personal development such as wellness, wellbeing, and personal finance (i.e. managing student loan debt).

A variety of professional development opportunities are available to educators seeking to enhance their skills and knowledge. Many universities, including Rowan, offer resources through their faculty centers, which host a range of offerings from workshops to seminars, often detailed on their websites and calendars. Additionally, Rowan provides access to the National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity ([NCFDD](#)), a resource-rich platform focusing on teaching and faculty development.<sup>14</sup> Beyond institutional support, most professional and honor societies also offer professional development opportunities, including workshops and interest groups, available in both virtual and in-person formats. Remind your mentees that they can connect with their undergraduate institution(s) as alumni and may find opportunities for professional growth through those engagements. Things such as speaking engagements as panelists aimed at current students could be valuable means for developing communication and interpersonal skills. Furthermore, resources such as the University of Wisconsin-Madison's site for professional development<sup>15</sup> serve as a valuable link for educators seeking comprehensive professional development ideas and descriptions. Other free resources include Khan academy, Udemy, Coursera and other micro-credentialing online resources.

Funding does exist to pay for professional development and avenues should be sought ahead of time by the mentor and mentee. Covering the costs associated with professional development can be achieved through various avenues. Foundations and professional associations often provide financial support for those looking to further their education or skills. Additionally, there are grants specifically designed for student travel to conferences and other professional development events. Some conferences offer to waive registration fees for students who apply for assistance or agree to serve as volunteers in roles such as room attendants, ushers, and other staffing positions during the event. Internal funding sources within Rowan, such as departmental and College/School budgets, the School of Graduate Studies, or other special initiative funds, also present viable options for covering professional development expenses.

In order to design professional and skill development goals and to evaluate whether these goals are being met, Individual Development Plans (IDPs) are useful tools. Several free versions of IDPs exist and are offered by AAAS (for the sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics disciplines) and by ImaginePhD (for the humanities and social science disciplines). The use of IDPs could be instrumental in highlighting and addressing any misunderstandings and misconceptions between students and their advisors. IDP utilization encourages students to think deliberately about their career goals and aspirations. Communicating their IDP with their mentor enables the student to foster a culture of open

communication to ensure both parties are aligned. Conflict between mentee and mentor's goals may be unveiled by these discussions—and we refer you to the section on *Managing Conflict* for ideas on how to manage challenging discussions on this topic. While the preparation of IDPs requires a significant investment of time, the benefits they offer in clarifying expectations and facilitating targeted professional growth make them a valuable tool in academic and professional development. When shared with other mentors in the constellation of mentors (mentor network), other mentors can help the mentee to navigate towards their career goals and incorporate professional development.



#### — IDP for Biological and Physical Sciences

**myIDP** is a web-based career planning tool, hosted by the AAAS, tailored to meet the needs of graduate students and postdocs in the sciences.



#### — IDP for Humanities and Social Sciences

**ImaginePhD** is a free online career exploration and planning tool for graduate students and postdoctoral scholars in the humanities and social sciences.

Images from <https://grad.wisc.edu/professional-development/>

The use of Individual Development Plans (IDPs) has become increasingly common in recent years to help mentees look beyond program progression and consider broader applications of their degrees. Currently, there are five options for IDPs available. These include:

1. IDPs developed "in-house" by the mentor/mentee, program, college, or school.
2. **American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS)** - [myIDP](#)
3. **American Chemical Society (ACS)** - [ChemIDP](#)
4. **American Psychological Association** - [APA IDP](#)
5. **ImaginePhD** for Humanities and Social Sciences - [Career exploration and planning tool](#)

Useful links for IDPs:

- **American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS)** - [myIDP](#)
- **American Chemical Society (ACS)** - [ChemIDP](#)
- **American Psychological Association** - [APA IDP](#)
- **ImaginePhD** for Humanities and Social Sciences - [Career exploration and planning tool](#)

Annual reports are retrospective and IDPs are forward looking and thus used for future planning. You are not obligated to use only the IDPs mentioned above. Check with your department, college, or school to see if there are resources for annual reviews and benchmarks that could serve as alternatives to these formal IDPs.

