

This is an Open Access document downloaded from ORCA, Cardiff University's institutional repository: <https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/id/eprint/155842/>

This is the author's version of a work that was submitted to / accepted for publication.

Citation for final published version:

Meier, Kenneth J. 2023. It all depends: Reflections on the art of mentoring PhD students in public affairs. *Journal of Public Affairs Education* 29 (3) , pp. 313-326. 10.1080/15236803.2022.2157191

Publishers page: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15236803.2022.2157191>

Please note:

Changes made as a result of publishing processes such as copy-editing, formatting and page numbers may not be reflected in this version. For the definitive version of this publication, please refer to the published source. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite this paper.

This version is being made available in accordance with publisher policies. See <http://orca.cf.ac.uk/policies.html> for usage policies. Copyright and moral rights for publications made available in ORCA are retained by the copyright holders.



**It All Depends:**  
**Reflections on the Art of Mentoring PhD Students in Public Affairs**

Kenneth J. Meier  
American University, Cardiff University, Leiden University

Dept. of Public Administration and Policy  
School of Public Affairs  
American University  
Washington DC 20016  
kmeier@american.edu  
202-885-3930

Journal of Public Affairs Education (forthcoming)

Abstract

Systematically examining the mentoring process for PhD students' needs to recognize that it has characteristics of unit/small batch production and relies heavily on the coproduction of the PhD student. This article examines one mentor's experiences with 80+ PhD students over an extended period of time using these conceptual lenses. Three general principles or "mindsets" that serve as an overall guide to the process. First, mentors need to take cognizance of their strengths and weaknesses as scholars and potential mentors. Second, mentors need to recognize that students vary in skills, personality and responsiveness; and these factors need to be considered in successful mentor relationships. Third, humility is valuable since not everything will work every time. Mentoring is a process where adjustments need to be continually made as the student, the mentor, and their relationship evolves. Ten specific tools are discussed in relation to these mindsets.

I would like to thank Anita Dhillon, Amanda Rutherford, Xiaoyang Xu for helpful comments on a previous draft of this manuscript.

## **It All Depends:**

### **Reflections on the Art of Mentoring PhD Students in Public Affairs**

PhD programs in public affairs spend the preponderance of their time on developing research skills with perhaps some time devoted to teaching (including a formal course at times), some effort at interfacing with public officials perhaps informally, and virtual no time on how these future faculty should mentor PhD students. At the same time, mentoring is perceived to be an essential component in producing high quality scholars (Schroeder et al. 2004). An extensive literature on mentoring PhD students exists in a wide range of disciplines and professions, covering such topics as advice to the student mentees (Lee et al. 2015), mental health aspects of mentoring (Liu et al. 2019), peer to peer mentoring among students (Mason and Hickman 2019; Webb et al. 2009), the relationship to scholarly creativity (Wang and Shibayama 2022), and outcomes for students (Boeren et al. 2015). Other work specifically examines mentoring of students of color (Brunsmas, Embrick, and Shin 2017; Santa-Ramirez 2022), and women (Hilmer and Hilmer 2007; Portillo 2007), and the impact of cross-race mentoring (Spalter-Roth et al. 2013). In public affairs, mentoring is presented as a central element in creating a professional identity (Smith and Hatmaker 2014) and as an essential element of teaching in the field (Holzer 2004). Special attention has been given to mentoring's role in improving diversity in the field (Portillo 2007) and in application to retention of junior faculty (Fountain and Newcomer 2016).

Without formal instruction in mentoring, many faculty logically start with their own graduate experience and seek to replicate that with adjustments based on self-reflection on how it affected one's own development. The process then evolves based on what seems to work and what does not with substantial self-selection into or out of the mentor role. The question becomes is it possible to produce generalizations or guidelines about mentoring that could be a roadmap to

practice?

The objective of this article is to provide guidelines to faculty mentoring PhD students (and some information for PhD students) by approaching this question with some concepts from public administration. Woodward's (1965) seminal work in organization theory suggests that optimal organizational structures depend on the process for production; unit/small batch, large batch, or continuous production. PhDs are clearly unit production; they are developed one at a time, each with a unique dissertation. Even within widely known brands (e.g., Maxwell), there is much individual variation. The process also relies on coproduction (Brudney and England 1983). Advisors facilitate the development of PhD students into scholars, but the actual production relies on the student. That implies that the process will follow some general principles in seeking a goal (production of an independent scholar) but with a great deal of variation from unit to unit and perhaps even greater variation across mentors and individual students. Using these two theoretical principles as applied to my own experience is a logical way to approach the topic of mentoring PhD students.

