Scholarly Definitions of Mentors and Mentoring

**Oxford English Dictionary:** Originally (in form Mentor): a person who acts as guide and adviser to another person, esp. one who is younger and less experienced. Later, more generally: a person who offers support and guidance to another; an experienced and trusted counsellor or friend; a patron, a sponsor.

**University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire Office of Research and Sponsored Programs:** A distinctively, personally, and positively influential model and guide in a student’s intellectual and professional development.

In *Mentors & Protégés* by Linda Phillips-Jones (1982), “Mentors are influential people who significantly help you reach your major life goals.”

**The National Institutes of Health Office of Intramural Training & Education:** The best mentors are advisors, coaches, counselors and supporters all at the same time. They are experienced scientists who guide your research, but also challenge you to develop your independence. A good mentor will help you define your research goals, and then support you in your quest to achieve them. He or she will share knowledge, provide encouragement, and hopefully inspire you. In addition to promoting your research, your mentor should help you to develop your career goals and construct a scientific network. Above all, your mentor should be someone you trust to always keep your best interest in mind.

**The American Psychological Association:** Mentoring a less-experienced researcher is a professional responsibility of all scientists. The ultimate goal of the mentor is to establish the trainee as an independent researcher. Mentoring responsibilities include sharing knowledge and skills, overseeing the trainee’s work, helping the trainee to make contact with other researchers and assisting with career counseling. The trainee reciprocates by providing work hours and a fresh perspective for the mentor, and taking a proactive role in learning, developing and landing a job.

**The University of Miami Undergraduate Research and Community Outreach:** One of the key characteristics to a successful mentoring experience is the willingness to guide, instruct and assist students to reach their research objectives. Beyond serving as an advisor or supervisor on a research project, the mentor takes an active interest in the student’s academic and professional development as a scholar. The ideal mentor seeks to quickly establish a positive working relationship with the student to promote confidence, student inquiry, focus, and discipline.

In *Mentoring School-Age Children: A Classification of Programs* by Sipe and Roder (1999), “Formal mentoring involves a structured and intentional approach to offering students those experiences and benefits similar to the ones provided by informal mentors. Such initiatives are often facilitated by an agency or program dedicated to this purpose and encompass both one-on-one relationships between an adult and the student, or an older more experienced peer and a younger peer, as well as small groups of students working with an adult or older peer on a particular goal. In all instances, mentoring activities take place at regularly scheduled times over an extended period, and are most often only one component of a comprehensive program.”

**Columbia University’s Responsible Conduct of Research Mentoring:** Mentoring is one of the primary means for one generation of scientists to impart their knowledge to succeeding generations. More than
textbooks and formal classes, the relatively informal, though complex and multidimensional, relationships between mentors and their trainees prepare the next generation of science professionals.

**Western Michigan University:** Mentoring is central to promoting responsible conduct in all areas of research since mentors function as role models and are often the primary means by which professional standards are informally communicated. A good mentor will demonstrate both professional and social responsibility in the context of research.

**University of Alaska Fairbanks Office of Research Integrity:** Mentoring the next generation of scientists is a responsibility for current scientists. A mentor has experience with the challenges that will be faced by a trainee, the ability to communicate that experience, and a willingness to do so. A mentor assists the trainee in understanding and adhering to the standards of conduct within their profession. In this way, mentoring of new researchers by senior investigators passes on the informal and possibly unwritten standards from one generation of scientists to the next.

**Georgetown University Medical Center:** The literature is full of definitions of mentors from a variety of sources, including classical literature, military training, academia, business, and government. These definitions include the roles of advocate, coach, teacher, guide, role model, valued friend, door-opener, benevolent authority, available resource, cheerful critic, and career enthusiast. It has also been noted that ‘supermentors’ combine many of these definitions, both generating leadership development for succeeding generations and innately leading change.

**Bozeman and Feeney (2007):** Mentoring: a process for the informal transmission of knowledge, social capital, and psychosocial support perceived by the recipient as relevant to work, career, or professional development; mentoring entails informal communication, usually face-to-face and during a sustained period of time, between a person who is perceived to have greater relevant knowledge, wisdom, or experience (the mentor) and a person who is perceived to have less (the protégé).
The above table was compiled by Bozeman and Feeney (2007). In creating their own definition, they reviewed several others that had been used by past researchers.