Building the Mentoring Relationship

Marilie Gammon, Ph.D.
Professor of Epidemiology
2014 UNC Graduate School Faculty Award for Excellence in Doctoral Mentoring

Mentoring experience
As primary mentor -- 25 doctoral and 13 masters students, 9 postdocs
As co-mentor -- 46 graduate students, 16 junior faculty
Why? Advantages of Building a Strong Mentoring Relationship

Your mentor can be your strongest ally in grad school and beyond

Mentors foster your research/scholarly growth

• Provide multiple opportunities to engage in research/scholarly activities
• Help to develop your own research/scholarly ideas and goals
• Close monitoring of your research/scholarly progress
• Provide critical feedback on conducting research/scholarly activities of the highest rigor
• Provide guidance for adhering to high ethical standards of conducting research/scholarly activities
• Facilitate research/scholarly connections/networks
Why? Advantages of Building a Strong Mentoring Relationship

Your mentor can be your strongest ally in grad school and beyond

Mentors aid in your professional development to yield positive scholarly and professional results

- Assist with developing professional goals
- Provide guidance in practical skill building
- Suggest opportunities for networking
- Help to identify potential professional opportunities
- Provide strong letters of support
- Advise on balancing work and life responsibilities
How? Steps to Building a Strong Mentoring Relationship

Meet with your mentor, **early** and often

- Focus on your research/scholarship activities and professional development
- Identify research/scholarly activities
- Focus on problem solving
- Review annual progress – outline realistic short-term vs. long-term future goals
- Coursework advice from mentor should center on how these classes will best help you to meet your research/scholarly goals

Come prepared for your meetings

- Do your homework
- Come with your own progress articulated – review what you have accomplished, but focus on challenging issues on which the mentor can help guide you
- Set realistic expectations and timelines
- Keep an open mind, and be prepared for constructive feedback
How? Steps to Building a Strong Mentoring Relationship

Develop strong communication skills

• Discuss communication styles with your primary mentor
• Contact your mentor early in your graduate career
• Contact your mentor(s) regularly
• Keep mentor updated with your progress
• Foster a dialogue
• Don’t be shy about asking questions
• Ask for what you need – both for scholarly growth and professional development
How? Steps to Building a Strong Mentoring Relationship

Cultivate multiple mentored relationships
- Graduate advisor or committee chair
- Seek other potential (co- or alternate) faculty mentors
- Consider RA/TA/internship/lab supervisors, postdocs

Network with your peers -- other graduate students
- Study groups – for classroom as well as research/scholarly activities
- Model your mentoring relationships based on your observation of other strong student-mentor relationships
- Seek guidance from senior grad students
- Mentor other more junior students
How? Steps to Maintaining a Strong Mentoring Relationship

Find common ground for maintaining the mentoring relationship

• Build trust and respect
• Be authentic, a straight shooter, good for your word
• Manage expectations with input from your mentor
• Flexibility is key, humor is helpful
• Seek navigational advice from co-mentors/peers, as needed
How? Steps to Maintaining a Strong Mentoring Relationship

Draw upon your community of mentors and peers, because navigating a mentoring relationship is complex.

Graduate student

- Co-mentors
- Faculty Mentor
- Peers
Summary: Building a Strong Mentoring Relationship

Why?

A strong mentoring relationship is in your best academic, research/scholarly, and professional interest

- Fosters your growth as a scholar and professional
- Yields positive scholarly and professional results

How?

Undertake steps that will foster your scholarly and professional growth

- Meet early and often
- Come prepared for your meetings
- Develop strong communication skills – both written and oral
- Cultivate more than one mentor
- Build graduate student – peer -- networks
- Find common ground for maintaining the mentoring relationship
- Draw upon on your community of mentors and peers
Questions?

Contact me: gammon@unc.edu

Contact your advisor!