Mentoring Ethically:

A Handbook by the Emerging Scholars Organization[1]

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[1] Adapted in part from the Society of Early Americanists' "The Ethical Mentoring of Junior Scholars in the Humanities" (https://www.societyofearlyamericanists.org/about-us/archive/ethical-mentoring-draft-sea-2018) and the University of Michigan, Rackham Graduate School's "How to Mentor Graduate Students: A Guide for Faculty" (https://www.rackham.umich.edu/downloads/publications/Fmentoring.pdf)

Long-overdue conversations about sexual misconduct and assault in academia have underscored the importance of articulating clear guidelines and boundaries for academic relationships for both emerging and established scholars. Indeed, the Emerging Scholars Organization recognizes the broad importance of attending to the ways in which power circulates in academic and professional settings, and specifically, the ways in which structural power imbalances can negatively impact the academic precariat.

This preliminary "best practices" guide is one effort on the part of the ESO to shape conversations about professional power imbalances broadly, and the vital mentor-mentee relationship more specifically. As the Society of Early Americanists' (SEA) recent statement, "The Ethical Mentoring of Junior Scholars in the Humanities," notes, institutional efforts to codify healthy and respectful relationships tend to emphasize what *not* to do, rather than offering examples of practices and attitudes that embody ethical mentorship. This document strives to provide practical, sustainable, and ethical suggestions for a healthy and mutually-rewarding mentoring relationship.

Echoing the SEA's statement, the best practices offered in this guide apply to all scholars, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, class, religion, nationality, dis/ability, and other subject positions. Nevertheless, best practices for ethical mentoring involve paying particular attention to the well-being of, and challenges confronted by, emerging scholars of color, scholars with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ scholars, women scholars, first-generation scholars, and scholars who are undocumented. In general, we encourage all scholars--and especially established scholars--to attend to the experiences and challenges faced by those in minoritized and marginalized communities. An ethical mentor will take extra care to ensure that these emerging scholars feel welcomed and supported as they navigate academia and their specific disciplines/fields.

Every mentoring relationship is unique as it meets the needs of its individual participants. However, the ESO advocates broadly for mentoring relationships that strive to welcome the emerging scholar into an intellectual community. We encourage mentors to solicit input from mentees about exactly what they need and want from a mentoring relationship.

Below are some general overviews of the mentorship process, and a (non-exhaustive) list of guidelines, suggestions, and best practices. We welcome discussion and feedback about this document; please don't hesitate to reach out to the ESO at emergingscholarsorg@gmail.com with any questions or comments.

What is a Mentor?

The role of a mentor is centered on a commitment to advancing the mentee's career through an interpersonal engagement that facilitates sharing guidance, experience and expertise. Just as emerging scholars have different learning styles, the skill sets and aptitudes of mentors are as varied as the individuals themselves. There is no single "right way" to mentor. Consider, instead, this multidimensional definition of mentors as people who:

- Take an interest in guiding and supporting another person's career and contributing to their well-being;
- Have an interpersonal as well as professional relationship with those whom they mentor;

- Advance the person's academic and professional goals in ways most suited to, and desired by, the individual mentee, while being inclusive of diverse career aspirations;
- Tailor mentoring approaches and feedback to the individual;
- Consider the ways in which race, ethnicity, class, family background, gender, sexual identity, nationality, religion, dis/ability, funding status, and home institution shape a mentee's experiences and challenges.

Thinking about these points can help you develop a vision of the kind of mentor you want to be, and the most effective ways you can mentor emerging scholars inside and outside your discipline.

- Good mentors help students gradually understand how their objectives fit into the particular graduate degree program, departmental life, and postgraduate options.
- In particular, mentors need to understand that it is much harder today to find a tenure-track position or even, in many fields, any full-time faculty position. This makes the mentor's guidance, encouragement, networking and promotion of the student more critical than ever. If the relationship is, indeed, lifelong, then opportunities to provide such assistance don't end with the completion of the degree.
- In working with mentees, the mentor's function goes beyond the promotion of academic success, and so the mentor must be open-minded about the students' career interests and paths, and help them to explore those options outside the academic world if that is where their interests lie.
- The influence that research supervisors wield over their students is enormous. The effective mentor serves as advocate and guide, encouraging the student to move from novice to professional.