# Wellness and Work-Life Integration

Mentors should prioritize familiarizing themselves with the comprehensive “wellness infrastructure” available at Rowan, which encompasses various dimensions of wellness including mental, physical, financial, emotional/spiritual, purpose and community, and social aspects. Resources such as the First-Year Writing Resource, emergency/crisis guide, and syllabi statement examples provide valuable support for integrating wellness into teaching and student support efforts. Additionally, the establishment of a new Graduate Assistant position for Mental Health, Wellness, and Wellbeing underscores Rowan's commitment to promoting holistic wellness among its graduate student community. As the University works on developing a wellness strategic plan, mentors are encouraged to engage with available resources and initiatives to support the well-being of themselves and their students.

Participating in QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) training can equip mentors with the skills to recognize and respond to mentees in crisis, contributing to a safer and more supportive learning environment. Encouraging mentees to also undergo QPR training in a peer-to-peer support format can further enhance mental health support within the academic community. More information about QPR training at Rowan University can be found [here](#).

## **Work-life integration for faculty members**

Faculty members should prioritize their own well-being, recognizing that burnout is a prevalent phenomenon that can impact productivity and job satisfaction. Engaging in mentoring and providing guidance to graduate students can be fulfilling but also demanding; therefore, it is essential for faculty to establish boundaries and seek support when needed. One book that is worthwhile reading is called “[Unraveling Faculty Burnout](#)” by author Rebecca Pope-Ruark.<sup>16</sup>

Work-life integration for faculty members must be contextualized based on the differing power dynamics of tenure track and post-tenure faculty. With that in mind, the following tips for mentors to model are essential, no matter the stage in tenure process or rank. Faculty members should take advantage of the flexibility offered by their positions to prioritize their well-being and establish clear expectations with students and colleagues regarding boundaries, including managing after-hours communication. Emphasizing the importance of “paying yourself first” and setting boundaries to avoid overcommitment are crucial practices to uphold. Additionally, advocating against academic martyrdom and promoting self-care, including seeking support systems and opportunities for socialization with similar faculty,

fosters a healthier work environment. It is important to note that these strategies are negotiable and depend on individual circumstances and career stage. Participating in group activities related to health and wellness, as well as prioritizing self-care activities, can further reinforce these principles within the academic community. Some of these group activities can be found in Professional Learning Communities (read more [here](#)) sponsored by the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning here at Rowan University. Other groups will take on a less formal tone and could be simply a group of faculty and staff members getting together in an informal setting.

