

# Pay it Forward: Guidance for Mentoring Junior Scholars

UPDATED EDITION, SEPTEMBER 2017

Forum for Youth Investment  
William T. Grant Foundation

Alicia Wilson-Ahlstrom

Nalini Ravindranath

Nicole Yohalem

Vivian Tseng

---

*Pay it Forward: Guidance for Mentoring Junior Scholars*  
Updated Edition

September 2017

Forum for Youth Investment  
William T. Grant Foundation

Alicia Wilson-Ahlstrom  
Nalini Ravindranath  
Nicole Yohalem  
Vivian Tseng

**Suggested Citation:**

Wilson-Ahlstrom, A., Ravindranath, R., Yohalem, N., &  
Tseng, V. (2017). *Pay it Forward: Guidance for Mentoring  
Junior Scholars* (updated edition). Washington, DC: The  
Forum for Youth Investment.

## **CONTENTS**

### **Mentoring and the William T. Grant Foundation, I**

Preface, II

Introduction, 1

### **Building and Maintaining Mentoring Relationships, 3**

Develop Explicit Agreements, 3

Create a Comprehensive Mentoring Plan, 3

Protect Mentoring Time, 4

Consider Mentoring in Group Settings, 4

Resources: Creating Mentoring Plans and Agreements, 6

Resources: Mentoring Early-Career Scholars, 7

### **Mentoring Across Difference, 8**

Acknowledge Context, 9

Encourage and Broker Additional Mentoring Relationships, 10

Consider How Race and Identity Influence Career Decisions, 10

Develop Your Own Cultural Competency, 11

Resources: Mentoring Across Difference, 12

### **Supporting Career Development, 13**

Broker Access, 14

Create a Career Development Plan, 14

Develop and Review a Skills Inventory, 14

Prepare Your Mentee to Assume the Role of Colleague, 14

Collaborate With Your Mentee, 15

Discuss Work-Life Balance, 15

Develop Effective Task Prioritization and Time Management, 16

Encourage Broad Thinking About Career Options, 16

Resources: Early-Career Development, 18

Resources: Addressing Work/Life Balance, 19

### **Managing Conflict, 20**

Anticipate Potential Conflicts, 20

Revisit Underlying Structures and Agreements, 21

Identify Solutions, 21

Seek Outside Help and Support, 21

Resources: Communication Through Conflict, 22

**Conclusion, 23**

## MENTORING AND THE WILLIAM T. GRANT FOUNDATION

**T**he William T. Grant Foundation supports research to improve the lives of young people. The long-term success of our work depends on the energy, talent, and success of junior scholars, and we view strong mentoring as key supports for them.

Since 1982, the Foundation has invested in the development of promising early-career researchers through the William T. Grant Scholars Program. Scholars propose an ambitious program of work that will expand their expertise and skills; and they rely on the support and guidance of strong mentors to help them succeed. In 2005, we began to provide these Scholars with supplemental awards to support them in becoming stronger mentors themselves. We are also focused on ensuring high-quality training and mentoring for researchers of color. Our goals are for Scholars to become stronger mentors and develop a better understanding of the career development issues facing their junior colleagues of color. We also hope to increase to a modest extent the number of strong, well-networked researchers of color doing work on the Foundation's research interests.

The Forum for Youth Investment has been a partner in our efforts to support Scholars in becoming effective mentors. The Forum is a nonprofit, nonpartisan "action tank" dedicated to helping communities and the nation make sure all young people are Ready by 21<sup>®</sup>—ready for college, work, and life.

This mentoring guide features knowledge gleaned from interviews with Scholars and their mentees, their progress reports to the Foundation, our mentoring workshops, and a review of selected literature.

We hope you find the insights useful for your own mentoring.

---

## PREFACE

**I**n 2010, we wrote *Pay It Forward*, a guide on mentoring in academic settings. Written for both mentors and mentees, it provided guidance, ideas, and resources on mentoring junior scholars, with a special focus on mentoring across difference. The guide was inspired by the William T. Grant Foundation's program to support early- and mid-career researchers in mentoring their junior colleagues of color. The rich dialogue between mentors and mentees in annual meetings; grantees' program reports on their challenges, successes, and lessons learned; and follow-up interviews with mentors and mentees provided important source material for the guide. The clear patterns in their discourse and their desire for additional resources that they could take back to their home institutions motivated our development of *Pay It Forward* to benefit our grantees as well as the broader field.

Since 2005, the William T. Grant Foundation has supported 43 dyads with mentoring grants and annual convenings on mentoring and career development. In the last several years, we have invited additional grantees and their mentees of color to attend the annual convenings. To date, over 120 mentors and mentees have participated in these convenings on mentoring and career development. The Foundation was initially motivated by a desire to strengthen the pipeline for junior scholars of color coming up in the academy. We soon realized the importance of also helping mentors—both White and racial/ethnic minority—to develop their own skills and knowledge to successfully support their junior colleagues. Thus the Foundation's mentoring program includes a balanced focus on growth for both mentees and mentors.

From the beginning, the Forum for Youth Investment has been a critical partner in organizing meaningful discussions on the general challenges

and rewards of mentoring, as well as the particular dynamics involved in mentoring across difference. In 2017—under the direction of Vivian Louie, the new manager of the Foundation’s mentoring program—we updated *Pay It Forward*, named in recognition of the important compact that mentoring in the academy represents for mentors and mentees.

The new guide has been reformatted to reflect a contemporary look, and the resources have been updated. Specifically, we have updated existing links and added new resources published since the first publication. These resources include:

- Compacts and mentoring plans
- Career development resources
- Guidance for mentoring across difference
- Resources for managing conflict
- Resources for managing work/life balance.