Why be a Mentor?

Mentoring benefits emerging scholars in many ways. Here are just a few:

- It supports their advancement in a range of capacities, including research activity, conference presentations, publication, pedagogical skills, grant-writing, navigating the job market, and pursuing directions beyond academia
- It supports them in navigating their specific field and/or discipline
- It creates a safe space for mentees to share their concerns and cultivate mutually respectful relationships with colleagues
- Emerging scholars who have the support of a mentor are more likely to feel prepared and resourced to deal with the inevitable stresses and trials of early-career development, whether in academia or beyond
- Whether mentees are interested in pursuing careers in or beyond academia, the experiences and networks their mentors introduce them to may prove invaluable down the road
- The awareness on the part of mentees that someone is invested in their progress, can offer guidance and support, and can advocate for their needs can reduce stress and build confidence and well-being.

Mentoring also rewards established scholars in a variety of ways:

- Your mentees can introduce you to new knowledge, perspectives, texts, and techniques in the field
- Mentorship can (and should!) be personally satisfying. Seeing your mentee(s) contribute confidently to their field is a wonderful and fulfilling experience
- Established scholars benefit from a higher degree of institutional and professional stability. Using that position to advocate on behalf of emerging scholars who face increasingly precarious professional futures is an opportunity to reinvest in the value of scholarly community.

Best Practices for Ethical Mentorship

- **Model professional responsibility**: It is crucial for emerging scholars to see their mentors participate ethically and responsibly within their professional communities. This includes, but is not limited to: avoiding conflicts of interest; respecting personal and professional boundaries; and supporting and advocating on behalf of marginalized individuals/communities.
- **Demystify academia**: Many aspects of graduate school, the academic job market, and academia more broadly are vague and unwritten. Emerging scholars will benefit immensely from candid discussions with mentors about the ins-and-outs of academia.
- **Identify professional workshops and networking opportunities that might be relevant to your mentee(s):** If a mentee is interested in diversifying their experience and skills, suggest possible opportunities such as editing, peer-reviewing, chairing a conference panel, as well as scholarship and grant opportunities that come to your attention.
- **Center the needs of the emerging scholar:** Since mentoring relationships, and especially inter-institutional ones, such as those within the ESO Mentorship Program, are an opportunity to reach across disciplines and offer holistic guidance. We stress that this may mean, for example, helping mentees realize careers outside of academia, or guiding them on how to handle academic power imbalances at their home institutions or elsewhere.
- **Provide practical resources:** The role of the mentor does not involve fulfilling emotional or psychological needs beyond what is relevant to the mentee's professional life. However, mentors are encouraged to make available any resources they are familiar with that might be relevant to the specific challenges a mentee might confront, including mental health issues, intimate-partner abuse, bullying, financial hardship, gender-based discrimination, and racial violence. Recognizing the breadth of challenges a mentee might face and directing them to helpful resources can do much to foster the integration of emerging scholars into the profession while maintaining healthy boundaries.
- **Maintain clear interpersonal boundaries:** All mentoring relationships are different. We strongly advocate for the importance of recognizing both the mentor's and mentee's humanity, which obviously extends beyond each person's professional roles; ethically contributing to a mentoring relationship can certainly include sharing major events in one's life, as these inevitably shape our perspectives and work. However, we endorse the SEA's statement on professional relationships: "Extensive conversation about family life, romantic engagements, feelings about one's intimates, or gossip about colleagues is not suitable for this relationship. Such discussions can prove confusing to

both members of this relationship and can provide openings for exploitation or abuse, even unintentionally."