## Promoting Inclusion and Inclusive Mentorship

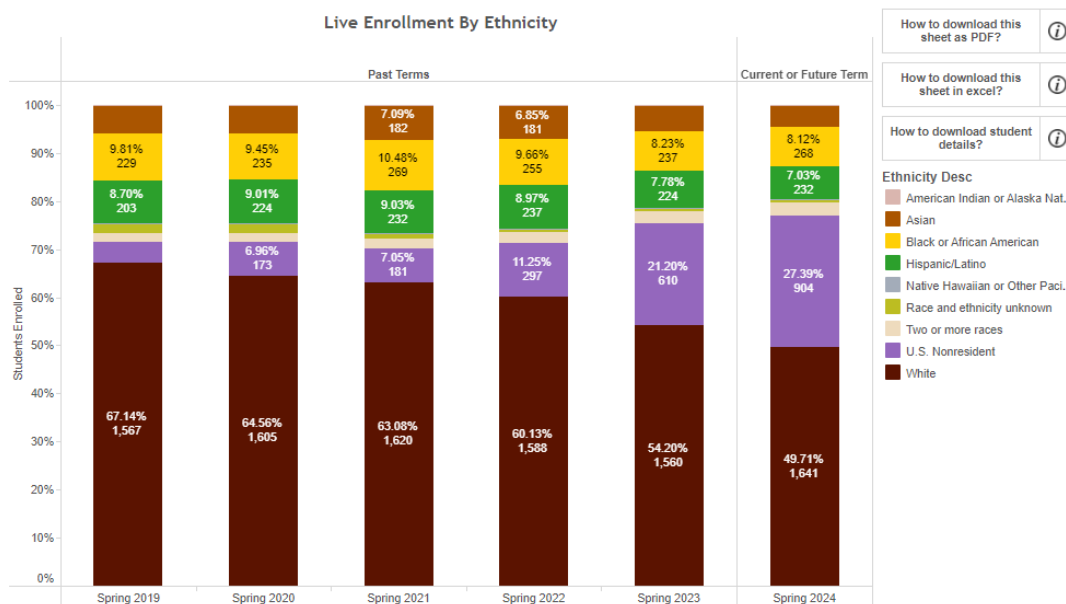
### **The Importance of Inclusive Mentorship**

Inclusion is not just a buzzword; it is a cornerstone of creating a thriving academic environment. The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) in its publication, *Achieving an Inclusive Graduate Community*, underscores why inclusiveness matters so deeply. According to CGS, diversity enriches the academic environment, bringing a wide range of perspectives that can enhance the learning experience for everyone. Inclusiveness is also crucial in a globalized world, as it prepares students to succeed in a diverse and interconnected global community.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, CGS reports that fostering an inclusive environment can lead to positive changes in curricula, ensuring that they reflect a broader range of experiences and knowledge systems. Diversity in research enriches methodologies and topics, providing new insights and innovations that may not emerge in a homogenous setting. Finally, inclusiveness is integral to fairness and access, which are fundamental to the mission of higher education.

At Rowan University, we are committed to these principles. As mentors, we can embody inclusiveness by valuing new perspectives on research topics and methods, and by being open to shifting our viewpoints. For example, the CGS booklet highlights the story of a Native American student who planted a new plant each time she took plant samples, honoring her heritage and native land.<sup>17</sup> Such practices remind us that there are diverse ways of knowing and producing knowledge, which should be respected and integrated into our academic practices.

Understanding the diversity of our graduate students at Rowan is crucial to fostering an inclusive environment. Rowan provides common dashboards to the campus community, allowing us to examine characteristics such as gender, commuter status, low-income status,

and first-generation status in our admissions and enrollment data. These tools can help mentors tailor our support and ensure that we are meeting the needs of all students. Below is a screenshot of the “Daily Enrollment” Dashboard showing all graduate students:



Screenshot of Enrollment Dashboard Collected on March 22, 2024

Inclusion at Rowan is not just a policy; it is part of our culture. By embracing inclusion, we can create a graduate community where all students feel valued, supported, and empowered to contribute their unique perspectives.

### What does Inclusion Mean to You?

Take a moment to reflect on what inclusion means to you. When you think of inclusion, what words or phrases come to mind? You might think of concepts such as “everyone feels that they belong,” “open door,” “accommodating,” or “understanding of one’s circumstances.” Perhaps you envision “everyone having a seat at the table,” not just a nominal one, but an active, participatory role where they are “given a chance to bring their entire self, express their ideas, and know that their contributions are valued.” Inclusion, by formal definition, refers to the practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized. It involves creating environments where everyone feels valued, respected, and supported, where differences are celebrated, and where each person has an equal opportunity to contribute and succeed.

As you consider this definition, think about how inclusion plays a role in your mentorship practices. Inclusive mentorship goes beyond simply allowing participation; it ensures that each mentee feels genuinely welcomed, respected, and encouraged to bring their full selves





inclusive with the practical limitations of what can be provided. Managing the diverse experiences and needs of students, particularly when these needs vary so widely, requires a nuanced approach that considers where students are in their academic journeys and in their lives. The question we face is how to manage and meet these varied needs in a way that truly embodies inclusivity, without overextending the resources and time available, yet ensuring that every student feels supported and valued.