Logic suggests that mentoring process start with a clear goal in mind. In my case the goal is to produce an independent scholar with the tools to be able to successfully contribute to the literature in our field. The student might not pursue an academic career, but I see my job is to provide the tools that are needed in that role. Others might have goals that are more closely linked to the world of practice or the myriad other opportunities for PhDs in public affairs, and their mentoring strategies should be designed to match those goals.

Because I do not work at an elite institution like Harvard or Princeton, I start with the idea that no one is going to hire a PhD of mine based on pedigree. The student has to stand out by professional standards and that means publications which means conference papers and a

heavy dose of professional socialization. Students are encouraged to present at conferences, and at some institutions this meant paying their own way to the conference. Their research was divided into what we did together and what was theirs alone; but the objective was to get them solo authored publications. The goal was to create highly professionalized individuals with a full research agenda and a good understanding of how the profession worked.

Given the goal of producing an independent scholar, my preferred policy instrument is coauthorship. Students work as apprentices and learn how to formulate a question, seek out the appropriate data, design the statistical or qualitative analysis, and write up a coherent paper. This allows the student to try things out, make some mistakes, and then correct them. Although this is a good process for learning and mentoring, it is not necessarily an efficient one. One can err by working with a PhD student too early or by allowing too much discretion on the project with a resulting unpublished paper. Pushing a student through a rigidly designed system that I think is optimal might either produce clones who do not establish independent reputations or students who lose of the inherent joy of being a scholar or both.

Writing an article on mentoring PhD students is a daunting task for a scholar who is primarily a large-n quantitative scholar. There are no existing data bases with public affairs scholars matched with mentors and variables that describe the mentoring process and subsequent outcomes. Similar to most scholars in the area, I am skeptical of all the “how to be a successful manager” books that are sold in airports and generally discount the contributions of this genre. So in setting out to discuss what I think works in mentoring PhD students, I not just expect the readers to be skeptical but encourage them to be. I am highly critical of my own performance as a mentor and see no reason that others should not also be. Failures teach you what to not do. Success teaches you to be overconfident.

So this essay is a recap of experiences advising some 80+ dissertations at multiple universities. It is a set of perceptions from this process that seeks to provide a roadmap of what I think works and what I am fairly sure did not. It is designed to provide guidance for faculty who are mentoring students for academic roles (see Table 1). At times there will also be advice for students on how to structure the mentor opportunities that they have (see Table 2).

### **Planning the Mentoring Process: Goals and Mindsets**

#### *Step 1. Take Inventory*

The starting point for a mentor is to recognize your strengths and weaknesses as a professor and thus as a mentor. It is possible that some faculty are good at everything; I am not. There are things I do well: I can publish, a skill that I attribute to being able to think theoretically and good insight on how to go from theory to data to convincing argument. I also network pretty well despite my lack of social skills and a basic distaste for social interactions. There are other things I do not do well; I am a terrible grant writer, and I would have been happier and more productive if I never wrote a grant and spent my time doing research instead. And there is a wide range of things I would rather just not do: social media, interviews with media, consulting with government agencies and others, engaging in university politics, etc. Some of these things I can do well, but I do not enjoy them and thus am not the best mentor for careers that some students might seek. In my own case, this means I try to select students who are primarily interested in careers as a scholar rather than as a practitioner, consultant or teacher.

Being aware of your own strengths and weaknesses means you should also encourage students to have more than one mentor. Others can provide advice or serve as role models where you cannot.

#### *Step 2. Recognize Student Variation*

The second step is to recognize that graduate students come in a wide variety of skills, interests, preferences and virtually everything else. Despite all the structure we add to graduate programs in terms of entry requirements, course requirements, evaluation processes and what seems to be hazing (prelim exams), producing graduate students remains an individualized process. Every student is unique in some ways. Some are highly self motivated; some respond better to criticism; some need more intense interaction; some need to be allowed to make their own mistakes. And some will end up being a better scholar than you are. Successful mentoring requires recognizing these differences and adapting a mentor approach that is most appropriate. The unit or small batch concept is more than a metaphor in the case of mentoring; the process needs to be tailored to the individual student.