Since the inception of the mentoring program, we have seen tremendous growth in the number of resources devoted to mentoring, including by institutions developing guidance for mentors and mentees at their universities. Many of those resources are included here. We are heartened by these developments and remain committed to building both individual and institutional capacity to support effective mentoring for junior scholars from different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

**—Vivian Tseng & Alicia Wilson-Ahlstrom**  
**August, 2017**

---

# Introduction

---

Having a good mentor early in a scholarly career can mean the difference between success and failure. It is striking that such an important activity in the training of new scholars has had few established definitions of effective practice. Many who take on the responsibility of mentoring do so without a primer, drawing on informal resources and personal mentoring experiences. We hope this resource helps change that, by addressing many of the common questions and dilemmas mentors face and identifying specific strategies and resources that can help you develop your own mentoring skills.

The guide addresses four themes: 1) building and maintaining mentoring relationships, 2) mentoring across difference, 3) supporting career development, and 4) managing conflict within mentoring relationships. While the experiences and reflections of individuals connected to the William T. Grant Foundation's Scholars Program are woven throughout the guide, the strategies and resources included here are relevant for any mentor or advisor, particularly those working in academic settings with graduate students and postdoctoral fellows.

The first theme, building and maintaining mentoring relationships, examines the foundations of a strong mentoring dyad. Early and ongoing communication is essential; a solid beginning supports the relationship and often sets the stage for collaboration after the mentee joins the professional ranks of the research community.

The second theme focuses on mentoring across difference, an important topic that is addressed too infrequently. This guide is only a starting point for acknowledging how and where social and interpersonal differences impact mentoring relationships and research careers. Many types of difference, including gender, sexuality, and social class, can play a role in mentoring relationships. In this document, we focus primarily on mentoring across racial and ethnic differences, but we hope some of the strategies and resources may be helpful for mentors and mentees dealing with other important differences.

Career development, the third theme, is one that may consume a substantial portion of time and energy in any effort to mentor an early-career scholar. Good mentoring can make a critical difference in shaping early career decisions. Several researchers who were mentored by William T. Grant Scholars credit that experience with positioning them to confidently explore a range of options and transition smoothly into their first professional appointments.

Lastly, managing conflict, the fourth theme, is critical to relationship building. Because conflicts do arise between mentors and mentees, the best defense is to prepare for the possibility in a realistic and straightforward way. Most mentoring dyads survive bumps, big and small, with preparation and discussion about the potential for conflict and a willingness to re-examine communication.

Good mentoring involves ongoing skill development and personal and professional growth for mentors as well as mentees. It is also important to remember that mentoring benefits both members of a dyad. Developing competent junior colleagues that work with you as graduate students and postdocs is valuable to your own research career. We hope this guide will be useful as you hone your scholarship while actively contributing to the development of future scholars.

---



# Building and Maintaining Mentoring Relationships

---

Good mentoring is not always easy to achieve. It requires work and commitment from both members of the dyad. Mentors and mentees we interviewed underscored the importance of establishing structures for the mentoring relationship. The basic commitment to the relationship already exists: each of you has a stake in developing a productive, mutually beneficial partnership. One of the first tasks is to turn that shared commitment into explicit, fully developed expectations related to meeting times, work plans, work products, and communication.

This section highlights how others have approached building and structuring solid mentoring relationships with their junior colleagues. We discuss strategies for setting expectations, protecting mentoring time and structuring that time effectively.

## Develop Explicit Agreements

One former mentor took a very intentional approach to setting relationship goals and priorities with her mentee. She devoted the first couple of meetings to establishing “norms” for the relationship and discussing expected work products and deliverables. Establishing an underlying structure reduced the likelihood of ill-defined or unproductive meetings. The transparency allowed this mentoring team to put most issues squarely

on the table, minimizing misaligned assumptions and conflicts related to products, progress or process. It may be useful to discuss the following areas during your first few meetings:

- When and how often you will meet;
- Norms for communicating with each other, both in-person and via phone or email;
- Plans for how to give and receive feedback;
- Expectations related to work deliverables, including firm deadlines and timetables for completing work;
- Expectations about the quality of work products; and
- When and how you will revisit, clarify and/or renegotiate expectations as the relationship progresses.

## Create a Comprehensive Mentoring Plan

A written plan serves as a compact between mentor and mentee and is a useful tool for guiding interactions. Mentoring dyads have found it particularly useful to revisit their mentoring plan periodically to discuss how the mentee is progressing and whether adjustments need to be made.

Though we recommend that dyads look into their own institutional resources first, numerous templates do exist for mentoring plans. In the list of resources

on “Creating Mentoring Plans and Agreements,” we provide links to a compact, a mentoring plan outline, an individual development plan, a template outlining mentor expectations (example based on a postdoctoral appointment), a training checklist, and accompanying resources.

In your initial interactions, consider that your mentee may not have been formally mentored before (though they likely had an advisor) and that the mentoring they have received could differ considerably from your own experience. In that context, your mentee may or may not know what they want to get out of their mentoring experience or how to negotiate expectations. Discussing any past mentoring experiences with your mentee—including what worked and what didn’t—may be useful for developing your joint expectations.

## Protect Mentoring Time

Mentors and mentees we interviewed emphasized the importance of protecting regular meeting times. “My advice for future cohorts,” one mentor offered, “would be for them to really protect their work time together. They should have a weekly meeting from the beginning and set clear expectations from each person.”

One mentoring dyad used their meetings as joint working sessions: part study hall; part creative collaboration. Throughout their mentoring relationship, they set aside one day a week to get work done together. “The time really allowed us to get to know each other’s work styles better, and we both benefitted from the kind of feedback that the working sessions allowed,” the mentor explained. This arrangement allowed them to discuss work plans regularly and make consistent joint progress. It also provided a practical way

to keep work commitments, adding positive pressure to make deadlines and move forward. This structured, protected time allowed the pair to work productively, strengthened their relationship, and facilitated a natural transition to a collegial relationship once the mentee accepted her first faculty appointment. Setting aside a full day for joint working sessions may not be feasible for every mentoring arrangement. However, the principles underlying this strategy—protected time and joint work—are important for every mentoring relationship.