- **Avoid romantic and/or sexual relationships:** If mentors and mentees maintain clear interpersonal boundaries, romantic and/or sexual relationships should not occur. Consent is a murky issue in relationships that emerge from power imbalances, and such relationships can be highly detrimental to an emerging scholar and to an intellectual and professional community. **For this reason, the ESO discourages any romantic and/or sexual relationship between a mentor and mentee**. If this kind of relationship does develop, the mentoring relationship should be formally terminated immediately.
- **As a mentor, think carefully about asking mentees to perform work for you:** It is strongly advised that mentors do not ask mentees to do labor beyond what is relevant to the professional or pedagogical relationship. Mentors need to be aware that a mentee may not feel empowered to decline such requests or to negotiate terms. If a mentor does ask for and receive such labor, they should research fair compensation ahead of time and compensate the mentee accordingly.
- **Within mutually agreeable limits, mentors should be easily accessible:** Tell mentees how frequently you will be able to meet with them. Let them know if you have a busy travel schedule, are about to take a sabbatical, or will be assuming an administrative position. Give mentees your full attention when they are talking with you, and the time and encouragement to open up. Try to minimize interruptions. If you generally correspond over email, consider scheduling an occasional meeting in person or via Skype or telephone to help create a more personalized interaction.
- **Be conscientious about the specific challenges confronted by emerging scholars from marginalized communities:** Many new students suffer from impostor syndrome and anxiety about whether they belong in graduate school or academia more broadly. It's crucial to support them and advocate on their behalf to ensure they are welcomed into their professional community.
- **Use concrete language to critique a mentee's work if they solicit your feedback:** What the mentor communicates with the mentees must be timely, clear and, above all, constructive.

Ultimately, individuals have relative strengths in their capacity for mentoring, and mentors should be clear about what they can and cannot offer. Part of effective mentoring is knowing when to refer someone to another resource that might be more helpful. Most important, and more so than any particular piece of advice or supportive act, your mentees will remember how they were treated. The example you set as a person will have a profound effect on how they evolve as professionals.

Becoming a Mentor

You may find it a useful starting point to think about your own experiences as an emerging scholar, and how you felt about your mentoring. Consider these questions:

- What kind of mentoring did you have?
- What did you like and dislike about the mentoring you received?
- What did you not receive in the way of mentoring that would have been helpful to you?

Mentoring in a Diverse Community

The diversity of those in graduate education is an invitation to consider and reassess what is worth preserving and transmitting, and what is rooted in problematic assumptions about homogeneity. There are issues that call for attention and thoughtfulness on the part of mentors. Consider how the following might pertain to your mentoring of current and future emerging scholars.

- Emerging scholars from underrepresented or marginalized groups often have a harder time finding professional role models who have had experiences similar to their own. Consider how best you can support and advocate for these students.
- Be welcoming of your mentee's experiences and perspectives. Ask where a student's research interests lie rather than making assumptions about them based on the student's personal characteristics or past work. Think about the ways that race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, class, and other subject positions help to expand the types of questions that are asked in your discipline and the approaches used for answering them.
- Students from underrepresented groups can too frequently expend time and energy speaking up when issues such as race, class, gender, ability status or sexual orientation arise–or are being ignored. Consider how you can bear some of the burden by speaking to these issues.

Effective mentoring is good for mentors, good for emerging scholars, and good for the discipline. You're probably already doing much of what's been discussed in the preceding sections: supporting your mentees in their challenges as well as their successes, assisting their navigation of the unfamiliar waters of doctoral study and academia more broadly, and providing a model of commitment and ethical, professional responsibility.

Mentorship in the SSSL Community and Beyond

Since mentorship in SSSL develops beyond the boundaries of a particular institution and across a diffuse intellectual community, a mentor's general responsibilities involve supporting emerging scholars in their academic, professional, and civic projects, and welcoming them into the community. Traditionally, The SSSL Emerging Scholars Organization has paired mentors with emerging scholars on the basis of research interests. We recognize, however, that as a greater number of emerging scholars pursue alt-ac or non-ac positions and seek guidance on a range of professional and cultural contexts beyond the traditional tenure-track job market, it is important to expand our idea of mentorship to encompass these interests and trajectories. To this end, we acknowledge the valuable role that other professional affinities might play in mentorship. For example, mentees interested in specific approaches to pedagogy, activism, or service-learning may seek mentorship from a scholar with experience in these areas that overlap with (or exceed) the category of formal research interests.

Finally, while we believe that mentorship can be beneficial for both parties and the academic community at large, we also acknowledge that an individual relationship may come to an end for a variety of reasons. We fully support all mentees and mentors in building, or moving on from, mentoring relationships that no longer feel sustaining.