

Mentoring Statement

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For most of my professional career, I conflated mentoring and teaching. My identity as a graduate student instructor has developed over time as I strive to incorporate traits that I observe and admire in my own mentors – tenacity, honesty, and kindness. As many of my own mentors are researchers and teachers themselves, this approach has served me well. At the same time, I tended to treat my friends’ concerns and problems as “teachable moments,” which can be insensitive and, at worst, alienating. I didn’t see a difference between being a teacher and being a true peer mentor. Nowadays, I am much more apt to describe my teaching and mentoring style as compatible, but not interchangeable. While I anticipate that most of my mentoring will happen with my students, I will also develop mentoring relationships with friends, colleagues, and many other folks throughout my career. In short, I have to learn to be adaptable, because peer mentoring is not a structured, formulaic process.

It is difficult to “unwire” my brain from thinking in terms of hierarchies (mentor/mentee, teacher/student), but I firmly believe that mentorship is a fluid interaction, with give and take between the mentor and mentee. I am constantly working on living comfortably within this pluralism. Mentorship can happen in formal situations, but it can also happen in little unguarded moments and unexpected ways. Sometimes mentorship is as simple as a smile or encouraging text. It can be as difficult as explaining to a fellow colleague why they failed a test or why their paper got rejected from a journal. But most often, I find that in my life and daily interactions, I am becoming the mentor I wish to be simply by being present, nonjudgmental, and mindful of how each person and situation is unique.

Given these recent revelations, I would say personal mentoring style best fits that of a holistic peer mentor (Beattie, 1985). That is, I seek to be adaptive and to treat my peers as complex people with interdimensional needs. Sometimes, people need a listener, and sometimes people need honest constructive criticism. I seek to help people with both their vulnerabilities and strengths. Most of all, I see my relationship with others as reciprocal: even though I identify as a mentor and I enjoy teaching, I also gain valuable advice and experience from deepening my relations with others.

Academia is a challenging work environment, full of triumphs and pitfalls, discoveries and rejections. To be a peer mentor in such a setting requires more than wisdom or intelligence; it requires flexibility, forgiveness, and self-awareness. Flexibility, because no two people have the same background and experiences, forgiveness, because no one is perfect, including myself; and self-awareness, because if I do not understand myself, I will find it difficult to truly help others. Overall, I hope that, when people look back and reminisce about my impact, they think of a strong, kind individual who was a positive presence in their lives.