## Consider Mentoring in Group Settings

Finding ways to be a good mentor in the context of time constraints and heavy workloads presents serious challenges. While it will never replace one-on-one interactions, mentoring within a group context—a research lab, writing group, or seminar—is a strategy to consider as you balance your own career needs. In such group contexts, work toward cultivating peer mentoring relationships among students and postdoctoral fellows that result in mutual support, exchange of ideas, and help building new skills and expertise. Establishing a culture of collegiality and modeling collaborative behaviors can help shape the professional growth of junior colleagues.

One former mentor discussed the advantages of group mentoring. “I used to show students my analyses, and then they’d go off on their own. Some would follow up in individual sessions, but I realized that a lot of students would go off, hit hurdles in their analyses, and not discuss it individually. They wouldn’t know what to do, not realizing I face the same hurdles. So I’ve used labs to have them observe my process and talk it through. It’s reduced anxiety and made one-on-one mentoring more effective when they do come in. It’s opened my eyes to

what students do and do not know. That makes meeting time more productive, and provides a non-threatening way to make sure the bases are covered.”

In another approach, one mentor devoted a portion of group meeting time with her advisees to discussing a common reading related to professional development goals (e.g. *The Compleat Academic*)<sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup>Darby, J., Zanna, M., & Roediger, H. (2004). *The compleat academic: A career guide, 2nd Ed.* American Psychological Association. Washington, DC.

## RESOURCES: CREATING MENTORING PLANS AND AGREEMENTS

At the beginning of a mentoring relationship, one early task for mentors and mentees is to create a mentoring plan and develop agreements about how each individual will contribute to the relationship. Mentoring dyads can turn to a range of resources on graduate and faculty mentoring, including planning templates, toolkits, compacts and sample agreements. Many institutions have their own mentoring toolkits or guides. However, if your institution does not have an appropriate set of resources, the following list may help:

---

### **How to Mentor Graduate Students: A Guide for Faculty**

A comprehensive introduction to graduate level mentoring, produced by the University of Michigan.

---

### **Postdoctoral Mentoring and Advising Toolkit**

MIT developed this toolkit to guide postdoctoral mentoring dyads. The toolkit provides resources on developing a mentoring plan, structuring initial meetings, annual reviews, and career planning development.

---

### **Individual Development Plans and Progress Assessment Resources**

UCLA has developed a suite of tools aimed at improving postdoctoral scholar and faculty mentor relations.

---

### **Sample Mentors' Expectation Letter**

This sample mentoring agreement outlining responsibilities, benefits, and roles for a post-doctoral appointment was developed at UC San Diego.

## RESOURCES: MENTORING EARLY-CAREER SCHOLARS

Mentoring is fundamental for ensuring that new scholars enter, progress with, and eventually make important contributions to research. Mentors' ability to provide thoughtful and effective guidance is critical to scholars' early development.

---

### Faculty Mentoring Models and Effective Practice

This report prepared by the Hanover Research group reviews faculty mentoring models and outlines strategies for effective mentoring.

---

### Academic Advancement Network Resources for Faculty Mentoring

This web page, maintained by Michigan State University, provides resources on faculty mentoring for a range of mentoring circumstances, including mentoring across difference.

---

### Ball State University New Faculty Mentoring Guide

This guide is aimed at mentoring for new faculty, offering practical guidance around mentoring on key tasks in the first year that new faculty must master.

---

### Brigham and Women's Hospital Mentoring Curriculum & Toolkit

This toolkit was developed to help mentors and mentees navigate the challenges of mentoring relationships. Employing case sketches, readings and other resources, the toolkit aims to help mentors and mentees develop productive mentoring relationships.

---

### Making the Right Moves: A Practical Guide for Scientific Management for Postdocs and New Faculty

This resource from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute presents considerations for researchers responsible for labs and research teams, emphasizing the value of mentoring as a management tool. Additionally, the guide offers guidance on managing groups in a research setting.

---

### Choosing a Mentor

This PowerPoint presentation reviews factors to consider in selecting an academic mentor.

# Mentoring Across Difference

---

Given the dearth of people of color in high level faculty positions, mentoring relationships with junior scholars of color are often cross-racial. It is useful to consider the ways race affects mentoring and career development in these cross-racial relationships. In same-race relationships, it also can be valuable to consider ways to better support junior colleagues of color. The academy can be a very isolating place for any early-career scholar and, due to their limited numbers, scholars of color may experience this isolation more acutely. You can work to mitigate this isolation by helping your mentee develop the professional skills and political savvy necessary to successfully navigate an academic career, while also considering ways to make your institution and field a more equitable place.

Race often has significant social and personal impact on researchers, and it is important to acknowledge this within mentoring relationships. For many of us who care about racial and ethnic diversity, it can be easy to assume that we already “know this stuff.” But it is useful for all of us to question what we think we know and be open to recognizing that we are sometimes wrong. Asking hard questions about your work with students and colleagues is not routinely rewarded in most institutions, but reflecting on these issues can be an extremely worthwhile investment in your own mentoring.

The “Mentoring Across Difference” resources focus on mentoring across difference and becoming an ally to and resource for mentees of color.

Mentors can play a vital role in facilitating a more inclusive environment and connecting mentees to an institution’s academic culture. To effectively mentor across difference, mentors must understand the challenges mentees of color often face, help them navigate such challenges, and show them how to adapt the lessons learned to their professional (and sometimes personal) goals. While no two individuals think about racial identity the same way, it is likely that your mentee has thought about his or her racial identity in the context of academia. Mentees we interviewed have experienced each of the following scenarios:

- Mentees described wondering about whether they’d be the only person of color in a cohort and what kinds of experiences they would have as a person of color in their department. At their departmental visits, they may have experienced relief (or disappointment) at the racial composition of their cohort and/or the faculty.
- While balancing professional pursuits with personal ones is a challenge for every scholar, your mentee may feel there are few models for scholars of color.

