

# MENTORING HANDBOOK

## For the Homer L. Dodge Department of Physics and Astronomy at the University of Oklahoma

Version 1: August 20, 2021

*(the material presented in this Mentoring Handbook borrows heavily from the references provided at the end of the document)*

### 1. Introduction to Peer Mentoring

#### Definition of Mentoring

A mentor is defined as a knowledgeable and experienced guide, a trusted ally and advocate, and a caring role model. An effective mentor is respectful, reliable, patient, trustworthy, and a very good listener and communicator. A skilled mentor offers guidance, support and encouragement aimed at developing the confidence, competence, success, and effectiveness of the mentee.

#### Peer Mentoring

Peer mentors are at slightly advanced but roughly comparable career stage than their mentees. In general, people take their peers' perspectives very seriously. This means that a positive peer mentoring relationship can have profound effects on a mentee's sense of self-worth.

Due to the similarity in career status of peer mentors to their mentees, mentees might feel more comfortable sharing concerns and problems with their peer-mentors than with mentors who are further removed from the mentee's career stage. A healthy mentee--peer-mentor relation increases mentee access to appropriate support and resources during times of struggle.

## 2. Peer Mentoring Goals:

While it is great to have goals that you and your mentee can work towards, it is important to remember that the purpose of mentoring is to **build a relationship**. Your primary mission should be to establish trust and to be a supportive role model in your mentee's life.

It is also important to keep in mind that the goals you work toward should come from your mentee. If you, as a peer-mentor, have personal goals for your time together, try to focus them on yourself within your role – to improve your listening skills, to become solution-oriented, or to be the best peer-mentor you can be.

## 3. Some Roles as a Peer Mentor:

- Model behavior
- Focus on the positive
- Be a good listener
- Encourage

## 4. Expectations

Peer mentors are expected to:

- Attend an orientation session held at the beginning of the fall semester and about three to four meetings held throughout the semester.
- Attend all mandatory events.
- Meet with their mentee for about one hour every other week.
- Respond to the (roughly) monthly “check-in” surveys and to the end-of-the semester survey.
- Inform the mentoring program coordinators of problems with their mentor-mentee relationship, including any decision between the mentor and mentee to request terminating the mentoring relationship as outlined in the mentoring agreement.
- Remain in good academic standing.

Faculty mentors are expected to:

- Attend an orientation session at the beginning of the fall semester.
- Meet with their mentee about 3 times during the semester.
- Respond to the (roughly) monthly “check-in” surveys and to the end-of-the semester survey.
- Mentor first-year graduate students and not use the mentoring relationship primarily as a means for recruiting students into their research group.

- Inform the mentoring program coordinators of problems with their mentor-mentee relationship, including any decision between the mentor and mentee to request terminating the mentoring relationship as outlined in the mentoring agreement.

## 5. Getting to Know Your Mentee

### Thinking Through the First Meeting

Typically, first meetings allow two people to get to know a little bit about each other, attach a face to a name and gain a bit of comfort. To do so, you need to think about what setting would feel comfortable for both of you, and plan out some conversation starters — knowing that these are tools if you need them, not a formula.

1. What are some things I could tell my mentee about myself that would help us get to know each other a little bit? What about me and my life story might be interesting and relevant to this person?
2. What are some questions I could ask my mentee to get to know them a little bit without prying?
3. What do I want out of the mentoring relationship — what are my hopes and how can I be helpful?
4. How can I find out what my mentee hopes to get out of the relationship — what questions might I ask?

## 6. Respecting Boundaries

Setting boundaries in the mentoring relationship will help to ensure that you and your mentee have realistic expectations of one another and can also help you to avoid some awkward situations.

Some possible boundaries to set up with your mentee might include:

- What conversation topics are off-limits.
- Language/words that are off-limits.
- What ways are appropriate to communicate with one another, at what times of day, and how frequently.
- Types of behavior that are off-limits.
- Defining your role – what you can and cannot reasonably do with and for your mentee.

