

# REU Mentor Training Workshop Iowa State University

## Facilitating Group Discussions

You will be facilitating a group of ~ 5 mentors through four cases. There will be 3 to 4 groups in your room and each group has their own facilitator. Since each case session is about 40 minutes, we suggest that you

- Give time for each person in your group to read the case
- Open up discussion using the following general guidelines and the specific suggestions for each case.
- Please leave about 5 minutes at the end of each session for the groups to report out to the other groups in your room.
- People in the room should ask questions to each group to produce a room-wide discussion.

### General Guidelines for Facilitating Group Discussions

- Keep the group on task.
- Give all an opportunity to share.
- Suggest alternatives in case the group comes to too rapid a conclusion without considering all options.
- Keep to time.
- Make sure that there is a decided upon recommendation.

### Materials for Facilitating Discussions on Diversity (1<sup>st</sup> Case Study: All alone)

*Questions to Get the Discussion Started:*

- As a mentor, would you feel comfortable asking a mentee about their race, ethnicity, gender, disability, etc?
- Specifically, how would you go about engaging someone in a discussion about their race, ethnicity, gender, disability, background?
- What are some ways you can learn to better understand your mentee's attitudes and experiences?
- Do you think someone's race, ethnicity, gender, disability, and background impact their experience as a mentee?

*Questions to Broaden or Deepen the Discussion:*

- How can you use diversity to enhance learning?

*Suggested Facilitation Techniques: Diversity Discussion*

- If you have a group of mentors who are all the same ethnicity or gender, the conversation may need some prompting for them to consider what it may be like to be an underrepresented mentee. Try to get them to consider diverse perspectives by asking them to reflect on a time they felt they were in the minority.
- Ask mentors to list types of differences that can be significant in a research/education setting. If they failed to bring up some important differences (e.g. – gender, disability, race, age, etc.) ask them why. Urge them to talk about why some types of difference are difficult to discuss.

## **Materials for Facilitating Discussions on Expectations (2<sup>nd</sup> Case Study: In over his head)**

### *Questions to Get the Discussion Started:*

- How do you establish and communicate your expectations of your mentee?
- When choosing a project for your mentee, how do you weigh the mentee's interest with the immediate needs of the research PI or group?
- As an advisor or mentor, what should you do if a student does not like the project?
- How do you assess your mentee's skills so that you can choose an appropriate project?

### *Questions to Broaden or Deepen the Discussion:*

- How do you help your mentee understand the project goals and how the research fits into the "big picture"?
- What are strategies for uncovering the unspoken expectations mentees and mentors may have about issues such as authorship, job placement, hierarchy, letters of recommendation, etc?
- How do you help a mentee learn to assess his or her own skills and abilities?
- How do you deal with an apathetic mentee?
- How does a mentee learn the social dynamics/structure of a research group and the sense of hierarchy (if it exists) of personnel and projects? How can a mentor
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### *Suggested Facilitation Techniques for the Expectations Case Studies*

- Ask mentors if they have ever been in the situation described by the case study. What was the outcome? What could have been done in advance to avoid a difficult situation? What can be done now to fix it?

## **Materials for Facilitating Discussions on Ethics (3<sup>rd</sup> Case Study: Tweaking the data)**

### *Question to Get the Discussion Started:*

- How can you teach a mentee good ethical behavior?

### *Questions to Guide the Discussion towards the Benefits and Challenges of Ethics:*

- How do new researchers learn ethical practices in the discipline? What is general and what is specific to the discipline?
- What ethical issues can arise due to the power dynamic between a mentor and mentee?

### *Question to Broaden or Deepen the Discussion:*

- As a mentor, what responsibility do you have to respond to a mentee's concerns about the ethics surrounding the ultimate use of your research?

### *Suggested Facilitation Techniques for Ethics Discussion*

- Ask mentors if they have ever observed unethical behavior in their research group? What did they do?
- Ask the mentors if they have ever had a situation in which a student was unable to distinguish between manipulating data using well-established techniques to remove contaminants or remove systematic biases, and arbitrarily culling or altering data to affect the conclusion?

## **Materials for Facilitators Leading Discussions on Independence (4th Case Study: Ready Mentee)**

### *Questions to Get the Discussion Started:*

- How do you foster independence?
- How do you determine how much independence a mentee is ready for?
- How do you convey to your mentee that it is okay to make some mistakes? How do you judge which and how many mistakes are acceptable? How important is it for a mentee to make mistakes to become independent?
- Can you give a mentee too much independence? How would you know?

### *Questions to Broaden or Deepen the Discussion:*

- How can you foster independence in a mentee when he or she has no experience upon which to base decisions?
- A natural consequence of fostering early independence can sometimes be a reduced quality and quantity of data produced; is this a worthwhile sacrifice?
- How do you convey the level of independence you expect from your mentee?
- How can you deal with the mentee's assumptions that you have all the answers? How can you help mentees not be disillusioned when their mentors do not know everything?
- Instead of answering all your mentees' questions, how can you teach them to find information on their own?
- How do you question the details of mentees' work without making them feel like you do not trust them?

### *Suggested Facilitation Techniques for Discussions focused on Independence*

- Have mentors ask mentees to explain their approach and decision points in lay terms. Have mentors reflect on what they learned regarding the way(s) their mentee thinks, what the mentee knows, and how the mentee approach their work.
- Ask the mentors to role play one of the case studies.
- In pairs, have the mentors practice motivating a mentee.
- Ask mentors if there was a time they were given too much/too little independence. What were the consequences?
- Ask mentors how much independence their advisors give to them? Ask them to recall if there was ever a conversation establishing this level of independence?
- Ask mentors to consider if and how they would approach fostering independence in their mentees differently if they discovered a mentee had a disability.