### *Step 3. Humility is a Virtue*

Given your inventory of skills and the extensive variation in students, humility as a mindset is important. Humility allows you to recognize the mistakes you are making and take corrective action. Perhaps you will never fail, but that is not my own experience. And in many cases a student might respond better to a different mentor than you. That *has been* my experience. I have had students who have moved to another advisor and had a stellar career. I have had students who I thought were not going to make it, but who then worked out various problems and came back to write an excellent dissertation and have a productive career.

Because producing PhDs is an exercise in coproduction, there will be many outcomes where you as a mentor will be less relevant or even irrelevant. Student interests change, not just choice of topic or advisor but even whether or not a PhD is something that is needed or desired. Pursuing a career in an area that will not provide a measure of satisfaction is never a good choice, and students should be free to make that decision.

Even while admitting mistakes of strategies and interactions with a student, setting one's standards and expectations high for a student is important. You will not feel good about it if you do not, and it is unclear it does the student any favors. I fully understand that my standards mean some students are not interested in working with me. More than one has referred to me as intimidating and thus did not seek me out only to tell me later (suggesting that there probably were other similar cases). Aiming high is what you want your students to do; we should be producing students whose achievements exceed our own. In one case a student, who dropped out of our PhD program to transfer to another, sent me a nice email after she got tenure telling me that she now understood what I was trying to do and appreciated it.

The process of successful mentoring starts with these three points and realizes that good results are possible only if you recognize your own limitations (and by implication get help in those areas or encourage multiple mentors), you are flexible enough to deal with the various contingencies that are likely to arise, and you are willing to look critically at yourself as a mentor.

### **Picking From the Mentoring Toolkit**

If students vary in skills, aptitude, effort, and other variables and mentors vary in the skills that they have, an important part of mentoring is picking tools that you use to mentor students. Mentoring tools are exactly that, instrumental activities to accomplish an end. Determining which tools to use for a specific student is important. While I will list those that work for me, again I encourage readers to be critical from their own perspective.

1. Look for *match ups* between what you do and what the student is interested in studying. There are people who are excellent mentors in areas without expertise, but it is clearly harder in my experience simply because you do not necessarily know the literature or the biases



in the area. You need to rely on the student to make a serious investment in the literature or much of the effort will be wasted or the student will examine questions that are minor or trivial. This applies to all fields, but I think it best to illustrate with the study of gender and public administration. There is a massive literature on gender and identity; scholars need to read and relate to this literature, some that is difficult political theory. An additional literature primarily in the private sector focuses on gender and organizations. And if your concern is representation, then the entire gender representation literature (much focused on legislatures) is also relevant. I think it is very difficult to make a contribution in this field (or others) without a major initial investment in the literature.

A lack of student interest in the project runs the risk of the student changing topics or deciding to drop out of the program, thus generating a loss of the fixed costs of setting up the project and the investment in mentoring. You want students to own a project. This is especially the case with projects that require data gathering, both quantitative and qualitative. If students move in and out of the data collection processes, then the reliability of the data suffer, and the mentor might as well be collecting the data himself or herself. Data projects need a great deal of hands on time to monitor and check on the progress. I can attest that I have failed in this multiple times and generate far more work for everyone by not keeping track of the process.

The advice to faculty applies to students. From a student perspective, you want a mentor with a substantive interest in your work. I have directed dissertations in comparative politics, international relations and political theory (in addition to American politics and public affairs), but my value added in those areas is limited to questions of methods and style. In addition, I am pretty sure a letter of recommendation from me in a field where I am not an active scholar does not have a great deal of credence. I think it is unrealistic for a student to believe that a program

will adapt to them; students can work independent of the program, but they have to be aware of the difficulties and will need to do extra work to make it happen.

Another aspect of match-up is how mentors and students interact with each other. While I do not consider it a criterion for willing to be a mentor, it does make the process easier. I prefer students with egos. I want them to question what I say or tell me during a joint research project that I am doing something wrong. This also applies to the mentor process; if you are not likely to respond to how I am approaching you, I really need to know that. I also think that when I coauthor with a student that they should edit my work; if it usually takes me about 10 drafts to get something that is well written, then any suggestions are welcome.