### **Ideas for Creating an Inclusive Environment**

Creating an inclusive environment requires intentionality and a commitment to recognizing and meeting the diverse needs of all mentees. Here are some ideas to foster such an environment:

- **Active Listening and Open Communication:**
  - Encourage mentees to voice their needs, concerns, and ideas. Create safe spaces where they feel comfortable sharing their experiences without fear of judgment or retribution.
  - Regularly solicit feedback from mentees about how they experience the learning environment and what can be improved to make it more inclusive.
- **Flexible and Accessible Support Structures:**
  - Offer flexible scheduling and deadlines to accommodate mentees with varying life circumstances, such as those who are parents, caregivers, or working part-time.
  - Ensure that support services, such as mental health resources, academic advising, and career counseling, are accessible to all mentees, including those who may be part-time or have non-traditional schedules.
- **Representation and Visibility:**
  - Include diverse perspectives in the curriculum and invite guest speakers from various backgrounds and fields to provide different viewpoints.
  - Ensure that materials, examples, and case studies reflect the diversity of the student body and society at large.
- **Tailored Mentorship:**
  - Offer individualized mentorship that takes into account the unique backgrounds, identities, and goals of each mentee
  - Pair students with mentors who share similar experiences or can provide the specific support they need, whether related to academics, career development, or personal growth.



- **Cultural Competency Training:**
  - Consider taking (and suggesting your mentees take) training available at Rowan to faculty, staff, and students on cultural competency, unconscious bias, and inclusive teaching practices to better understand and respect the diverse backgrounds of all community members.
  - Encourage ongoing education and self-reflection on issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- **Building Community:**
  - Foster a sense of belonging by organizing events, workshops, and social activities that bring mentees together and celebrate diversity.
  - Refer mentees to affinity group organizations and other support networks where mentees can connect with others who share similar identities or experiences. At Rowan, we have many such organizations for students.
- **Equitable Resources Allocation:**
  - Advocate for and ensure that resources are allocated equitably, particularly in departments or programs where funding is limited.
  - Support initiatives that provide financial assistance, scholarships, or grants to students from underrepresented or marginalized groups.
- **Intersectional Approach:**
  - Recognize that mentees' experiences are shaped by multiple aspects of their identities, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and socioeconomic status.
  - Address the specific challenges that arise at the intersections of these identities and ensure that institutional policies and practices support mentees holistically.
- **Clear and Inclusive Policies:**
  - Communicate clearly the university policies that promote inclusivity, such as anti-discrimination policies, accommodations for disabilities, and guidelines for respectful behavior and student conduct.
  - Ensure that these policies are consistently enforced and that mentees know how to access support if they experience exclusion or discrimination.
- **Promoting Equity in Opportunities:**
  - Ensure that all mentees have access to opportunities such as internships, research positions, and leadership roles, regardless of their background or circumstances.
  - Actively seek to eliminate barriers that may prevent certain mentees from taking full advantage of these opportunities.

By implementing these strategies, institutions can create an environment where all student mentees feel valued, supported, and empowered to succeed.

### **How to Know You Have Created an Inclusive Environment**

Inclusive environments do not host the concepts of “deficit model thinking” or “competition over collaboration” (Lezotte 2023, *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*).<sup>18</sup> One effective way to gauge whether you have successfully created an inclusive environment is through climate surveys. These surveys, ideally administered in partnership with the Division of DEI and/or your college or school dean’s office, can provide valuable feedback on the inclusivity of your environment. Additionally, when individuals feel empowered to openly communicate with their advisor about their experiences and challenges, it is a strong indicator that the environment is inclusive. Reducing the sense of hierarchy within the mentor-mentee relationship further contributes to this sense of inclusion. Incorporating self-reflection at the end of the term, or during midterm assessments, can also be telling. Engaging in conversations based on questions like “What did you struggle with?” and “What do you need help with?” allows for deeper understanding and improvement. For greater honesty and participation, consider making these reflections anonymous and online, with the option for others to upvote responses, creating a collective dialogue on inclusion.