Concerns related to their racial identities have been challenged or dismissed by faculty and other students.

- Treatment from a senior colleague was so hostile that a mentee approached a mentor about plans to initiate a discrimination law suit. The time spent dealing with those issues took significant time and attention away from their work.

A deeper investigation into the experiences of scholars of color across the social science disciplines would likely reveal many more examples. Given these kinds of experiences, mentors and mentees suggest that some acknowledgment of race affirms the mentee's experience and can be critical to opening up a supportive and productive discussion of race.

You can start discussing the very different social experience that your mentee may face as a person of color in your academic institution. Doing so can go a long way towards connecting with them personally and building trust. What next? The answer depends, in part, on your own racial identity. Mentors of color are often assumed to “get it,” and may be sought out to share their own insights (sometimes on issues with which they have no direct experience). White mentors may have to approach the topic differently, acknowledging their openness to discussing race. Acknowledging how your own racial identity and experiences may shape the dynamics you develop with your mentee is also an important step in encouraging open communication and a productive working relationship.

## **Acknowledge Context**

While your relationship with your mentee will be developed mainly on an interpersonal level, it is also

impacted by institutional and cultural systems that influence behaviors, expectations, and privileges related to race. Recognizing that race matters means acknowledging those influences, challenging yourself to understand your own reactions to them, discussing the specific experiences of your mentee, and speaking up on issues that negatively affect your mentee.

One way to respect how issues and experiences of race may be different for your mentee than for most others in their cohort is to acknowledge the narrower band of acceptable behaviors allowed racial minorities. For example, a working style called “assertive” when exhibited by a senior academic might be labeled “angry” when adopted by a junior colleague of color. Don't assume all advice will be helpful, and consider qualifying advice with thoughts such as “this approach worked for me, but may not work the same for you.” This provides guidance without assuming that an approach is right for the mentee.

One White mentor dealt with issues of race in her work with an African American student, whom she saw was not approaching her for help partly because she did not want to affirm negative stereotypes. “This graduate student had a hard time showing her weaknesses, and she was struggling with writing skills. She thought I was a great writer, and she didn't want me to see her work. So there was this avoidance process that I was slow to recognize because she was bright, personable, and always put such a good face forward. Race made it harder for me to talk initially to her, and harder for her to admit a problem.” To address this, the mentor put more energy into building their relationship—trying to better understand the student and building trust. With that foundation, they were eventually able to address the writing challenges. The student gained essential



writing skills and the mentor a valuable framework for navigating difference while addressing a common mentoring issue.

## **Encourage and Broker Additional Mentoring Relationships**

One of the best investments of time junior scholars can make early in their careers is to establish several strong mentoring relationships. Having a range of mentors provides multiple perspectives and different skills and expertise. The networking and follow-through needed to establish multiple mentoring relationships can be taught to mentees. Sharing how you have successfully developed relationships with new mentors and what you gained can provide insight and help your mentee approach such relationships strategically. Additionally, when appropriate, you might broker one or more of these relationships with colleagues you think might work well with your mentee. You could also help your mentee recognize and make the most of the resources the new mentor has.

## **Consider How Race and Identity Influence Career Decisions**

Early career decisions are quite often leaps of faith. Those leaps may feel even greater when race enters the equation. For some mentees, such considerations will be muted; for others, they will factor in much more prominently. As doctoral students, mentees may struggle with what research to pursue. If they conduct “applied” research or study topics considered outside the “mainstream,” they may be concerned that their scholarship will be marginalized. If your mentee’s research focuses on their own ethnic or identity group, they could have similar concerns. At a different point

in their career, they may doubt how their scholarship is being received, particularly if there is a scant history of people of color advancing in their department or field.

Wherever your mentee is in their professional development, normal doubts and concerns may intersect with his or her experiences of race. Helping your mentee assess their progress and work and make decisions based on that assessment can counteract those doubts. However, it is also important to validate such feelings and provide an opening for discussing departmental politics, the unwritten rules of your institution, and the skills your mentee needs to navigate them.

The job search is another major decision point in which race and other factors related to identity play a role. When considering various opportunities, your mentee may be wary of jobs in communities in which there are few people of color, or at institutions or in departments with a poor record of supporting diversity. In other cases, cultural values prioritizing family proximity may conflict with the norms of academia that dictate that young scholars should be flexible about the location of academic appointments. Given the realities of the job market, it is important for junior scholars to gain skills and experiences (e.g., developing outside networks, collaborating with colleagues on publications) that will help them navigate less supportive environments, including those with scant histories of hiring or retaining faculty of color. You can be instrumental in helping your mentee sort through these issues, reflect on which environments might be more or less supportive, and identify tools they will need to launch their career in a range of settings.

One mentee decided to limit her job search to her home state given the importance of family proximity.



She was worried that her mentor would interpret this decision as “lack of ambition” and was conflicted about how to approach the mentor for advice. The mentor broached the topic first and was able to help the mentee launch an effective in-state job search. Communicating that you are interested in discussing these kinds of considerations—perhaps by sharing a story of making your own non-traditional career choice or struggling with similar concerns—can help your mentee navigate a non-traditional path or deal with personal constraints as a serious scholar.

## **Develop Your Own Cultural Competency**

Mentors and mentees should work toward a level of comfort that allows both to candidly share their insights and challenges related to difference. Though, as the mentor, you should also seek out other opportunities to become a stronger ally to junior colleagues of color. If your mentee is going through a set of challenging experiences, they may not be in a position to help you figure out how to best mentor them through those experiences. More importantly, it may be helpful for your mentee to know that they are not alone in thinking about and raising issues that affect them personally. The “Mentoring Across Difference” resources may be useful, but there may also be relevant forums and workshops available at or near your institution. Maintaining and developing relationships in which a variety of culturally connected perspectives are heard deepens your capacity to be an ally.