2. The *socialization* process starts on day one. I like to ask the students what they plan on writing their research papers in the first semester in the first few weeks of class. If you are taking a class from me, you have no choice in this regard since there is an early abstract to submit and a plan to complete an actual research paper that semester. The way to learn how to do research is by doing research and getting feedback on it. I am not a fan of critical literature reviews or similar papers in graduate seminars; I never give exams in nonmethods courses and think prelim exams are the dumbest idea that has ever plagued PhD programs. A student only has so much research time available, it should not be wasted. In recent years I have set a goal of having students present a paper at a conference in their second semester. This does not have to be solo authored, but I want students attending a professional meeting and learning how to present papers, interact on panels, and gain the experience of learning about the profession. If I am to be a coauthor on the project, I try to set and enforce deadlines so that I have time to work on the paper before it goes to the conference. I admit I often fail in this regard, and some students have been taken aback when I refused to put my name on a paper when it was drafted

too late for me to make a contribution.

Let me stress again that this focus on socialization and the production of research reflects an assessment of my own skills and limits. Other faculty might find value in other strategies such as a broader focus on literature, more gradual development of research interests, or stressing other aspects of graduate education. Mentors should emphasize their strengths.

3. Reinforce that *deadlines* are important. There may be people who can write well under time pressure. I am not one of them, and I do not see many who are. New PhD students generally cannot although I once worked with a former journalist who was exceptional under deadlines. Professional etiquette includes getting conference papers to other participants and discussants with plenty of time to read before the conference.<sup>1</sup> This becomes even more important if you have a large number of students.

The lack of concern for meeting deadlines affects not only mentoring students but appears to have been detrimental for the entire profession. The value of professional conferences is dramatically degraded by papers that are not circulated or provided the day before the conference. Often incomplete, such papers prevent real discussion of the research and an exchange of ideas. While I will not mention any names, there are conferences that I simply refuse to attend because the quality of the work is so terrible and is more like individuals doing Walter Mitty impressions than a professional conference.

---

<sup>1</sup>One of the difficult things is to convince a student is that just because almost everyone circulates conference papers at the last minute and they are frequently incomplete and badly written does not mean that this is acceptable practice. If you act professionally, others will recognize it. If you fail to do so, it will be noted.

Professionalism at conferences pays off, especially for PhD students. A comment at a faculty recruitment committee about how one candidate presented a quality paper in a professional way generally makes a very positive impression. You have no idea who might be in the audience at a professional meeting and how that might generate some future contact, invitation, or other benefit. I have several long-term relationships with faculty who I first met when they were graduate students presenting a paper.

4. *Feedback* needs to be frequent and strong. My former students say that I have mellowed over time, and they are probably right. Being negative all the time is work and wears on you. It also requires a great deal of focus, and it is hard to keep that focus and see the big picture when you are correcting spelling and punctuation. I have found that if I spend my time correcting your grammar that I do not have the time or the focus to provide you feedback on important things about your paper. As a mentor, you want to be encouraging, but you also want to make sure the student is improving. Nothing pleases me more than to see a publication by a former student and on reading it to realize how much they have developed since graduate school (or as I like to say, “they never learned that from me”). This means that students really need to develop an ego. They need to get over their fear of my blue pencil.

The blue pencil is legendary. Virtually every student I have had will tell stories of getting a paper back covered with blue pencil comments, sometimes with x marks thru entire paragraphs or pages. Once in a while I approach a graduate student and show them a paper where I have xed out entire pages and written all over in blue, and asked them, do you know who wrote this? They of course do not know and so I tell them, I wrote it. And then let them know I apply the same criticism to my own writing that I do to theirs. It might be the Stockholm syndrome, but I think eventually my former students see that this was good for them. Even curmudgeons

evolve, however; I have given up the blue pencil and provide all my comments electronically and even try to tolerate the stupid note function in MS Word.

Feedback applies as much to data analysis as writing. Frequently data analysis reveals puzzles. Something that should work theoretically does not, why? Bert Kritzer (1996) once published a wonderful paper in *AJPS* on playing with one's data much like musicians play with a score. To understand the data generating process and why relationships work, you need to really know your data and that means probing these puzzles. In recent years, I have done this by asking a student to run a set of analyses and then after they do, come back and tell me why they think I asked them to do this before we look at the results. In part, this is illustrating how my insight operates when conducting research, a valuable skill for students to learn.

