Roles and Responsibilities of UW-Eau Claire McNair Program Mentor

The UW-Eau Claire McNair Program is a collaborative partnership between the McNair scholar, their faculty mentor, and the McNair program. UW-Eau Claire faculty members who choose to nominate and mentor a McNair scholar are integral to the development of their respective protégés as well as to the continued success of the UW-Eau Claire McNair Program.

As a mentor, your role will be to serve your student as the primary discipline- and field-specific expert. As Gaskin, Lumpkin, and Tennant (2003) note: “A mentor is an experienced faculty member who commits time and energy, as part of his or her professional responsibility or by choice, to mentoring a colleague. … Mentors provide support and information regarding the institutional culture, rules, and processes; … guide the development of research and publication skills; [and] collaborate on or facilitate scholarly contributions…” (49).

There are four components to successfully mentoring a McNair scholar:

I. Nominate

Prospective McNair scholars are nominated for the program by a UW-Eau Claire faculty or academic staff member (typically the instructor with whom they will pursue their collaborative research). UW-Eau Claire is the only Wisconsin McNair program to depend on faculty nominations. This model allows faculty members to identify promising, academically-talented students and commit themselves to the development of a prospective McNair scholar. The quality of scholars that faculty members nominate (based on their perception of a prospective scholar’s potential and motivation to apply to, enter, continue in, and successfully finish graduate school) and their commitment to be engaged with their scholar over the course of the two-year McNair program sequence is critical to a student’s future success in gaining admission to a graduate program.

II. Formulate

In the fall of the junior year, mentors assist the McNair scholar with crafting a research proposal outlining the faculty-student collaborative research that will be the cornerstone of the McNair Summer Research Institute project. Under the supervision of the faculty mentor, the McNair scholar will develop a project which is significant within the current state of research in the field, manageable within the McNair program framework, and suitable as a demonstration of the scholar’s potential as a future graduate student.

III. Collaborate

During the spring of the junior year and (the following summer), the faculty mentor will supervise their McNair scholar’s research. During the formal Summer Research Institute, the McNair mentor supervises a three-credit independent study class during which the McNair scholar conducts the research which was outlined in their faculty-student collaborative research proposal. Mentors receive a modest honorarium for supervising their McNair scholar’s SRI project.
During the fall and spring of the senior year, the McNair mentor helps the McNair scholar analyze the results of their collaborative research; assists the scholar with the preparation of oral or poster presentations for local, regional, or national conferences; and reviews and provides feedback on draft manuscripts suitable for consideration for publication in academic journals in the scholar’s field.

**IV. Advocate**

During the summer before, and fall of, the senior year, the faculty mentor will help their scholar identify programs and institutions that are appropriate for their long-term research interests and writes letters of recommendation, and serves as a reference, in support of their scholar’s applications to graduate programs and appropriate national and international fellowships and scholarships.

**Specific Roles and Responsibilities Related to the McNair Summer Research Institute (SRI)**

Every year, our junior cohort of McNair Scholars works on a six-week intensive research project with their mentors. The following, in our view, are the specific roles and responsibilities of the McNair mentor with regards to the SRI. Note that the McNair program will announce the specific start and end dates of SRI in Spring semester. Typically, the SRI runs from Mid-June to End-July.

1. In the Fall and Spring semesters leading up to the SRI, collaborate with and guide your mentee in crafting an original research proposal and a budget for the McNair SRI.
2. Simultaneously (optional), also collaborate with your mentee to craft and submit an application for the ORSP-SREU. This is optional, although highly recommended. The McNair SRI project can be the same as or different from the ORSP SREU proposal.
3. During the summer following creating the research proposal, spend six-weeks on the research project with your mentee. Also during the SRI, please assist your mentee in completing and submitting the Weekly Research Progress Report in a format that will be given to you by the McNair Program.
4. Assist your mentee in research completion.
5. Guide them on discipline specific research methodologies, thus helping your mentee develop critical research and scholarly skills.
6. Grade your mentee for the independent study course # 499.
7. Assist mentee in developing a plan for dissemination of results. This includes crafting a publishable research paper, poster, powerpoint presentation.
8. Provide need based assistance as your mentee prepares for the National McNair conference (mid-Fall semester following SRI) and the UWEC McNair Program Symposium and (Late Fall semester following SRI).
9. Collaborate with your mentee on publishing research accomplished in a peer-reviewed journal that is respected in your field of inquiry.
10. Guide your mentee in reaching other venues for disseminating research results, including conferences, symposiums, CERCA, provosts’ Honors Symposium.

The role of a mentor is complex and deeply engaged as both an advocate and facilitator for your
protégé’s professional development as well as a role-model for his or her personal growth (Zellers, Howard, and Barcic 2008). Some of the characteristics which have been identified as necessary for a committed mentor include: “being available, a good listener, encouraging, insightful, sharing, helpful, honest, nonjudgmental, and collegial” (Gaskin, Lumpkin, and Tennant 2003, 49).

However, while the commitment to become a McNair mentor is considerable, the rewards for mentoring a McNair scholar are likewise significant: McNair mentors gain the satisfaction of knowing that they have encouraged and supported the development of talented students; McNair mentors help shape the development of their discipline and foster the next generation of researchers doing cutting edge work; and by advancing the work of our alumni, McNair mentors bring acclaim and prestige to UW-Eau Claire and our faculty.

References
