What are effective mentoring practices, and how can they enhance outcomes?

Undergraduate and graduate students alike benefit from intentional and thoughtful mentoring by faculty. Close and supportive mentoring relationships with faculty help students achieve improved academically as well as increase their self-efficacy (DeFreitas & Bravo, 2012; Handelsman, 2005; Campbell & Campbell, 1997). When students believe their professors care about them as people, and can identify a mentor who encourages them to pursue their goals, they experience greater well-being in college and are more engaged in their post-graduation careers (Gallup-Purdue Poll, 2015).

For faculty, close relationships with students also offer a suite of benefits. As mentees achieve greater academic success through the relationship, they may produce higher-quality research, enhancing the profile of your lab or research group. Similarly, those greater academic achievements and leadership skills may allow students to take on higher-responsibility teaching or peer mentoring roles in the classroom. Finally, as students share their positive mentoring experiences with peers and prospective students, your research or degree program may grow.

Effective mentoring practices for college students fall into four key areas: psychological and emotional support, career paths and goal setting, role modeling, and academic support (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Crisp, 2009, 2008; Nora & Crisp, 2007). The SAIL framework and tools offer a variety of ways to help you add to your existing portfolio of mentoring practices in each of these four key areas.

If you are not yet familiar with the SAIL Framework, visit sail.northeastern.edu/about to learn about the dimensions, dimensional skills, and foundational masteries that make up the framework.

CAREER PATHS AND GOAL SETTING

The career paths and goal setting component of mentoring can include prompting students to reflect on their professional goals, supporting them in monitoring their progress toward their goals, and helping them expand their professional networks. To this end, you might ask students to use the Goals functionality of the SAIL web platform (https://integrate.sail.northeastern.edu) to craft one or more goals, with specific milestones along the way. By setting their privacy settings to “Advisor,” and adding you to their Advisors group in the Network functionality, the student can share their goals with you to review remotely, or as a starting point for a face-to-face conversation. For professional networking, encourage students to use the SAIL web platform (https://integrate.sail.northeastern.edu) to search for other students’ co-ops, identify some that are of interest to them, and reach out by email.
PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT
The psychological and emotional support component of mentoring can include practices such as discussing or prompting reflection on a student’s values or interests, strategizing ways to manage work-life balance, and encouraging students to develop extensive support networks so they will have others to rely on when they experience a challenge. The SAIL framework of dimensions, skills, and foundational masteries can provide a starting point for a one-on-one conversation about your mentee’s values and aspirations. You can also encourage your mentee to use the Opportunity Finder function of the SAIL app or web platform (https://integrate.sail.northeastern.edu) to search for on-campus programs on stress management and well-being, or other opportunities that can connect them to like-minded peers who can extend and broaden their personal networks.

ROLE MODELING
Role modeling in the mentoring literature goes beyond having a student observe your work, to describing the skills you’re drawing upon when performing a professional task and how, as well as helping students develop more expert-like insights into the ways in which your shared discipline connects to the broader world. For the former, you draw from the SAIL framework (which may already be familiar to your students) to describe the skills you need as a disciplinary expert, and how they are applied in your professional practice. Build on that conversation by asking students to use the Skills Visualization functionality (image below) of the SAIL web platform (https://integrate.sail.northeastern.edu) to identify experiences where they have used the skills you identified as important, and use the Opportunity Finder to identify other upcoming events on campus that draw upon those same skills.

Snapshot of the Skills Visualization functionality of the SAIL web platform (https://integrate.sail.northeastern.edu):

Snapshot of the Opportunity Finder functionality of the SAIL web platform (https://integrate.sail.northeastern.edu):
ACADEMIC SUPPORT

Finally, the academic support component of mentoring includes approaches such as helping students identify and adopt effective study strategies and mindsets, giving focused performance coupled with explicit encouragement, and nominating or encouraging students to apply for awards. Using a student’s Timeline in the SAIL web platform (https://integrate.sail.northeastern.edu), you can work together to consider what activities or practices the student has been engaged in, and how each of those activities has contributed to, or detracted from, their academic success over that time period. By logging into the SAIL Educator Portal (https://educator.sail.northeastern.edu) and going into the record for a course or other learning opportunity you facilitated, you can provide feedback to a single learner for any skill you selected when you mapped that opportunity- just hover over the individual student’s name under In Cohort. Finally, you might identify awards or other prestigious opportunities using the Opportunity Finder functionality of the SAIL web platform (https://integrate.sail.northeastern.edu) or the mobile app, and recommend those opportunities to your mentee.

**Snapshot of the Timeline functionality of the SAIL web platform (https://integrate.sail.northeastern.edu):**

![Timeline](https://integrate.sail.northeastern.edu)

**Why do these mentoring practices work?**

Decades of research with a wide range of populations across a variety of domains has demonstrated that social identity threat, the a fear that you may be expected to underperform due to cultural stereotypes about one of your identity characteristics (gender, race, background, and may others), inhibits working memory and thereby task performance (Appel et al., 2011; Walton & Spencer, 2009; Inzlicht & Ben-Zeev, 2003; Steele et al., 2002). By recognizing students as members of our community, fostering a sense of belonging at our institution, in our classes, and in our programs, and showing that we believe they can succeed, we can substantially minimize our students’ experience of social identity threat (Brown et al., 2016; Rinn et al., 2013; Good et al., 2012; Woodcock et al., 2012; Chemers et al., 2011; Hausmann et al., 2007).
References