5. Keep your *eyes on the prize* and encourage your students to do so also. Reflecting the insecurities of a lower class kid from the middle of nowhere, I have always been very concerned with having a job and being able to make a living. This dominates my mentoring philosophy. My job is to produce PhD students that major research universities are interested in hiring. While there are probably still a lot of good old boy networks in the academic job market, it is also clear that objective indicators of faculty potential are rewarded in the market. There is no more bona fide occupational qualification for a faculty position than articles accepted for publication in major scholarly journals. PhD students need to show that they can produce knowledge and contribute to the literature.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup>At the 2018 NASPAA meetings a panel on doctoral education focused on the competitiveness of the job market noting that there were new PhDs on the market with multiple publications. This escalation in standards meant that many students had difficulty getting jobs or

Keeping eyes on the prize means that you need to set priorities for students and encourage them to also set priorities. There are times when I remark to a student who is complaining about a class, “oh you are telling me that classes are interfering with your education as a scholar.” By this I mean that filling in classes can be less important than conducting original research. There are skills you need to learn from classes, and classes give you the opportunity to see how the mind of a faculty member works (always a valuable skill). But the objective of earning a PhD is to demonstrate that you can be a successful scholar.

The above paragraphs again derive from the goals that I set for mentoring; not all mentors will share my focus. Mentors advising future faculty for institutions that stress teaching will want to craft their mentoring instruments accordingly. Those seeking to guide students to careers in practice will select other instruments. Mentoring activities should always be adjusted to the specific goals of the mentor and student.

6. Get the students to focus on what their *agenda* is and how the students will market themselves. Under no circumstances should a student take me and my eclectic research agendas as a role model. The profession does not like generalists who apply their research skills in substantially different areas. This reflects the limits of some people’s minds in my opinion, but it is virtually impossible to convince a narrow specialist that someone can be good at a variety of different things.

I prefer that students have more than one set of papers but hopefully have them related.

---

would take post-docs rather than a tenure track position. I was unable to attend this panel, but I wanted to because I wanted to ask why people think this is a problem.

Two agendas are an advantage because when you get bored with one or run up against obstacles in one, you can shift to the other for a while. In addition, insights from one can be valuable and seem highly creative in another. In 1984 Bart Connor won the Olympic gold medal in floor exercise (gymnastics) by simply taking tricks that were traditional on the pommel horse and translating them to floor exercise. The creativity won him the gold. Within two years everyone was doing this once Bart showed how to do it. The same synergies work in research.

This focus means that you need to avoid the tangential projects that look interesting but do not fit with your market profile. If you have not done that, then you have to have some explanation such as “I was the methodologist on that project.” Of course that only works if you actually have some methodological skills. This does not mean that you cannot combine fields such as applying the logic of political behavior to public policy as Joe Soss did with welfare policy and welfare participants, but it does mean that you have to be able to demonstrate your work can all be tied together. Recently my students have been using some nice Venn Diagrams to do this and show how there is a common core to what they are doing.

7. Advise students to *attend job talks* and write up a critique of each one. What did the candidate do well and what was not clear? Was the technology useful to clarify things or was it just for show and tell or worse just got in the way? Was there a major theoretical question that was addressed? Was it clear how the current paper fit into a coherent research agenda? Was it clear what direction future research would go? Were questions actually answered? It is useful for the student to write out a critique of the job talk afterward and engage in discussions about the above questions.

You can learn a lot by doing this. There are times when you will see exceptional job talks and times when you will see very bad ones. Learn from these and apply them to your own

presentations. If you are my student, you have practiced your job talk many times and fielded some oddball questions from me. This is to prepare you so that you are never surprised. You want to be able to think on your feet and let your personality come through. Actual presentation styles can be adapted to what you feel you can do comfortably, for some this is standing behind a lectern, for others it is engaging the audience. There are many ways to do a good presentation, and PhD students need to develop a style that works for them. If there are no job talks, do the same thing for people who give research talks at your university.

8. Have the student start building a *network*. Creating a professional network is important for both scholarly and visibility purposes. Conferences create opportunities for this. Even as a graduate student, you need to focus on doing this. It is fun to hang out with the other PhD students from your program, but none of them are going to get you a job. Meet faculty, impress them with your professionalism, hand out your business cards, ask for copies of their papers, etc. The purpose of cocktail parties, receptions and business meetings is to expand your professional network; these are individuals who might give you advice on research, share insights on how the field is developing, make decisions on who is hired, or even be asked to write an evaluation of your tenure and promotion file.