### **Equity Minded Mentoring**

The “Equity-Minded Mentoring Toolkit”<sup>19</sup> by Wofford, Burton, Dennin, and Gardner defines concepts like mentoring, equity, and equity-mindedness to provide a cohesive description of equity minded mentoring

## Equity Minded Mentoring

Another resource is the Equity-Minded Mentoring Toolkit drafted by Wofford, Burton, Dennin, and Gardner. In it, the authors provide some basic definitions of mentoring, equity, and equity-mindedness. They also note the reciprocal relationship of mentor-mentee but frame it in a way that focuses on addressing inequitable barriers. Just as a lot of factors contribute to your total self, those same factors define your mentee. Think about these contexts in order to better understand your mentee (and yourself!) and how you and your mentee can come to an understanding about how to meet their needs. Even if your beliefs differ from the student's condition and desire, you can still understand where the student's needs come from and prioritize those (we advocate prioritizing in *most* cases - if a belief system includes fundamental ideas of exclusion then refer to section two of this guidebook on how to mediate conflict).



### MENTORING

"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" (NASEM, 2019)

### EQUITY

The process of achieving parity in student educational outcomes, regardless of students' social identities (adapted from the Center for Urban Education)

### EQUITY-MINDEDNESS

The perspective exhibited by faculty, practitioners, and leaders who take responsibility for inequities and take action to address them (adapted from the Center for Urban Education)

[Link](#) to the *Equity-Minded Mentoring Toolkit* by Wofford, Burton, Dennin, and Gardner

They also offer various context for understanding the needs and background of your mentee. Briefly, those are: Personal, Organizational, Social and Emotional, Motivation and Engagement, and Executive Functioning Skills. The image below, from page seven of the [toolkit](#), provides bullet points for further details of these attributes.

## PERSONAL CONTEXT

- Cultural background and self-identification
- Primary language and any other languages spoken
- Interests/strengths/extracurricular activities
- Homelife factors

## ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

- Institutional policies shaping one's role
- Perception of organizational structure (e.g., institutional hierarchy)
- Organizational expectations that define "success"
- Access to beneficial resources or networks in one's field

## SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS

- Peer status and relationships
- Self-awareness
- Ability to communicate thoughts and feelings effectively
- Ability to work effectively in group settings
- Resilience and perseverance

## MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT

- Primary methods for:
  - Acquiring, engaging, and expressing information
  - Seeking and offering help
  - Giving and receiving feedback
- Motivations
- Ideal learning conditions

## EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING SKILLS


- Planning, organization, and goal-setting
- Reflection and self-monitoring
- Short-term memory
- Flexible thinking
- Ability to focus and remain on task
- Perspective-taking

Remember that as mentor, you do not need to be the only individual who provides students with resources:

“Mentees should not expect one mentor to meet all of their needs (thus prompting the benefit of having multiple mentors)” (Wofford et al, p. 13).<sup>19</sup> “Prior scholarship has shown that, in a workplace setting, individuals with multiple mentors experienced

enhanced commitment to their organization, job satisfaction, and clarity of career expectations” (Baugh & Scandura, 2000).<sup>20</sup>

The template below (adopted from Wofford et al.<sup>19</sup>) may help you document available resources for your mentee:

	<b>Safe Space</b>	<b>Emotional Support</b>	<b>Accountability</b>	<b>Intellectual Community</b>
	1. _____	1. _____	1. _____	1. _____
	2. _____	2. _____	2. _____	2. _____
	3. _____	3. _____	3. _____	3. _____
	4. _____	4. _____	4. _____	4. _____
<b>Professional Development</b>	<b>Access to Opportunities</b>	<b>Substantive Feedback</b>	<b>Possible Milestone Committee Members</b>	
1. _____	1. _____	1. _____	1. _____	
2. _____	2. _____	2. _____	2. _____	
3. _____	3. _____	3. _____	3. _____	
4. _____	4. _____	4. _____	4. _____	

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6. Gail Lunsford, L and Baker V. L. (2016). Great Mentoring in Graduate School: A Quick Start Guide for Protégés. Council of Graduate Studies.
7. NCFDD Mentor Map. Website: <https://ncfdd-production-file-uploads.s3.amazonaws.com/media/5c2/Mentor%20Map.pdf> (last accessed on August 16, 2024).
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13. Presentation by Katharine Stewart, Sr. Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs at NC State at the Council on Graduate Schools Annual Meeting, Dec 6 2023.  
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Stewart Consulting: <https://katharinestewartconsulting.com> ).

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## Appendix I: List of Mentor Guides from Other Institutions

1. Mentoring Graduate Students: A Practical Guide by Kathy Ketchum  
[https://issuu.com/northeasterncollegeofscience/docs/nu-mentor\\_guide--102721](https://issuu.com/northeasterncollegeofscience/docs/nu-mentor_guide--102721)
2. U of Michigan Rackham Graduate School: How to Mentor Graduate Students: a Guide for Faculty - <https://rackham.umich.edu/downloads/how-to-mentor-graduate-students.pdf>
3. North Carolina State University Mentoring Guide for Graduate Students - <https://grad.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/The-University-of-Michigans-Guide-for-Graduate-Students.pdf>
4. University of Colorado at Denver - guide for faculty - [https://www.ucdenver.edu/docs/librariesprovider149/default-document-library/how-to-mentor-graduate-students.pdf?sfvrsn=3a6637b9\\_2](https://www.ucdenver.edu/docs/librariesprovider149/default-document-library/how-to-mentor-graduate-students.pdf?sfvrsn=3a6637b9_2)
5. University of Maryland Mentoring Guide - <https://www.combine.umd.edu/peer-to-peer-tutorials/undergradmentoring/>
6. Duke University Mentoring Guide - <https://gradschool.duke.edu/professional-development/mentoring/>
7. Vanderbilt University Mentoring Guide - <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/mentoring-graduate-students/>



## Appendix II: Additional Useful Resources

1. Teaching Matters : A Guide for Graduate Students, Aeron Haynie and Stephanie Spong, 2022, West Virginia University Press. Read online here:  
<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/rowan/detail.action?docID=29094365&pq-origsite=primo>
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<https://doi.org/10.1177/0092055X13507781>
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<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9781003448655/inclusive-instructors-mallory-sorelle-buffie-longmire-avital-tracie-marcella-addy-derek-dube-khadijah-mitchell>
4. Professional Development Content by the University of Wisconsin -  
<https://grad.wisc.edu/professional-development/>
5. This isn't about graduate students in particular, but perhaps a resource to considering referencing?: Mentoring BIPOC in a University Setting
6. NC State University's content on Conflict Management:  
<https://counseling.dasa.ncsu.edu/support-and-resources/self-help-resources/conflict-resolution/>
7. Mentor discussion of alignment of goals and expectations at UW Institute for Clinical and Translational Research (ICTR): <https://ictr.wisc.edu/mentoring/> and <https://ictr.wisc.edu/mentoring/mentees-alignment-phase-resources/>
8. Center for the Improvement of Mentored Experience in Research (CIMER):  
<https://cimerproject.org/>

## Appendix III: Example Mentor-Mentee Agreements

- **ASPIRE Research Group Advising Guide prepared by Dr. Justin Major, Rowan University Henry M. Rowan College of Engineering link [here](#)**