



Welcome - thank you for joining us today! The meeting will be recorded and the recording will be posted online. You can change your name for anonymity. You can type questions/comments in the Q&A, but we might only get to them next time. For general discussion, please use the chat (select “All panelists and attendees”).

July 10, 2020

On mentorship



Akiko Iwasaki
(immunobiology, Yale)



Wei Ji Ma (cognitive
science, NYU)



Yael Niv (cognitive
neuroscience, Princeton)



Jay Van Bavel (social
psychology, NYU)

Q1: If this applies to you, please fill in the blank: "My advisor is generally a good mentor, but _____ "

Q2: Have you experienced or directly heard about any examples of toxic mentorship near you? If so, can you tell us what happened?

Q3: What structural changes do you think are needed to improve mentorship in academia?

Q4: What other issues or questions would you like discussed in the session?

We commit to follow-up sessions!

"My advisor is generally a good mentor, but _____"

Lots of answers here. There are many ways to screw up the mentoring relationship, and we have all erred (and will err) on some of these.

First, solidarity. It sucks to be in a bad mentoring relationships.

Second, it is a relationship -- involving at least two parties. Sometimes, you have some agency to mitigate the problem.

To discuss some of the common pitfalls, and some things you can do if in this situation, we divided the answers to this question into 11 sub-groups of problematic mentoring, which we will discuss in turn:

1. Communication is not their strongest skill

wants to dominate every discussion; unable to control temper and lashes out; only gives negative criticism and feedback to the point that I am very anxious about meeting with them; doesn't give enough positive feedback; when issues about or relationship or mentoring are brought up, gets defensive and blames me for the problem; we have never discussed mentoring preferences to I don't know where I stand; am not sure they give me honest criticism; unintentionally (?) says hurtful things; rarely conveys expectations in a concrete and transparent way, leaving me feeling uncertain about how to make progress on my research, or how to develop the skills that would be necessary to become an independent researcher; belittles us saying our questions are like the ones he gets from undergrads

2. Too self centered

wants to dominate every discussion; doesn't give me enough credit for ideas; struggles to understand that our priorities don't always align; makes me feel like I am wasting their time, and also that the problems that are complex for me are really easy (which may be the case for him, but not for me from a lower privilege background and encountering these problems for the first time); controlling and doesn't want me to talk to other professionals besides him; only wants to do thing that directly benefit themselves; too stressed and doesn't manage time well, and takes it out on students with microaggressive statements; he is a narcissist

3. Creates unsupportive lab environment:

not inclusive enough, doesn't address stress and mental health issues enough; no emotional support for the job-market related stress; does not encourage collaboration in the lab; doesn't stop senior grad students from bullying other students, leaves trainees to compete for resources within the lab; play favorites with the lab; treats people unequally; No clear authorship rules: many instances of handing students' projects to other lab members, often without asking the student, or sometimes, despite the student's objection; setting trainees on the same project to "compete"

4. Has very little time:

generally uninterested in details of projects; mentorship limited to sending papers to read; has checked out of academia leaving trainees to fend on their own; seems indifferent to my future career; is generally away or unavailable; doesn't answer email, and answers not well thought-out; runs a lab that is too big for them to handle; makes promises on deadlines but does not keep them (e.g., editing a manuscript); has gone months without meeting with me

5. Micromanages everything:

forces ideas; doesn't listen to my ideas; drops deadlines and tasks without discussion; doesn't share critical information in misguided attempt to shield us from stress

6. Has problems guiding the science:

finds it difficult to lead students to solutions of their research problems; main project/thesis of a paper shifts all the time; doesn't give me enough direction; has no vision/mission to guide the lab; projects in the lab are very varied which is good for avoiding intra-lab competition but leads to lack of scientific cohesion (feels like no one cares about what I work on); advice is sporadic, detached from reality (don't realize what the suggested experiments/analyses entail in terms of effort and time), and sometimes sounds like random suggestions