## 7. Ethical Code of Practice

- The mentor's role is to respond to the mentee's needs and agenda; it is not to impose their own agenda.
- Mentors and mentees should respect the confidential nature of what is discussed as part of the mentoring relationship (see also Section below).
- Mentors and mentees should respect each other's time and other responsibilities, ensuring they do not impose beyond what is agreed upon and reasonable.
- The mentee must accept increasing responsibility for managing the relationship; the mentor should empower them to do so and must generally promote the mentee's autonomy.
- Either party may dissolve the relationship. However, both the mentor and mentee have, in general, the responsibility to discuss the matter together, as part of mutual learning; all decisions must be made in accordance with the terms of the signed mentoring agreement.
- Mentors need to be aware of the limits of their own competence in the practice of mentoring.
- The mentor will not intrude areas the mentee wishes to keep private unless invited into these spaces. However, the mentor might help the mentee to recognize how other issues may relate to these areas.
- Mentors and mentees should aim to be open and truthful with each other and themselves about the relationship itself.
- The mentoring relationship must not be exploitive in any way and must adhere to all OU rules and guidelines.

## 8. Confidentiality

All peer mentors are expected and required to maintain high levels of confidentiality. Peer mentors should refrain from discussing incidents regarding mentees unless the incident falls under mandatory OU reporting responsibilities as outlined at <https://www.ou.edu/eoo/reporting-responsibilities>

## 9. Listening Skills

### 1. Active Listening

The four levels of active listening are:

- Listening with your ears to the words that are spoken.
- Listening with your eyes to non-verbal communication.

- Listening to yourself using all your senses and signals.
  - Listening with your mind to make sense of all that you are aware of.
- Keep in mind that stretches of comfortable silence can, at times, be an effective means to communicate.

## 2. Responding

Listening is the foundation upon which active support is built, and effective mentors build on this through appropriate empathic responses. Some of these responses may be non-verbal, such as slight movements of the head or noises of the 'mm – mm' variety, which indicate to the other person that one is present and paying attention.

## 3. Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is a response to the content of what the mentee has said. By paraphrasing, the peer-mentor summarizes the content of what has been said in such a way as to indicate to the mentee that they have heard and understood. From the mentee's point of view, this can help in clarifying the content of what has been communicated.

## 4. Reflection

As well as paraphrasing the content of what the mentee has said, the mentor is also concerned to reflect back feelings to the mentee. This then leads to a clarification of the emotional content of what is being communicated. In these ways the mentor communicates empathy and establishes rapport.

# 10. Diversity

Diversity is the vast possibility for differences among all of us. Since every person is an individual, with individual differences, humans are about as diverse as the number of people existing on this planet at any given time. We tend to group commonalities into different identities. All of us have a variety of cultures, identities and experiences that make us who we are. This combination of culture, identity, and experience is different for each person we meet.

Culture and Identities may be shaped by things such as:

- Your age
- Your race or ethnicity
- Your gender
- Your sexual orientation
- Your religion or personal philosophy
- Where you go to school
- Where you live

- Your support network including family and friends.
- The hobbies you have and your personal passions
- MUCH MORE!

Mentors want to:

- Recognize some of the biases and prejudices they bring to the mentor-mentee relationships.
- Be aware of their own privileges.
- Understand how their interactions with and role modeling for the mentee can affect that mentee's decision to commit to careers in science.
- Improve their own multicultural competency.
- Implement concrete strategies for addressing issues of diversity.

It is important to be inclusive at all times and in all situations – be respectful and welcoming of all of the differences you encounter. Your mentee will undoubtedly have culture, identities, and experiences that differ from your own. Explore those differences with your mentee and also find commonalities. Share with your mentee about your culture and identity, and perhaps how things were for you at their career stage.

## Appendix A: Some Suggested Topics for Mentor-Mentee Discussion

Academic topics

- Why did you choose OU and how is the experience so far?
- Have you found any research groups in the department that you might be interested in joining?
- Have you talked to any faculty members about research?
- How are your classes going?
- How have the TA duties (e.g., teaching, grading) been for you?
- Are you familiar with on-campus resource centers for graduate students?
- Are you aware of funding opportunities available to graduate students (on-campus, research-specific)?
- What type of career do you wish to pursue?
- What classes are you planning to take next semester/year?
- What are some of the biggest challenges you faced at OU?
- What are some of the biggest accomplishments you made at OU?
- What motivates you? And is there anything holding you back?
- Where do you want to be professionally in 1, 5, 10+ years?