Mentors need to take a role in creating these networks. Conference cocktail parties are opportunities to introduce your students to others. This creates a first contact; the student needs to follow up. At some conferences I ask the student who they would like to meet. I know students can find these receptions intimidating, but faculty are generally approachable. At the same time, do not monopolize such conversations with long explanations of your research, these are introductions that might lead to such discussions in the future.

9. Do not let your student fall in love with what you do. My parallel advice to students is



“Love your advisor but focus on your *individual record*, that is, a record that is separate from your advisor.” Everything you publish on your own is worth more (*ceteris paribus*). My students get tenure because they are not clones. They are independent scholars with independent ideas. They might have a distinctive stamp, but that stamp does not mean that they will be spending their entire career working on the topics I happen to be working on (if anyone could even anticipate what I will be working on in five years).

I encourage my students to work with other faculty and see how different minds approach a problem. This extends to my research assistants who I prefer to be shared with other faculty; this creates some valued variation that should be important over the course of a career. I generally find students develop better under such circumstances, and it often draws me into new and interesting areas of research.

10. Recognize that there are *exceptions*. Some of my students will read the above and think, he never did that with me. They are correct. While I think there is a pattern, every student is an individual; and it really is not my place to stifle creativity among my students or limit their ability to do things I know nothing about. There are times when I have encouraged students to work on their own because I thought they did not need me as a coauthor; there were times when I would have liked to coauthor material with students but encouraged them in solo endeavors. And there were enough mistakes in my mind to keep me skeptical that I had any special talent in terms of mentoring. And students overcame enough of my mistakes to make selection bias a feasible hypothesis.

Basically, this last point suggests that mentoring is always a one-on-one process and that there are no real economies of scale. Mo Fiorino once remarked to a group that he was on 23 dissertation committees; that has to be at least two full time jobs by itself. There are some

advantages to have two students at different stages of their graduate career or three or maybe even four, but more students than that means you are rushed, that you cannot take the time you might need in a difficult case, and that you will end up being frustrated.

### **A Caveat**

The corollary to humility is to *get help* for things that you cannot do well or have no relevant experience. My students often come to graduate school with experiences different from mine that have shaped their interests and skills. While I might hold opinions on such questions as when it is best to start a family, I have no experience in the area and no one should ask my advice on this. Your network and your colleagues can provide backup for you. Your scholarly network can often supplement your professional advice if your mentee is working in an area where you are not fully current. I have always been struck by the generosity of individuals who are willing to interact with my students on research questions. Your colleagues collectively have a wider range of experiences than you do, and your conversations with them on other topics in past might provide some clues as to who might be appropriate to approach.

This advice is particularly important in mental health issues that appear to be increasing or at least be more visible. Most of us are not trained in counseling or in clinical psychology. Spend some time in finding out what services are available for students at your university either at the university or the community. Know where other forms of assistance are available; my current school has an emergency loan fund for students. Every university has resources in cases of sexual assault. Some universities have extensive programs for food security or other issues. Knowing about these resources is important for all faculty not just PhD mentors.

### **A Note to PhD Students**

Although this article was design to provide guidance for faculty mentors, I would like to

think that some PhD students might read this essay. If so, there are things that they can do to make the mentoring process work better for themselves. PhD students need to take charge of planning their careers and thinking strategically about how to do it. While faculty know things, they are not omniscient and clearly not infallible. Although this essay encourages faculty to think in coproduction terms, from your perspective, your dissertation and your career is more dependent on you than anyone else. That means you need to take charge. That admonition includes selecting who your mentors are, and using different individuals for different things. It even covers switching mentors if interests evolve in different directions. Table 2 draws out a variety of takeaways for the PhD student from the various sections of the paper.

A second reason exists for students to be active in shaping their graduate experiences including their mentoring relationships. A literature exists on the dark side of mentoring (Johnson and Huwe 2002), reflecting the power differential between faculty and students (Behl 2020), and the possibility of unfairness, bullying (Metzger, Petit, and Sieber 2015), and sexual harassment (Hurley 1996). Having a team of mentors allows you to raise such issues with other mentors when they occur and provides you the opportunity to change mentors. Public administration is generally not a field where PhD students are bound to their advisors by specific grants such as in the sciences and engineering. Although the decision to change mentors might not be an easy one, many students change advisors/mentors and greatly benefit from the process.

