**Professors for the Future, 2018-2019**

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**Project Title:** "Expectations in Graduate Student Mentorship in the College of Letters and Science"

**Project Summary:**

**Background:**

UC Davis is home to many outstanding mentorship resources, for both mentors and mentees, yet many graduate students in the College of Letters and Science struggle to find lasting faculty relationships that aid in their professional development. While mentoring relationships fail for various reasons, unclear expectations about mentees and mentors’ behaviors and communication responsibilities might be a factor in failed mentorship relationships. This survey sought to answer the following research question: do graduate students and faculty have different expectations of the mentorship relationship?

In May of 2019, I conducted a survey that was sent to graduate students and faculty in the College of Letters and Science at UC Davis to learn more about their expectations of a mentorship relationship. The survey is adapted from work by I Moses, Centre for Learning & Teaching, University of Technology, Sydney and by M Kiley & K Cadman, University of Adelaide (1997). The data set allows us to gauge areas where graduate students’ and faculty expectations for mentorship relationships align and diverge. However, my analysis of the data here focuses on the differences so they might be institutionally addressed.

I am also inspired by former UC Davis Graduate Diversity Officer Steven Paul Lee’s essay, written along with Richard McGee, Christine Pfund, and Janet Branchaw, “Mentoring Up: Learning to Manage Your Mentoring Relationships” in the book The Mentoring Continuum – From Graduate School through Tenure (2015) which examined two STEM case studies in order to supply mentees with strategies to manage their own mentoring relationships. I am interested in applying some of their research conclusions for Humanities graduate students. In the essay, they present seven core principles that will facilitate better relationships between mentee and mentor, the first of which is “Maintaining Effective Communication.” While graduate students and faculty of the Humanities may likely research communication as their objects of study, communicating with one’s students proves to be an entirely different genre with different stakes.

**Methods:**

Administered by Qualtrics, I sent out two surveys, both entitled “Expectations in Graduate Student Mentorship” with a Graduate Student edition and a Faculty edition. Each survey contained the same twelve core questions featured below. Furthermore, each edition asked for some biographical data. The Graduate Student edition asked for graduate program, year, degree sought, whether the student was a domestic or international student, and first-generation status. The Faculty edition asked for program and
rank. The twelve core questions were measured on a scale of 0-10, with 0 denoting strong agreement with the statement on the left, and 10 denoting strong agreement with the statement on the right. The directions were as follows:

“If you believe very strongly that it is the major professor's responsibility to select a research topic, select “0.” If you think that both the professor and student should equally be involved, select “5.” If you believe very strongly that it is the student's responsibility to select a topic, select “10.” Please reserve the response of “5” for cases where you believe it is truly an evenly split responsibility between the processor and student.

Findings and Future Implications:

Overall, the data suggests that Faculty and Graduate Students have similar expectations for mentorship structures, but there are a few important differences that may affect discussions or programming for certain populations and mentorship relationships.

Graduate Student (GS) vs. Faculty (F): Based on the mean and mode: GS held higher expectations that graduate students should develop the timeline for research and study for the student (Statement 3). GS inclined towards Faculty mentoring students outside of their area of study more than F (Statement 5).

First Generation Students (FGS) vs. Non First Generation Students (NFGS): Mean, median and mode showed FGS had higher expectations that professors are responsible for introducing students to appropriate services in the university (Statement 4). Mean and Median showed FGS had a higher expectation that a personal supportive mentoring relationship is important to student success (Statement 6). Mean, median, and mode strongly indicate FGS also had a higher expectation that professors and students sharing a common background were important for student success (Statement 12).

Early Graduate Students (1st or 2nd years) (EGS) vs. Advanced Graduate Students (AGS): EGS differed from their AGS peers on the topics of personal, supportive relationships (Statement 6) as well as the expectation that professors provide emotional support (Statement 9). In both cases, AGS had higher expectations that professors should provide personal and/or emotional support.

Assistant vs. Associate Professors: Some of the most significant differences in expectations were found in this comparison. Assistant professors were more likely to support students developing their own timelines for research, while Associate professors indicated that it was equally the responsibility of both students and professors (Statement 3). Assistant professors were more likely to believe that a professor should be able to mentor students even if they do not have knowledge of the content area (Statement 5). Assistant professors strongly demonstrated that they believed that professors were responsible for giving emotional support to their students, while Associate professors were more likely to support students finding support elsewhere (Statement 9). Assistant professors were also more likely to believe that a professor and student sharing a common background was important to student success (Statement 12).

From these findings, I believe that more research needs to be done on understanding the causes for different expectations between First- and Non-First Generation students, Early and Advanced Graduate Students, and Assistant and Associate Faculty members. With the differing expectations between these populations, targeted trainings and resources for these specific populations may be beneficial. And, mentorship trainings and resources need to be provided and specifically aimed and designed for any phase of transition in a role, e.g. the beginning of graduate school or new assistant professor hires; prospectus writing and qualifying exam year or tenure review; advancement to candidacy or receiving tenure and promotion to Associate Professor.

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