While this guide focuses on the role of race in mentoring relationships, it is critically important to keep in mind that other issues, including differences related to gender, social class, and sexuality, are also relevant in mentoring relationships. What is perhaps most important to keep

in mind as you navigate this terrain is the value of acknowledging how your experiences differ from those of your mentee. Helping your mentee develop the skills and savvy to navigate the culture and norms of the academic context is crucial, and doing that effectively means understanding and acknowledging how they experience that context and how their experience differs from yours.

---

## RESOURCES: MENTORING ACROSS DIFFERENCE

Mentoring across lines of difference requires additional understanding and effort. It can be difficult for both mentor and mentee to fully appreciate how and when difference matters, especially since it is not the central focus of your working relationship. The resources listed here, which are useful for mentoring junior scholars of color, offer a starting point for thinking about difference in the context of your relationship.

---

### **The Truth about Mentoring Minorities—Race Matters**

David Thomas' 2001 article in *Harvard Business Review* has made its way onto several academic mentoring resource pages. The article outlines strategies for supporting mentees of color, but also discusses why career trajectories can stall or plateau before these scholars advance to the highest levels of the profession.

---

### **Brigham and Women's Hospital Mentoring Curriculum & Toolkit—Mentoring Across Differences**

Part of a larger toolkit, BWH's resources on mentoring across difference employs case sketches, readings and other resources. The toolkit aims to help mentors and mentees develop productive mentoring relationships.

---

### **Cross-race Faculty Mentoring**

This 2005 article by Christine Stanley and Yvonna Lincoln appears in the journal *Change* (2005), and provides a concrete narrative about a cross-race faculty mentoring relationship, offering specific lessons.

---

### **Surviving and Thriving in Academia: A Guide for Members of Marginalized Groups**

This guide summarizes the landscape of academia, relating current trends to challenges frequently experienced by scholars of color. Taking this landscape in, the guide presents factors to consider in assessing institutions, marketing oneself, and how to navigate professional challenges as a person of color.

---

### **The Pod: A New Model for Mentoring Underrepresented Minority Faculty**

This article presents a model involving peer, onsite, and distance mentors as part of a targeted mentoring experience. While designed for an academic medical setting, the POD model provides a framework that could be applied to other settings that aim to provide comprehensive support to meet the varied needs of minority junior faculty.

# Supporting Career Development

---

It takes a range of skills, developed over time, to effectively guide someone toward a successful career path. Mentors can serve as coach, career counselor, champion, confidante, and critic. Most of us have natural gifts in at least one of these areas, but need mentoring ourselves to master them all.

It is important to provide guidance and support to your mentees as they grow in their careers. Several resources—including journal articles and tool kits developed by universities—outline the essential role of mentors. One resource cited by several dyads interviewed for this guide is an article by David Sackett on the determinants of academic success for mentees. Sackett discusses the value of four things: resources, opportunities, advice, and protection.

## **Resources**

Mentors should make sure mentees have access to basic resources, which include productivity enhancing equipment and technology (e.g., computer software and applications, office equipment), funding to attend meetings and conferences, and other forms of support that facilitate strong research.

## **Opportunities**

Mentors should seek opportunities for their mentee to participate in professional activities and contribute to the advancement of knowledge in their field.

## **Advice**

Mentors should offer frequent opportunities and a supportive environment for junior colleagues to thoroughly process choices, think through methodological challenges, and weigh the pros and cons of specific courses of action and possible collaborations.

## **Protection**

Mentors should provide a reasonable buffer from the demands placed on new scholars and insulate them from any negative behaviors by other academics. They should help mentees decipher and decode hidden rules and provide effective guidance for navigating the politics of the scholarly community.

---

<sup>2</sup> Sackett, D. (2001). On the determinants of academic success. *Clinical Investigative Medicine*, 24(2), 94-100.

Beginning with this list, Sackett delineates the qualities of a good mentor and the range of roles that mentors play. In this section, we discuss specific strategies that can help you fulfill these roles, particularly in the context of supporting the career development of your junior colleagues.

### **Broker Access**

Early career development decisions can have a long-term impact on success. Providing information about how to approach career development, generally—and the first job, specifically—can make a difference in your mentee’s career trajectory. You can share your own career story, particularly decision points and instances of accomplishment and failure. Hearing a narrative that highlights the ups and downs of the career development process will allay common concerns of young scholars. Finally, share the tacit rules of being a successful scholar. Demystify the culture of the work environment and provide specific information on topics such as how to approach a scholar whose work interests you and navigating departmental politics.

### **Create a Career Development Plan**

Even first year doctoral students can—and should—begin to articulate their career goals, as this will provide a plan for time spent as a student. Throughout their graduate school tenure, doctoral students should make an intentional plan to prepare themselves for the job market by participating in professional opportunities. Mentors and mentees we talked with recommend an “early and often” approach to career planning—prepare for the next career stage early and update documents (such as your CV) often. For example, one mentor recommends having students attend job talks by other colleagues well before they begin their job search.

At each stage in their training, the mentor can use the mentee’s career plan as a gateway for discussing and analyzing the skills necessary to pursue certain paths. Worksheets and guides for creating career plans are available from many sources. Some are referenced here, but you should also connect mentees to resources within their own institutions. Information should flow both ways between mentor and mentee. Just as it is important for mentors to offer information on career development, mentees should be encouraged to initiate dialogue about how their professional goals are developing, changing, and being enriched over time. It is common for emerging scholars’ career plans to shift as they become further acculturated into academia.

