



# OFFICE OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

## **Mentoring Retreat Summary - July 2018**

*Discussion leaders: Peter Hitchcock, Scott Barolo, Shoba Subramanian, Lori Isom, Ashley (Curren) Kalinski, Jessica Chen, Tricia Garay, Jay Vornhagen*

*OGPS Team: Maggie Evans, Reggie Beasley, Catherine Garber, Jim Musgrave*

### **I. What is the spectrum of productive mentor:mentee relationships?**

#### ***Perspectives:***

- A. Successful science-related outcomes: publications, funding
- B. Successful career outcomes: mentees that continue in science-related careers
- C. Transitions mentee towards scientific independence
- D. Explicitly encourages career exploration & professional skill development
- E. Open & respectful communication

#### ***Challenges:***

- A. Effective mentoring must encompass diverse personalities, goals and needs
- B. Current lack of institutional incentives that meaningfully value & reward mentoring
- C. Widespread perception that faculty place less value on non-academic career trajectories undermining trust & communication

#### ***Action items:***

- A. Universally implement use of customized mentoring compact articulating specific expectations of each party, to be provided to dept upon joining the laboratory
- B. Develop mentoring toolbox to include STEM-specific mentor training program, protocols and communication scripts

### **II. Can we elucidate a good framework for mentoring?**

#### ***Perspectives:***

- A. Current ecosystem of mentoring resources lacks clarity and purpose
- B. Postdocs lack robust mentoring infrastructure - overly reliant on PI for mentorship
- C. Thesis committee currently used to provide scientific guidance but not tasked explicitly to promote trainee success

**Challenges:**

- A. Effective mentoring must encompass a diverse spectrum of individual personalities, goals and needs
- B. Current lack of institutional incentives that meaningfully value & reward mentoring
- C. Widespread perception that faculty place less value on non-academic career trajectories leading to barriers in trust & communication

**Action items:**

- A. Use of an mentoring compact signed by mentors & mentees articulating specific expectations of each party, tracked by departments
- B. One thesis committee member designated by student as student advocate tasked with promoting student professional development
- C. Facilitate peer-mentoring networks
- D. Schedule OGPS “roadshow” to educate faculty on resources for mentoring/advising

**III. What does the concept of “training” mean to different stakeholders?**

**Perspectives:**

- A. Primary stakeholders: trainees, faculty, funding agencies
- B. Secondary stakeholders: institutions, employers, taxpayers, families
- C. NIH is moving towards more clear expectations of training
- D. Expectations of training for postdocs remain poorly defined
- E. Faculty want to hear about trainee career interests

**Challenges:**

- A. Trainees largely do not feel empowered to decide/communicate career interests
- B. Faculty express concern about how to help students navigate career uncertainty
- C. Need to recognize career decisions as emotionally charged
- D. View career & professional development (CPD) as an integral part of scientific training

**Action items:**

- A. Establish a culture of career exploration for students & faculty
- B. Develop a CPD “toolbox” to provide resources for students & faculty
- C. Articulate expectations for professional competencies
- D. Create a diverse experiential learning portfolio
- E. Schedule OGPS “roadshow” to educate faculty on resources for mentoring/advising

**IV. What mechanisms of accountability are needed?**

**Perspectives:**

- A. Need for clear expectations to guide mentor-mentee relationship
- B. Need for understanding how postdoc employment contracts impact mentor or mentee (e.g., when can postdoc look for jobs, what is the expectation for developing independent research)
- C. Letters of recommendation carry a huge weight

- D. Concern that mentoring (e.g., authorship decisions) can be biased by career goals
- E. Conflict prevention is better than remediation
- F. The uneven power dynamic in the mentor:mentee relationship minimizes accountability and can diminish trust
- G. International trainees are especially vulnerable to consequences of poor mentoring practices

**Challenges:**

- A. Mentors and mentees value autonomy
- B. Current training system has evolved to be more faculty-centered not trainee-centered
- C. Good mentorship is expected but not explicitly valued or rewarded
- D. Lack of clear consensus on what constitutes good mentorship
- E. Lack of mechanisms for mentor accountability

**Action items:**

- A. Develop a mentoring “toolbox” to include a STEM-specific mentor training program, protocols & scripts for common areas of tension
- B. Define a more intentionally learner-centered structure and purpose for thesis committees, e.g., committee chair that is not thesis mentor, designated student advocate
- C. Create a culture that explicitly and materially values good mentorship
- D. Articulate clear expectations of good mentorship
- E. Explore mechanisms for mentor accountability

**Next Steps**

1. Develop STEM-specific mentor training workshop.
2. Evaluate how current mentoring frameworks, e.g., thesis committees or postdoc mentoring committees, can be intentionally structured to be more learner-centered.
3. Implement a UM mentor:mentee compact for all trainees that outlines training and mentoring obligations as a foundation for shared expectations and accountability.