Non-Academic topics

- How has living in Norman, OK been for you?
- Have you joined any student organizations (e.g., Lunar Sooners, Optics Society)?
- Have you gotten to know your classmates?

- What keeps you up at night?
- What has been the biggest adjustments you had to make starting the graduate program?

Special topics (e.g., for international students)

- Have you gotten the chance to talk to your friends/family back home since arriving?
- Are you familiar with ways to travel around Norman (e.g., CART, Zipcar)?
- Are you aware of the on-campus resources available to international students?
- How familiar are you with American culture and society, how was the adjustment? (e.g., medical system)

## References / resources:

- <https://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Portals/0/Commissions/Peer%20Adv/Peer%20Mentoring%20Handbook.pdf>
- [http://www.csun.edu/gehonors/documents/Peer\\_Mentor\\_Booklet.pdf](http://www.csun.edu/gehonors/documents/Peer_Mentor_Booklet.pdf)
- [http://www.mncpd.org/docs/RBPD%20Web%20Site%20Sep%202009/Mentor\\_training\\_toolkit.pdf](http://www.mncpd.org/docs/RBPD%20Web%20Site%20Sep%202009/Mentor_training_toolkit.pdf)
- [http://www.mncpd.org/docs/RBPD%20Web%20Site%20Sep%202009/Mentor\\_training\\_toolkit.pdf](http://www.mncpd.org/docs/RBPD%20Web%20Site%20Sep%202009/Mentor_training_toolkit.pdf)
- <https://kb.wisc.edu/images/group359/82397/ScienceofEffectiveMentorshipinSTEMM2019.pdf> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2019. *The Science of Effective Mentorship in STEMM*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25568>
- [https://d1wgtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/47643221/Hierarchical\\_Mentoring\\_A\\_Transformative\\_20160730-20953-pg4kls-with-cover-page-v2.pdf?Expires=1628804601&Signature=I1MkDLyPX-o7pyTmm4hkEF5Ej5oeCDPGvtyaNepCXqDck-lgYGGXs2vP1M~7xR7Od9suEddDHLwcb1ug1yzSqkpuHsOmBN-znWY1hyW-QH6vJerQyqY-mHnc6aDAtc1YArI2Ka7LcEoucgg1QDD2swIVm1jPC9dUBrBBYpEr5GSeFMWYtnoQ-7AGJoUV~PskfdfsIcMwRQI~TLwXFYh7nMNcJBeIV86YOGpsMFS8z4P-cKhAKpPYjxMB3q6IoOeJmBnwcz9VHnZybrwhomTKYeXHuCNDDhyKs92eGhSY3bA-moU53fBR7wrCdQ8Jsq7ayJsr9I4TQ2dN6dQMHwIFQ\\_&Key-Pair-Id=APKAJLOHF5GGSLRBV4ZA](https://d1wgtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/47643221/Hierarchical_Mentoring_A_Transformative_20160730-20953-pg4kls-with-cover-page-v2.pdf?Expires=1628804601&Signature=I1MkDLyPX-o7pyTmm4hkEF5Ej5oeCDPGvtyaNepCXqDck-lgYGGXs2vP1M~7xR7Od9suEddDHLwcb1ug1yzSqkpuHsOmBN-znWY1hyW-QH6vJerQyqY-mHnc6aDAtc1YArI2Ka7LcEoucgg1QDD2swIVm1jPC9dUBrBBYpEr5GSeFMWYtnoQ-7AGJoUV~PskfdfsIcMwRQI~TLwXFYh7nMNcJBeIV86YOGpsMFS8z4P-cKhAKpPYjxMB3q6IoOeJmBnwcz9VHnZybrwhomTKYeXHuCNDDhyKs92eGhSY3bA-moU53fBR7wrCdQ8Jsq7ayJsr9I4TQ2dN6dQMHwIFQ_&Key-Pair-Id=APKAJLOHF5GGSLRBV4ZA)
- <https://aps.org/programs/minorities/nmc/webinars.cfm>
- <https://stem.northeastern.edu/resources/faculty/mentoring/>
- [https://www.lonestar.edu/departments/mediarelations/WISE\\_Institute\\_Mentor\\_Handbook.pdf](https://www.lonestar.edu/departments/mediarelations/WISE_Institute_Mentor_Handbook.pdf)