### **Develop and Review a Skills Inventory**

At the start of the mentoring relationship, consider conducting a skills inventory with your mentee. The assessment should include their current skills (including both technical and “soft” skills such as collaboration and conflict resolution), strengths, gaps, and areas for growth. It should be based on long-term career goals, but should be revisited on a regular basis, especially if the mentee’s career interests shift. The inventory can address skills needed for careers outside of academia as well. This process will also help mentors identify mentoring needs and target resources to achieve short- and long-term career development goals.

### **Prepare Your Mentee to Assume the Role of Colleague**

Over time, your support should help your mentee assume the eventual relationship they will have with you—that of a peer. The nuances of this shift are not always apparent to students. Demystifying the process by exposing behind-the-scenes dynamics can help.

One mentee, now a faculty member, credited his ability to pursue independent research and manage a research project to his mentor's support. He described the "tremendous head start" he had when it came to the varied tasks and responsibilities expected of new faculty. His mentor was particularly thoughtful about taking him to proposal writing meetings, review panels, and other decision-making forums, which gave him an insider's view of processes most graduate students don't see. Several mentees expressed the value of the mentoring experience in shifting their view of themselves from students to independent researchers.

## **Collaborate With Your Mentee**

Collaborative work between mentors and mentees can take on many forms, from writing the technical sections of a report to serving as a conference panelist for a jointly written paper. Prior to collaborating on a project, mentor and mentee should discuss the parameters of the collaboration, including division of labor, opportunities for growth and new skills acquisition for both parties, and ways to maximize the learning experience for the mentee.

Collaborating on a project is a chance to deepen working relationships and an opportunity for mentees to develop new skills and expertise. Sackett suggests that mentors examine everything that comes across their desk for its collaborative potential and appropriateness for their mentee. He further advises that mentors continually help mentees build new skills and prepare for higher levels of contribution. For example, Sackett recommends that as soon as competence allows, mentors share authorship with junior colleagues.

With the appropriate training in place, mentors can support mentees in generating and testing new ideas and increasing their research productivity and overall professional skills. Collaborative projects also serve as an opportunity to develop a variety of other skills including organization of time, project management, and writing.

Your mentee's ability to learn (with your guidance) from projects and assignments will be enhanced if you think through your roles together. Crucial conversations in the process include delineating who will author which parts of an article; processes for editing drafts, managing data, and resolving intellectual differences; and discussing how credit will be given. Assigning the work of submitting journal articles, corresponding with editors, handling revisions and resubmissions, and reviewing page proofs can also be useful.

## **Discuss Work-Life Balance**

As new members of academia, mentees often struggle with balancing work obligations with their personal lives. And, as you know, the need to effectively manage this balance will only increase. Even if they had a career prior to entering graduate school, academia is very different from other professions. It is not structured around a traditional work day, and your time and responsibilities are not managed by someone else.

You should acknowledge the difficulty of achieving balance and offer your mentee concrete strategies for doing so. Ideally, these conversations will help your mentee understand the connections between the variety of topics that are often presented as discrete issues in career services workshops—time management, effective use of technology, parenting while pursuing an academic career, learning when to accept and decline

requests, planning courses, etc. Your candid insights and reflections on attaining a work/life balance will be invaluable to your mentee. Modeling how you manage all of these issues, and offering up your missteps and lessons learned, will add a critical perspective that is often left out of professional conversations.

If your mentee seems to be having unusual struggles in balancing their scholarly activities with their personal life, approach them as early as possible. Until they have achieved effective solutions—better childcare, financial assistance, or counseling, for example—they are not going to be able to take full advantage of their time with you. One of the great assets of academic environments is the exposure scholars and students have to a variety of ideas and models. Encouraging your mentee to seek out a range of resources and individuals for help may mitigate challenges that could hamper their productivity.

## Develop Effective Task Prioritization and Time Management Skills

Mentees are in the process of developing work habits that can help them become productive, successful scholars. To minimize mistakes, mentors should help mentees develop work plans that include big picture goals and the necessary interim steps.

By working with mentees to set short-term goals, you can support the development of their project management skills and create opportunities for them to help manage the types of projects they will likely encounter in a productive career. Introduce mentees to your strategies for creating boundaries and routines that help you manage your own responsibilities. Sackett describes a priority setting activity that every new scholar should be introduced to as they learn how to

manage a growing set of tasks and responsibilities. The process includes listing the following:

- List 1: Things I’m doing that I want to quit.
- List 1a: Things I’ve just been asked to do that I don’t want to do.
- List 2: Things I’m not doing that I want to start.
- List 3: Things I want to keep doing.
- List 4: How I plan to shorten Lists 1 and 1a and lengthen List 2 over the next 6 months.

Periodically reviewing such a simple list with your mentee—and sharing yours with them—may reveal more about being a successful scholar than any number of professional workshops could.

## Encourage Broad Thinking About Career Options

While research careers can develop outside of academia—in think tanks, nonprofit organizations, or the public sector—it is useful for mentors who are working with junior scholars to keep in mind that many students enter PhD programs with a very narrow understanding of their career possibilities.

Even when mentees have a good grasp of the options, they may feel internal or external pressure to pursue the traditional tenure-track academic career. “My family already didn’t fully understand all that getting the PhD entailed. When I didn’t take a traditional professor position at a university they had heard of, they really didn’t get it,” one mentee explained. If a mentee does express interest in learning more about research careers in non-academic settings, be open to the discussion. This can be difficult, as there may be a sense, on both sides, that a lot has been invested, and anything other



than an academic career would be a disappointment. As the primary career consultant for your mentee, you should offer guidance in sorting through these issues.

Some young academics of color contemplate career options outside of academia or even outside of research because they are isolated or unsupported. It is important to ensure that mentees are pursuing a career that is truly a good fit for their skills, interests, and strengths, rather than opting out of academia because they lack adequate support. If a mentee expresses an interest in pursuing a non-academic research career, helping them connect with other potential models and mentors, particularly if you are unfamiliar with nonacademic careers, is important. A wider network will broaden their understanding of their options and help them translate their research skills into other settings.

