ACTIVITY #1: Case study A
“Looking for Harmony” & Enhancing Work-Life Integration

Case #1: Looking for Harmony
Dr. Feinstein is a 32-year-old Assistant Professor on the tenure track who joined the faculty one year ago at the time she received a NIH Career Development Award. Dr. Feinstein is expecting her first child this year and would like to request a three-month maternity leave, and consider returning to work in a part-time capacity. However, Dr. Feinstein has not raised this issue with her mentor, a 60-year-old Professor, whom she senses is already growing frustrated that she does not put in the number of hours that his generation did. Dr. Feinstein has heard that a newly hired assistant professor is a real “go-getter” working 70-80 hours a week, and she fears this new mentee will make her look as if she is less serious about her research career.

Questions for Discussion
“Looking for Harmony”
Guiding Questions for Discussion:
1. What are the main themes raised in this case study?
2. What approaches should Dr. Feinstein use to work through her concerns?
3. As a mentor how do you address generational differences (with respect to work ethic, work-life integration, or other areas) that arise with your younger mentees?
4. How do differences in gender, cultural, and racial identity affect discussions involving work-life balance and integrity?
ACTIVITY #3: Small group work on other Entering Mentoring case studies

1. Identify a spokesperson, timekeeper, and facilitator
2. You’ll have 15 minutes to work through the case and questions in small groups
3. They share out on key elements for about five minutes with the rest of the group

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Learning Objective:
Listen to and consider the expectations of their mentee in the mentoring relationship and consider how personal and professional differences may impact expectations.

Case B

The Sulky Undergraduate

I mentored an undergraduate student who came from another university for the summer. I explained the project to him and taught him some basic techniques and approaches needed for the project. Because my professor and I did not think he had sufficient background for a more complicated project, we chose to have him work on a more basic one.

He was very quiet for the first 10 days of the project, and then he went to my adviser and complained about the project. He said he wanted a project “like Mark’s.” Mark was a student with a strong disciplinary background and his project was much more advanced. My adviser insisted that my mentee keep the project I had designed for him, but the student became sulky. As the summer went on and he didn’t get much of his work done, I began to wonder if he understood what we were doing or even cared about it.

Guiding Questions for Discussion:

1. What are the main themes raised in this case study?
2. What kind of conversations regarding expectations might have been helpful early in this relationship?
3. What kind of conversations would be helpful once the student asked for a different project? Who should be involved in these conversations?
Case C

Handout #6 Case

Study: Family Ties

As part of the departmental honors program at her small liberal arts college, Professor Rebecca Temin has been mentoring a very bright and motivated undergraduate student researcher, Winona Davis. Winona’s high-quality data have contributed to several projects and her results have even opened a new line of investigation, positioning Professor Temin to compete for federal funding. Winona is well suited for research and is very engaged in the lab, both when performing experiments and also when planning and discussing the experiments. Given her talent for research, Professor Temin has been encouraging her to pursue a PhD and Winona has expressed great interest in doing so. However, she feels conflicted about leaving the local area where her tribe is based and her extended family lives. She is an integral contributor to the care of her aging grandparents and feels a strong sense of responsibility to her family and her tribe. Even getting her to agree to attend a 2-day undergraduate research conference to present her findings involved a difficult decision making process. Professor Temin knows that in order for Winona to pursue a PhD, she must train at a university.

Guiding Questions for Discussion:

1. What are the main themes raised in this case study?
2. What are some of the potential threats to self-efficacy that Winona is experiencing here?
3. What are some of the questions that Professor Temin could ask to better understand Winona’s self-efficacy and the personal/cultural factors that may be influencing her beliefs about her capability to pursue a PhD?
4. What source (or sources) of self-efficacy might you use to boost Winona’s self-efficacy for pursuing a PhD program?
5. What story from your own academic experience (or the experiences of previous mentees) could you convey to Winona that would demonstrate empathy and provide an example of ways to adjust or cope?

Case D

Learning Objective:

Articulate the ethical issues they need to discuss with their mentees. Manage the power dynamic inherent in the mentoring relationship.

Case Study: Absent Mentor

A professor often mentors three or four students over the course of a summer, each one working on a different field project. Unfortunately, the professor was so busy with all of her projects that she rarely stayed at the field station, leaving her undergrads to “fend for themselves” in her absence. Her students often had to borrow items from other projects, broke equipment, or generally relied on other graduate students for support. One day, a few of us got fed up with the responsibility of dealing with her students, so we called a meeting with the students and explained some common courtesy rules for living and working at a field station. Of course, their mentor was not around at that time, but we were polite and tried to be effective and straightforward with the students. Later, we got an angry phone message from their mentor saying that we should focus on our own projects and leave her students alone.

Guiding Questions:

1. What are the main themes raised in this case study?
2. How does this situation affect the research group environment?
3. If you were the mentor, how would you feel? If you were the graduate student, how would you feel?
4. If you were the undergraduates, how would you feel?
5. List three concrete strategies for dealing with this issue.
Learning Objective:
Provide constructive feedback

Case Study Putting in Enough Time
An undergraduate was working hard at her first semester of research, but nobody seemed to notice. Her mentor said she could come in whenever she had time available; at the start of the semester she was spending about ten hours per week in the lab, but after a few weeks of solo work with little feedback, her motivation declined and she started to cut her weekly hours progressively shorter. Unlike the other undergraduates in the lab, she also had a part-time job to juggle. Nobody commented to her about the change, so she assumed that everything was going okay.

One day toward the end of the semester, a fellow mentee approached the undergraduate to tell her about a conversation she'd overheard at lunch between their mentor and a postdoc. According to the student, the mentor was complaining that nothing seemed to have gotten done in the lab this semester. “She made a really snide comment about part-time jobs getting in the way of research,” the other mentee said. “I think you’d better start trying to look busy.”

Guiding Questions:
1. What strategies have you used to assure that your mentee’s time is adequately protected? How do you ensure your mentee feels useful?
2. How does this situation affect the research group environment?
3. What could have been done to avoid this situation? What should the mentee do now? Should she approach their mentor about this? If so, how?

Case F

Learning objective:
Provide constructive feedback.

Case Study The Slob
A graduate student mentor was frustrated because her student was not running successful experiments. While the undergraduate had great enthusiasm for the project, each experiment failed because of some sloppiness—forgetting to pH the gel buffer, forgetting to add a reagent to a reaction, or forgetting to turn down the voltage on a gel.

After a month of discussions, and careful attempts to teach the student habits that would compensate for his forgetfulness, the graduate student was ready to give up. She spoke with her adviser and asked for advice, hoping that she could fix the problem and start getting useful data from her undergraduate. The adviser offered to work with the undergraduate mentee. When the undergraduate walked into his office, the faculty member said, “I hear you’re a slob in the lab. You gotta clean up your act if we’re going to get any data out of you.” Seeing the crushed and humiliated look on the undergraduate’s face, he quickly added, “I’m a slob too—that’s why I’m in here pushing papers around and not in the lab doing the hard stuff like you guys!”

Guiding Questions:
1. If you were the mentee, how would you feel?
2. If you were the mentor, how would you feel?
3. If you were the faculty adviser, how would you feel?
4. If you were the adviser, how would you have handled this situation?