



MCNEIL SCHOLARS  
CAPS INTERNATIONAL

## MENTORING GUIDE

Effective mentoring begins, as all good things do, in a warm and caring relationship. Research has shown that mentees and mentors benefit from a collaborative and interactive experience together. A healthy, constructive working relationship between you and your mentee is a vital support to the academic success of your student. This guide offers tips to help you think through how you will approach your role as mentor, including information about elements of mentoring relationships and stages of development that have been identified by mentorship researchers. We've also created a parallel guide for mentees. Mentorship is a two-way street.

Specific commitments of McNeil Scholars Project Mentors:

- Two-year commitment to monthly online contact with scholar.
- Attendance at 2 CAPS International conferences during the two-year participation period and attendance at the McNeil Reception during the conferences.
- Attendance at periodic online MSP meetings with other mentors and scholars for encouragement and information sharing. MSP provides training opportunities and community gatherings online. Your attendance is important and we ask mentors to do all they can to attend.
- Membership in CAPS International during the two-year participation period.
- Scholars are expected to present at their final CAPS conference within the two-year participation period. Mentors guide and support these presentations and are encouraged to present with their scholar if they wish.

HOW TOs

- Tailor your approach to your individual mentee's goals and circumstances. Not all mentees are alike in their needs or their backgrounds. The mission of the McNeil Scholars Project is to support students of color as they pursue entry into professional psychology and mental health roles. CAPS and specifically the McNeil Scholars Project acknowledges that people of color are underrepresented or marginalized in U.S. higher education in general and we hope to impact the diversity of the field of professional psychology and mental health specifically by supporting McNeil Scholars. Your mentoring relationship takes place in a specific historical/social/political/cultural/religious context. This means you have a lot of listening to do to begin this important relationship.
- Start with open communication. Talk regularly with your mentee (monthly is a minimum requirement of the project, but more frequent contact is encouraged). Talk about research, coursework, funding streams, various roles in the professional arena. Students have reported all of these topics as high on their interest lists.
- We don't want to prescribe a formula to restrict you as you develop your unique relationship, but there are some indicators in the literature about important points to include. The first meeting should include a forthright and mutual exploration of interests and expectations. Your desire to see your mentee succeed is the key. Don't be shy

about expressing this and inviting your McNeil Scholar to tell you about their hopes for the relationship. Mentoring doesn't just happen. It develops through the care and commitment of each partner.

- Your mentoring relationship will include academic guidance, of course, but also focus on providing support for the student's personal, scholarly and professional development.
- You'll find yourself offering career advice and support emotionally and spiritually. You may offer tutoring and undoubtedly will offer specific feedback on performance. Your scholar will model you in many ways as the scholar forms a professional identity. Your connections with others in the field and with research opportunities will be significant as the student acquires skills in networking and collaborating.
- In addition to helping students develop excellent research skills, the McNeil Scholar Mentor also assists in the acquisition of effective oral and written communication skills. The importance of being able to communicate outside one's narrow knowledge field to teach the public and persuade others of the import of research findings is key to graduate's success in the future. Student's need guidance into an appropriate valuing of their own work and then more guidance into influencing future funders, conference audiences and others. Similarly collaboration skills should be nurtured and leadership skills encouraged. The mentor should be mindful of offering opportunities to the mentee to lead projects and become part of teams who problem-solve collaboratively.
- Help students address areas of their program of study that are confusing/vague to them (if any) and assist them in getting clarity about expectations from professors in their program so they can be successful in their specific institution.
- Discuss the explicit and implicit criteria for quality work across the mentee's program of study including the fine points of forming a committee and approaching the dissertation.
- Respect goes a long way toward success:
  - Minimize interrupts during your meetings with the student. Show the mentee you are focused on them and consider them and their time valuable. Your body language and eye contact speak volumes. Students, unfortunately, often report that professors seem disinterested in them specifically because the professor is distracted during meetings.
  - Remember former conversations with your mentee. Keeping notes can help if you refer to them just before meeting with the mentee again.
  - Tell your Scholar what you have learned from them.
  - Name the student's prior skills and personal/professional experiences as strengths.