### **Conclusion**

This essay reflects the experience of one mentor based on interactions with a large number of PhD students over an extended period of time at multiple universities. It also reflects observing mentor relations of my colleagues both up close and from a distance. Although the essay spun out a set of guidelines, the reader should be aware that in a unit production process,

there will always be exceptions and the need to adjust practices.

Table 1 recaps the main points of the essay for faculty. Good mentoring requires thinking rationally about the process and approaching it in the same way that you approach your scholarly puzzles. A match-up between a student's goals and plan of study and your interests simplifies the mentoring process. Think of mentoring as a socialization process keeps the focus on goals for both you and the student; much of what we teach is the expectations of our profession. Be clear on work and relationship rules; deadlines are very important to me and I try to stress that for students so that our relationship will be harmonious. There is no substitute for strong and consistent feedback; setting expectations provides a structure for a good working relationship. Remembering the end objective, producing quality scholars and the indicators of that, is extremely important. Even if the student changes topics or advisors, focusing on what the profession values will make the transition from student to scholar easier. Your advisees should be encouraged to have their own agendas; perhaps with multiple interrelated parts. It allows them to establish an independent career. Have the student attend job talks and other research presentations as a learning experience with a critical eye; these are opportunities to develop a style of presentation that works for the student. Networks are increasingly important, and PhD students need to start building their own networks while in graduate school. Encourage your students to do work different from yours on some dimension: substance, method, theory; this creates ownership of the process for the student. Finally, recognize that there are always exceptions and be prepared to deal with them. As Harvey Sherman (1966) said about management, "It all depends."

Pointing out limitations of a study has become common practice in public affairs. While I have tried to emphasize the variance and the exceptions in the mentoring process, it is fair to

look critically at this entire essay. First, this is one person's summary of his own experiences, and the possibility of misperception and bias has to be considered. Second, the essay consistently stressed the numerous variables that contribute to a successful mentor-mentee relationship and thus provided only general guidelines and the admonition to be flexible rather than a set of concrete rules. Other patterns of mentorship might work very well for other people; these guidelines work well for me, but they could reflect idiosyncrasies of the students or the mentor. I would encourage others to offer similar guidelines that they find have been effective. Third, the best advice is to approach mentoring as a learning experience with a critical eye for what works and what does not work with an individual student. This is not easy to do given all the other demands on your time in terms of teaching, service and research.

Finally, remind yourself that mentoring is a crucial task in developing our future scholars. Properly mentored students become faculty with a head start on developing a successful career. And there is no greater joy than to see a former student flourish as a scholar, teacher and a mentor.

### References

- Behl, N. (2020). Violence and Mentoring: Race, Gender, and Sexual Harassment. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 53(4), 780-783.
- Boeren, E., Lokhtina-Antoniou, I., Sakurai, Y., Herman, C., & McAlpine, L. (2015). Mentoring: A review of early career researcher studies. *Frontline Learning Research*, 3(3), 68-80.
- Brudney, J. L., & England, R. E. (1983). Toward a definition of the coproduction concept. *Public administration review*, 43(1), 59-65.
- Brunsmas, D. L., Embrick, D. G., & Shin, J. H. (2017). Graduate students of color: Race, racism, and mentoring in the white waters of academia. *Sociology of race and ethnicity*, 3(1), 1-13.
- Fountain, J., & Newcomer, K. E. (2016). Developing and sustaining effective faculty mentoring programs. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, 22(4), 483-506.

Hilmer, C., & Hilmer, M. (2007). Women helping women, men helping women? Same-gender mentoring, initial job placements, and early career publishing success for economics PhDs. *American Economic Review*, 97(2), 422-426.

Holzer, M. (1999). Mentoring as a commitment to teaching. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, 5(1): 1-4.

Hurley, A. E. (1996). Challenges in cross-gender mentoring relationships: psychological intimacy, myths, rumours, innuendoes and sexual harassment. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 17(3), 42-49.

Johnson, W. B., & Huwe, J. M. (2002). Toward a typology of mentorship dysfunction in graduate school. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 39(1), 44-55.

Kritzer, H. M. (1996). The data puzzle: The nature of interpretation in quantitative research. *American Journal of Political Science*, 40(1), 1-32.

Lee, S., McGee, R., Pfund, C., Branchaw, J., & Wright, G. (2015). The mentoring continuum: From graduate school through tenure. R. Wright, G (Eds.), *"Mentoring Up": Learning to manage your mentorship relationships*, Graduate School Press of Syracuse University, 133-153.