7. “Stopping problem”:

won't allow me to finish a project until it is absolutely perfect; drives students too hard when there is a paper in sight leaving no breathing room and demanding figures and progress ad infinitum; holding student hostage from moving on to postdoc until last paper is in draft form, but wants that draft to be for Nature/Science so may take another 2-3 years; imposes unrealistic deadlines; puts a lot of pressure on trainees, often requiring long work hours at short notice; gives me too many ideas to follow up on, which is overwhelming; doesn't understand the day to day hardships of students working in the lab during COVID-19

8. Too competitive/ambitious:

sees my accomplishments as a threat to themselves and wants to put me down as a response; doesn't deal well with failure and blames it on me rather than take responsibility; doesn't care enough about my personal development (treats me as just a work force in the lab)

9. Advises rather than mentors:

mentorship always has to be solicited by trainees (but they don't always know what to ask for or that e.g. networking and training opportunities are things that could be asked for); only talks about science and research (no personal relationship); difficult to step back and talk about the big picture rather than the details of the research; doesn't give advice on things that were easy for them (survivor bias) like choosing a well-funded area, networking, etc.

10. Doesn't adjust to different management/ leadership needs of people:

Management style works well for postdocs but not for students (or vice versa); fails to understand the depth of how certain personal situations can impact productivity

11. Doesn't always abide by professional and interpersonal boundaries:

Makes jokes that make people uncomfortable; inappropriately timed emails/expectations; we have a close personal relationship and they don't realize we still have power dynamics in this relationship so I can't say no to personal requests; doesn't respect employee's personal time

Some thoughts about systemic solutions

You all had great ideas. We can do this. But it will take time and work and sometimes radical change.

- Separate point person for trainees to go to apart from advisor
- Two advisor system
- Radical rethinking of the advising role and dividing among people
- Funding structure that allows trainees to change labs
- Normalizing changing labs as part of exploration process (rotations, etc.)
- More info to trainees about mentors before they sign on
- Draft contracts re expectations from both sides
- Explicit points in the program for two-way big picture feedback
- Leadership & management training
- Training about bias, and mentoring people who are different from PI
- Feedback mechanism from trainees to faculty
- Accountability and institutional rewards and penalties
- Mechanisms for bystander intervention
- Radical change in what is valued in academe (productivity vs mentorship)
- Expanding the relationship to more accountability re mental health etc
- Training for students on how to be a good mentee and on upwards management

Idea: Formal group leadership training for postdocs

- Build on knowledge from parenting courses and couples therapy
- Mentoring is anything but trivial! Needs to be trained and taught like any other part of our job (like we teach people to write grants etc. -- it won't be perfect, but better than nothing!)
- Use professional courses
- Anyone know of such courses?
- Can we create one online?
- “including writing/reflection, role play, workshopping and receiving feedback”

30 National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity

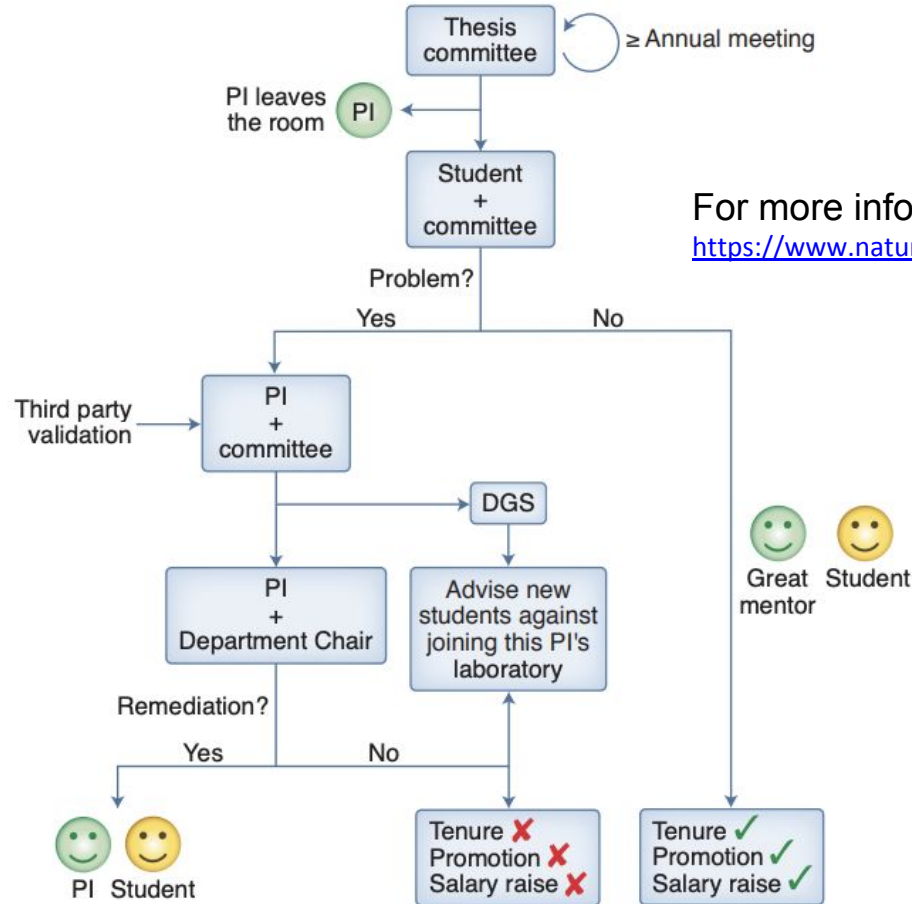
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Changing the Face of Power in the Academy

