Questionnaire for Aligning Expectations in Research Mentoring Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentor / Supervisor:</th>
<th>Mentee / Student:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time Period:</td>
<td>Dept / Program:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For each pair of statements, determine your preference. For example with statement pair #1, if you believe the ideal mentoring relationship focuses on common research interests, select 1, 2, or 3. Or if you think the ideal relationship focuses on effective working and communication styles, select 4, 5, or 6. Avoid filling in “3.5” for your responses.

### Early Stages of the Mentoring Relationship and Choosing Mentors/Mentees

1. In an ideal mentoring relationship, the mentor and mentee should have similar research interests (4/6)
2. In an ideal mentoring relationship, mentors should provide close supervision and guidance (4/6)
3. Mentors should only accept mentees when they have specific & deep knowledge of the mentee’s research topic (4/6)
4. A personal and friendly relationship between mentor and mentee is important for a successful relationship (4/6)
5. The mentor is responsible for providing emotional support & encouragement to the mentee (4/6)
6. The mentor should play a significant role in deciding on the research focus for the mentee (4/6)
7. When choosing research topics, I prefer to work on projects with potential for high payoffs, even if it involves high risk (4/6)
8. The mentor should decide how frequently to meet with the mentee (4/6)
9. The mentor should provide the rules and guidelines for the program or dept to the mentee (4/6)
10. The mentor is responsible for finding funding until the mentee graduates or completes the program (4/6)

### Middle Stages of the Mentoring Relationship

11. The mentor should be the primary guide for the mentee in their academic and professional goals (4/6)
12. The mentor should be the first place to turn when the mentee has problems with the research project (4/6)
13. The mentor should check regularly that the mentee is working consistently and finishing tasks (4/6)
14. The mentor should develop an appropriate plan and timetable of research and study for the mentee (4/6)

### Advanced Stages of the Mentoring Relationship

15. The mentor should initiate the preparation of presentations, papers, and reports (4/6)
16. The mentor should insist on seeing all drafts of work (presentations, thesis, papers, etc) to ensure that the mentee is on the right track (4/6)
17. It’s the mentor’s responsibility to first explain about co-authorship early in the process (4/6)
18. The mentor is responsible for providing career advice and professional connections to the mentee (4/6)
The Role of Expectations

Managing expectations between mentors and mentees can be challenging and is a common source of conflict in mentoring relationships. Often the conflict relates to unspoken expectations that are not explicitly addressed, because they are assumed or even unaware to the mentor or mentee. To help bring some of these expectations into the open for discussion, using this questionnaire can help. This tool has been designed as a discussion starter for use by research mentors and student mentees. The goal of using this questionnaire is to provide a framework for a fruitful discussion about each person’s expectations, and how to decide on appropriate ongoing actions as the relationship develops. Participants are free to pick and choose which pairs of statements are relevant for their situation, and to even add statements or topics for discussion. Our experience suggests that the tool is especially effective when users of this form recognize that:

- there are no “right” answers to the items on the questionnaire
  o The mentor will need to take particular care in not explicitly and implicitly communicating that their responses are the “right” responses, but stating that their expectations only reflect their particular style.
- responses are likely to be different at different stages of academic or professional progress, i.e. for undergraduate students, graduate students, postdocs, junior faculty, senior faculty, etc
- even identical numerical responses can correspond to different rationales and expectations

Signs of Misalignment

If you detect that your mentoring relationship is strained or unhealthy, consider if you are experiencing some of these observable signs of misalignment (adapted from https://ictr.wisc.edu/mentoring/mentees-alignment-phase-resources/)

1. Mentor/mentee dreads attending mentor meetings and finds themselves avoiding the other.
2. Mentor/mentee does not find the time to meet as agreed upon.
3. Mentor/mentee does not respond to emails and tasks in a timely manner.
4. Mentee does not feel a sense of belonging within the professional culture.
5. Mentee’s work is successful, but movement toward independence is not being fostered by the mentor (e.g. mentor does not publically advocate for mentee, provides opportunities for advancement, etc)
6. A sense of shared curiosity and collaborative teamwork is not present.
7. Mentor does most of the talking and direction-setting during mentoring meetings, and does not give the mentee opportunities to speak up, ask questions, and contribute.

Although the misalignment of expectations can often lead to conflict, the expectations do not need to be identical (and would be unrealistic) to develop a productive working relationship. However, a thorough discussion of expectations can greatly increase the likelihood of a productive collaboration and minimize conflicts. The mentor and mentee should also seriously consider developing a compact to help frame a more structured relationship. Some examples of compacts and other resources are found here: https://ictr.wisc.edu/mentoring/mentoring-compactscontracts-examples/

Suggestions for Use: We suggest the following process for using this questionnaire.

- make sure both parties have a blank copy of the questionnaire in advance, and fill it out separately
- set up a meeting that will be focused on this questionnaire
- at the start of the meeting, first share your primary goals for the mentoring relationship and research work
- then compare responses given for each statement by each person
- discuss thoroughly the significance of each response (i.e. answer what each response means for each person)
- provide suggestions on how you’ll address different responses and expectations
- consider repeating the process at various points (e.g. once per year, during critical transitions, etc)
- consider sharing your responses to the questionnaire with peers at your similar stage, so that you can compare how other people at your level respond to the statements

This document originated from Ingrid Moses (Centre for Learning & Teaching, University of Technology, Sydney), was adapted by Margaret Kiley & Kate Cadman (Advisory Centre for University Education at the University of Adelaide), and was further revised by Steve Lee (Graduate Diversity Officer for the STEM Disciplines at UC Davis; stnlee@ucdavis.edu) and Stephanie House (Co-director of the NRMN Master Facilitator’s Initiative at UW Madison; house2@wisc.edu).