Occasionally, the thought that a career outside of academia or even outside of research might be a better fit comes not from the mentee, but rather from the mentor. You may sense your mentee is not well-suited for the competitive environment of the academy, or that they may be happier in a direct service rather than a predominantly research role. If you are trying to determine if your instincts match your mentee's unspoken thoughts, broach the conversation using trust, skill, and tact. However the discussion develops, mentors need to be equipped with strategies to help mentees think broadly about their career goals. While it is not your role to make decisions for your mentee, you can share information about the realities and nature of the work and environment and help mentees connect that information to their individual situations.

Being frank about the competitiveness of many academic environments or particular barriers mentees might face is crucial.

To ensure students receive wide-ranging advice on careers, help them pursue a healthy balance of professional development opportunities. To do this, you may have to increase your awareness of opportunities outside of the academy. One mentor supported her mentee in pursuing a United Nations fellowship—a position that became permanent after the fellowship ended.

The resources of the university—career services, job databases, etc.—should be reviewed in the normal course of discussion with your mentee. Additionally, online resources, such as *Re-envisioning the PhD*, may suit the needs of candidates interested in career opportunities outside of academia.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> See: [https://depts.washington.edu/envision/project\\_resources/phd\\_career/resumes.html](https://depts.washington.edu/envision/project_resources/phd_career/resumes.html).

## RESOURCES: EARLY-CAREER DEVELOPMENT

There are multiple dimensions for mentors to consider when supporting the early career development of their mentees, and the following resources address many of these.

---

### Collaborating and Co-Authoring

The University of Washington developed a series of Graduate School Memos, which address a range of career development issues. For example, this 2009 memo focuses on how to structure collaborative projects, and provides a quick guide to co-managing the workload and responsibilities of junior colleagues.

---

### National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity

A resource center to support faculty to thrive in academia, this organization provides on-demand access to mentoring, tools and support to faculty in the areas of planning, productivity, work-life balance, and healthy relationships. The Center offers a faculty bootcamp for new faculty.

---

### Establishing Effective Mentoring Networks: Rationale and Strategies

Mentoring networks are an effective way for mentees to gain access to the full range of guidance and support needed to successfully launch and maintain a career. This article discusses strategies for building effective mentoring networks.

---

### Transferable Skills

This web page outlines the transferable skill sets of PhDs, providing a rubric for understanding the application of academic skills to other settings.

---

### The National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity Mentoring Map

Building a mentoring network requires identifying the individuals that might fill the diverse mentoring roles that an early career scholar needs to perform optimally.

---

### Non-Academic Career Options for PhDs in the Humanities and Social Sciences

A growing number of PhD-holders are seeking non-academic careers. In response, several on-campus career offices have responded with resources and information on pursuing a non-academic career path. Additionally, [several articles](#) have cropped up to address this trend and provide guidance for [open discussion](#) between mentors and mentees.

---

### On the Determinants of Academic Success

David Sackett's 2001 article in *Clinical Investigative Medicine* gives a comprehensive overview of the supports mentors can provide to the early-career scholars they are mentoring.



## RESOURCES: ADDRESSING WORK/LIFE BALANCE

Balancing life and work will be a career-long pursuit for your mentee. You can provide guidance to help them think about this and develop strategies. In recent years, a number of articles and resources on this issue have been published. University campuses have also increased their response to work/life balance issues. A few are listed below.

---

### **Balancing Life and Work: Three Perspectives from Tenured Faculty at the University of Virginia**

This 2005 guide aimed at junior faculty at the University of Virginia introduces strategies for structuring time to maximize professional opportunities while maintaining a healthy balance between work and life.

---

### **The Happy PhD Zone: How to Maintain a Work-Life Balance in Academia**

This essay explores ways to set boundaries and priorities around one's career as an academic.

---

### **Academic Guilt**

In a featured essay, this entry for an online advice column focuses on academic guilt, and how to counter tendencies to feel like one must work all the time to become a respected academic.

# Managing Conflict

---

Almost all mentoring relationships experience conflict from time to time. Ideally, these situations are buffeted by trust, open communication, and strategies and structures that support the goals of the relationship. However, issues can occasionally jolt the dyad out of a productive space. This section describes strategies that can help get things back on track if the relationship or specific agreements break down. Conflicts, major and minor, occur more frequently than mentors and mentees might imagine.

Specific challenges such as missed deadlines or meetings are often symptoms of broader problems. Conflicts may stem from relational issues or mismatched expectations, but whatever their roots, they can all hamper the quality and productivity of the relationship. In some cases, dyads have successfully addressed problems by going back to basics—revisiting original agreements and trying out new strategies for working together. When dyads we interviewed have been successful at reversing a difficult dynamic, the solution has always involved reconsidering what and how mentor and mentee were communicating with each other.

## Anticipate Potential Conflicts

Most serious conflicts reveal themselves in minor ways before they become full-blown problems. Attending to such cues and taking the time to think through and talk about a concern before it escalates will help preserve a

productive working relationship. Mentors and mentees who have experienced challenges can often identify missed opportunities to broach the issue which could have led to a quicker or more productive resolution.

One potential source of conflict stems from the need for many mentors to balance the roles of mentor and supervisor. Supervision and mentoring are not mutually exclusive. Good supervision requires some level of mentoring, yet it typically focuses on deliverables first, with professional growth a secondary goal. The priority in mentoring starts with the overall development of the mentee, and specific tasks serve as tools for assessing and developing skills. When the mentor wears both hats, managing this subtle but significant difference can be critical to a productive relationship. Past experience suggests that thoughtful, upfront discussion is crucial for ensuring that supervisory and mentoring roles are compatible.