About NCFDD

Founded in 2010, the National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity is an independent professional development, training, and mentoring community for faculty members, postdocs, and graduate students. We are 100% dedicated to supporting academics in making successful transitions throughout their careers.

Idea: Radical shift in how we value and reward mentoring



Idea: Mentoring literacy for empowering trainees

You often don't know what is normal, what is a problem, and what is not your fault.

Student-advisor relationship questionnaire

Theme 1: Relationship with your advisor (and other faculty members)

Have you experienced, or are you currently experiencing, any communication issues or conflict with your advisor (or other faculty member) that you would like to discuss?

Theme 2: Professional growth

Are you getting the support you need from your advisor in your chosen career path?

Theme 3: Expectations and Work/life balance

1. Is your advisor generally available to meet within two weeks?
2. Do you feel your advisor is giving you guidance when you need it?
3. Do you feel your advisor is giving you space when you need it?

Theme 4: Management qualities (the lab/you as a PhD student)

What kind of managing style does your advisor have? How does advisor organize the lab? And how do you feel about that?

Theme 5: Thought exercises

1. Give an example of a time where you were unhappy with a situation between you and your supervisor and describe if/how it was resolved.
2. If there were one thing you could change about your advisor what would it be?

By Shannon Locke

Full questionnaire available on
www.growingupinscience.com
under Resources

Idea: Rewarding good mentorship

Evaluation criteria

1. Mentoring excellence – a demonstrated track record of mentoring excellence over at least 5 years as indicated by a clear understanding and evidence of supporting graduate student/postdoctoral scholar academic, professional and psychosocial needs; evidence of support beyond the classroom, lab or office; and strong testimonials from former graduate students/postdoctoral scholars (this can be determined by graduation rates of students they admit, job placements of graduates, and successful relationships with current and former students).
2. Commitment to professional development and career advancement – a demonstrated commitment to graduate student and postdoctoral scholar professional development and career advancement as indicated by encouraging publication (with lead authorship by mentees), external grant funding or conference presentation, cultivation of a strong professional portfolio, development of network connections, dissemination of knowledge (knowledge mobilization) outside the academy, etc.
3. Fostering of inclusive, collaborative academic environments – a demonstrated commitment to diversity and inclusion in mentoring as indicated by cultural awareness and sensitivity, recognition and respect for differences in perspective (cultural, racial, socioeconomic, gender, sexual orientation, etc.), and openness and transparency in the mentoring/advising and scientific process.



Recording + slides will be posted on www.growingupinscience.com

We commit to follow-up events on mentorship, especially to provide resources and tips for you to make change locally.

(Also: many good questions in response to Q4 on our form, that we did not get to today)



Wed Jul 22, 2020 at 12:00 EDT

**A conversation with Angela Saini, the author of
*Superior: the return of race science***

Sign up and get the Zoom link through
www.growingupinscience.com