#### GIVING FEEDBACK

- Timely feedback to your McNeil Scholar will go a long way to nurturing a healthy relationship. Delays often leave the student feeling insecure and may impede their progress.
- Be forthright and explicit. Don't assume they know what you think.
- Give specific praise
- Give specific correction
- Do not assume that students who get behind in their work lack commitment. Investigate circumstances with curiosity rather than suspicion
- Don't put off concerns or problems. Address them as soon as possible. This helps avert problems becoming more serious/damaging and models an important element of becoming a professional who is able to deal directly with adversity.
- Encourage, encourage, encourage.
- Invite students to discuss their ideas.
- Challenge students to try new techniques.
- Help students overcome fears of failure and embrace mistakes as learning opportunities
- Address 'imposter syndrome' with your mentee. Many feel they don't belong.

- Help students break down scholarly tasks into small steps to be accomplished one by one so the student can hold back the flood of feeling overwhelmed that so many report.

#### THINGS TO AVOID

- No student can serve as a spokesperson for a group. Particularly when issues relating to race, class or gender arise, individuals from underrepresented groups can feel pressure to function as the representative for their group. This is felt as a burden. Do your best to avoid these sorts of assumptions. In fact, all assumptions need to be explored with your student so you can understand the individual well.
- Assertiveness tends to be rewarded in our culture. In some discussions, interrupting is the only way to be heard. This often feels disrespectful to some students and so they struggle to be heard. Open discussions about how to present ideas can be very helpful.
- Competition is also rampant in graduate school culture. This is often seen as alienating to people of color and women. Foster collaboration and discuss where competition can be transformed into collaboration.
- Isolation during graduate study is a problem. Check on your mentee's sense of connection with others and discuss alternatives with your mentee if you discover this is an issue.
- Don't avoid talking about race particularly if you and your mentee come from different races. Bring up the conversation and remain curious about the experience of your mentee. The field of psychology and professional mental health is dominated by primarily so called white practitioners. Graduate programs are similar in racial homogeneity. Your mentee may be struggling to find others to relate with or professors in their program who understand their experience as a person from a non-dominant culture. Students of color need to be invited to share their perspectives and their experience. Avoid foreclosing on this conversation too soon. Keep listening.
- Avoid giving your mentee the impression that all you do is work. This can be overwhelming to students. Model work/life balance as best you can. One way to do this is to ask about the student's responsibilities and activities in their personal life as well as their professional pursuits. What demands do they face outside their doctoral studies? Remember that cultural beliefs influence how a student understands family responsibilities. Listen before you offer solutions should problems occur. Encourage contact with friends and family. It can be helpful to give assignments well in advance and coach the McNeil Scholar in working ahead wherever possible in case family emergencies arise.
- Avoid assumptions about the mentee's economic freedom. Many students of color are supporting family members while they are studying and may experience financial stressors during their program. Be aware of these possibilities and offer your mentee a safe place to discuss these pressures. If possible loan a recommended book rather than suggesting it be purchased or put resource material you endorse online where possible. Securing travel expenses for conferences can be a lifeline if you are able to access funds or to assist your mentee in applying for funding through their program. The McNeil Scholars Project supplies funds for attending the annual CAPS conference for all scholars.

#### PREPARATION FOR MENTORS

Reflect on these questions to understand your own experience of being mentored:

- Who mentored me – what sort of mentoring did I receive?
- What was helpful and what was unhelpful?
- How did my mentor give me space to develop at my own pace? Or how did I feel rushed in an unsupportive way?
- How did my mentor seem distant or too 'hands off'? I didn't get pushed enough.
- In what areas do I wish I could have found a mentor to guide me?

- What is different about current graduate study? What applies and what doesn't from my experience?

#### BENEFITS TO MENTORS

Here's a valuable list from the University of Washington's website on mentoring that reminds us of the many benefits that come to mentors.

- engage the curiosities and energies of fresh minds
- keep abreast of new research questions, knowledge, paradigms and techniques
- cultivate collaborators for current or future projects
- identify and train graduate assistants whose work is critical to a research project or course offering
- prepare the next generation of intellectual leaders in the disciplines and in society
- enjoy the personal and professional satisfaction inherent in mentoring relationships