Liu, C., Wang, L., Qi, R., Wang, W., Jia, S., Shang, D., ... & Zhao, Y. (2019). Prevalence and associated factors of depression and anxiety among doctoral students: The mediating effect of mentoring relationships on the association between research self-efficacy and depression/anxiety. *Psychology research and behavior management*, 12, 195.

Mason, A., & Hickman, J. (2019). Students supporting students on the PhD journey: An evaluation of a mentoring scheme for international doctoral students. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 56(1), 88-98.

Metzger, A. M., Petit, A., & Sieber, S. (2015). Mentoring as a way to change a culture of academic bullying and mobbing in the humanities. *Higher education for the future*, 2(2), 139-150.

Portillo, S. (2007). Mentoring minority and female students: Recommendations for improving mentoring in public administration and public affairs programs. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, 13(1), 103-113.

Santa-Ramirez, S. (2022). Sink or swim: The mentoring experiences of Latinx PhD students with faculty of color. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 15(1), 124-34.

Schroeder, L., O'Leary, R., Jones, D., & Poocharoen, O. O. (2004). Routes to scholarly success in public administration: Is there a right path? *Public Administration Review*, 64(1), 92-105.

Sherman, H. (1966). *It All Depends: A Pragmatic Approach to Organization*. University of Alabama Press.

Smith, A. E., & Hatmaker, D. M. (2014). Knowing, doing, and becoming: Professional identity construction among public affairs doctoral students. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, 20(4), 545-564.

Spalter-Roth, R., Shin, J. H., Mayorova, O. V., & White, P. E. (2013). The impact of cross-race mentoring for “ideal” PhD careers in sociology. *Sociological Spectrum*, 33(6), 484-509.

Wang, J., & Shibayama, S. (2022). Mentorship and creativity: Effects of mentor creativity and mentoring style. *Research Policy*, 51(3), 104451.

Webb, A. K., Wangmo, T., Ewen, H. H., Teaster, P. B., & Hatch, L. R. (2009). Peer and faculty mentoring for students pursuing a PhD in gerontology. *Educational Gerontology*, 35(12), 1089-1106.

Woodward, J. (1965). *Industrial Organization: Theory and Practice*. London: Oxford University Press.

## **Table 1. Takeaway Points for Faculty Mentors**

### **Mindsets before you start**

1. Take inventory of your skills and where you can provide value added to a PhD student.
2. Recognize student variation and the need to adapt your mentoring style to the individual student.
3. Be willing to recognize that you can make mistakes and will need to make adjustments for individual students while maintaining high standards.

### **Mentoring Tools**

1. Stay within your skill set; mentoring outside one's area of expertise is difficult and more uncertain. Encourage a team of mentors to cover where you lack expertise.
2. Professional socialization is a core mentoring tool and needs to be consistently emphasized from the start.
3. Stress deadlines, this will make your life easier, and it creates a professional environment for the student.
4. Frequent feedback is essential.
5. Keep your focus on the end goal. What careers will your students pursue. This essay is focused on the academic market for PhDs in public affairs.
6. Keep the student's focus on their research agenda. Seek ties among the various research projects.
7. Have students attend job talks or research presentations and provide a detailed critique of the talk and its presentation as a learning exercise.
8. Encourage students to start building professional networks for their career.
9. Encourage students to work with others to create independence and insights different from yours.
10. Recognize the exceptions to every takeaway.

### **Caveat**

1. Get help from others. Think of yourself as part of a team of mentors who have skills different from yours.



## **Table 2. Takeaways for PhD Students**

1. Every student should have multiple mentors who can be a source of guidance on different concerns. This article focuses on your academic mentor.
2. Students need to take an active role in selecting mentors for their education and career training.
3. One mentor should share your research interests. You may need substantive, theoretical or methodological advice and this requires specialization.
4. Much of PhD training is learning by doing either by yourself or with others. A mentor is a guide in this process.
5. Keep your career goals in mind and build your experiences around them. If you aspire to an academic career, research skills and productivity are essential.
6. Seek feedback on your research. Take opportunities to present your research and seek out critical feedback.
7. A coherent research agenda is an advantage. Take advantage of synergies across your projects and avoid interesting but tangential work.
8. Attend all job talks and research presentations in your department. Do critical evaluations of them as a way of determining how you will present your own research.
9. Take every opportunity to start building a professional network with people who visit your program, with others at professional conferences, and through activities that major associations offer.