Balancing supervision and mentoring requires that mentors provide space for counsel, information, and support while also establishing appropriate professional boundaries and maintaining high work expectations. This may require establishing ground rules for how feedback is given and received, and checking in frequently to tie project goals to the larger professional development needs of the mentee. A good start might be a conversation that lays out a “roadmap” for the work ahead. Discussion of external obligations and

institutional or departmental requirements will help define the parameters of the work you are supervising. If others also supervise the mentee, you can serve as a confidante to help your mentee effectively interpret and incorporate feedback they receive from your colleagues.

## **Revisit Underlying Structures and Agreements**

In thinking about the potential for conflicts, the “ounce of prevention” adage is useful. What underlying structures and agreements are guiding the mentoring relationship? Conflicts between dyads typically improved when both individuals reconsidered when and how they were communicating. Keeping the prevention adage in mind, mentors and mentees that experience conflict might first return to basics: Have we been following our agreements? Do we share the same expectations? What have we done to deepen our understanding of each other’s working and communication styles?

While revisiting these basics may not get at the entirety of problem, it has helped reset several relationships that hit a difficult patch. Your overall goal is to mutually assess what is going well and what is not, including an understanding of how expectations play into the underlying conflict. Making an effort to review institutional guidelines and resources for mentoring arrangements may also help to troubleshoot a strained relationship.

## **Identify Solutions**

Once you have identified the problem, you and your mentee must work together on solutions. Working together requires tackling the issues directly and increasing understanding and communication on both sides. One potential source of conflict involves mentee

underperformance. In this type of situation, it is easy for mentors to simultaneously express frustration and fail to clearly communicate what the mentee should be doing differently. The mentee may have a sense of their own underperformance, but lack the tools to change it. Their failure to reach out for help could be due to pride, a misapplied sense of independence, coping with stereotype threat, or other personal barriers.

Both mentor and mentee have an obligation and opportunity to examine behavior changes that could help resolve the problem, but doing so requires a high level of mutual trust. This can be difficult, particularly if part of the conflict is interpersonal. Resources focused on changing an unproductive or negative dynamic between mentor and mentee offer strikingly similar advice, encouraging active reflection from both individuals. In the list of resources on “Communicating Through Conflict,” we provide a brief summary of the basics for getting a rocky mentoring relationship back on track.

## **Seek Outside Help and Support**

If you find yourself in a difficult patch in your mentoring relationship, it may be helpful to reach out to others (outside of the mentoring dyad) for support and advice, and for your mentee to do the same. Mentoring can be hard and often solitary work, but there are models for handling difficult situations. Colleagues and peers in other institutions can often provide invaluable support and broader perspectives. You should also encourage your mentee to seek out support, such as other faculty, their peers, student support groups, and campus counseling services. If the conflict is very contentious, you may need to enlist another faculty member to help connect the mentee to resources that can appropriately assist them in resolving the issue.

## RESOURCES: COMMUNICATING THROUGH CONFLICT

Building an effective working relationship takes time and effort. Occasionally, it may require a difficult conversation about interpersonal or professional concerns. Seeking the advice of other mentors can be invaluable. Many useful resources advocate similar approaches to communicating about difficult issues.

---

### Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High

A basic approach to communicating through conflict, as proposed by the authors, follows these steps:

**Examine yourself first:** Ask what you really want to happen differently, and think about the role you might have played to contribute to the problem. Assume competence and commitment on the part of your mentee.

**Confront with safety:** Make the interaction as safe as possible by starting with facts rather than opinions, describing the gap between what was expected and what was observed. Then ask a genuine question about his or her story against that narrative; listen for motivation and ability.

**Agree on a plan and follow up:**

Outline a plan for who does what by when, and follow up, noting potential barriers. Stay flexible while working through the solutions.

---

### Giving Feedback

Giving feedback is a core element of academic mentoring, yet the evidence base guiding educators is thin. This article discusses considerations for giving feedback, particularly critical feedback, titrating the amount of feedback given; attending to affect; emotions—and how to make a plan; and making a plan for next steps.

# Conclusion

---

Mentoring can be both tremendously rewarding and frustrating. There are few things as gratifying as helping a bright, talented young scholar flourish. In the long-term, the investment of time in mentoring can also allow you to be more productive and to find your work more fulfilling. Like any relationship, mentoring can also bring its share of frustrations. Over the course of your career, you may face different mentoring challenges. Successful scholars are often sought out by potential mentees even while they seek to advance their own careers. The need to balance the various mentoring needs of junior colleagues and the multiple roles you play (e.g., supervisor, advisor) may add complexity to your mentoring relationships.

Moments of frustration are often good catalysts for growth as a mentor. Seek out supports similar to those you have encouraged for your mentee. Just as your mentee has likely developed a career plan and discussed their goals with you, try to articulate your own goals and motivations as a mentor and get regular feedback. Asking your mentees to discuss how well you provide resources, opportunities, advice, and protection can be invaluable in terms of honing your skills. Faculty peers can also provide valuable feedback and support as you continue to grow as a mentor. Lastly, one of the best ways to build your mentoring skills is to continue to seek out competent mentors of your own.

Creating the time and space to reflect on your mentoring may feel like a luxury, but it is critically important. We hope this guide helps you reflect on and continuously improve your mentoring skills. Your investment will likely benefit not only your mentees but their future mentees as well.

---

---

## **The Forum for Youth Investment**

The Cady-Lee House  
7064 Eastern Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20012  
[forumfyi.org](http://forumfyi.org)

---

## **William T. Grant Foundation**

570 Lexington Avenue, 18th Floor  
New York, NY 10022  
[wtgrantfoundation.org](http://wtgrantfoundation.org)

The Forum for Youth Investment  
The Cady-Lee House  
7064 Eastern Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20012  
[forumfyi.org](http://forumfyi.org)

William T. Grant Foundation  
570 Lexington Avenue, 18th Floor  
New York, NY 10022  
[wtgrantfoundation.org](http://wtgrantfoundation.org)