

Mentoring is critical for promoting success in higher education and professional arenas. While the benefits of mentoring are many, specific benefits include socioemotional or psychosocial support, academic and professional skills development and progress, and both short- and long-term career advancement and success (Montgomery 2017). Traditional mentoring approaches center on conveying information from a top-down mode, and typically align with goals of advancing individuals along institutionally- or disciplinarily-defined paths of success (Montgomery 2018a; Yun, Baldi and Sorcinelli 2016). Such mentoring frequently takes place in hierarchical one-on-one pairings of a senior

or experienced individual (i.e., the mentor) in a dyad with a more junior or novice individual (i.e., the mentee). Classic power differentials exist in these relationships that frequently result in maintaining “business as usual” (Darwin 2000) or status quo dynamics in particular contexts (Darwin 2000; Thomas, Bystydzienski, and Desai 2015).

I believe ideal mentoring is about so much more than “supporting” an individual to be successful towards some recognized, and customarily institutionally determined, goal or milestone. Optimally enacted, mentoring is about success of the individual in and with contributions to a particular context. That is, mentoring success is bilaterally

cultivated between mentor and mentee. Reciprocity and bilateral engagement increasingly are recognized as critical in improving mentoring outcomes (Clarke 2004; Pololi et al. 2002; Yun et al. 2016). True reciprocity and effective bilateral mentoring include adapting mentoring approaches to individual mentee goals and aspirations (see Montgomery 2017, and the references therein).

Mentoring as adapted for individual aspirations is distinctly different from advising, the latter of which consists of recommendations for *anyone* attempting to progress on a particular academic path or to accomplish a specific achievement (Montgomery, Dodson and Johnson 2014). Mentoring is also not imprinting. That is, mentoring is not a process of training someone to pattern her or his behavior *after yours* or after the general norms of a group (e.g., to get safely to a destination). Many people imprint in their environments while mistakenly calling it mentoring. Moreover, imprinting is often championed as a means of acculturation for immigrant youth (Liao and Sánchez 2015; Pryce, Kelly and Lawinger 2018). I also argue that mentoring should not be wielded as a weapon of acculturation or assimilation. Acculturative mentoring has been associated with reductions in perceptions of racism (Liao and Sánchez 2015), but perhaps not with actually mitigating racial biases based on persistent underrepresentation and marginalization of particular groups in many spaces, including specific disciplines such as those in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, and academia as a whole.

Truly individual-centered mentoring is about offering specific advice and insights based on a personal relationship and developed understanding of an individual. Effective mentoring emerges from awareness of their accrued and potential capital, from supporting them

## Environmental Stewardship

in using these forms of capital, and in gaining additional skills and capital in pursuit of a specific path of achievement (Montgomery et al. 2014). Individual-focused mentoring can be cultivated in-person as well as online for individuals or in larger communities of support for personal and professional advancement (Montgomery 2018b).

Ultimately, bilateral mentoring prioritizes cultivating the intersection of individual interests or goals and aspirations with the production of “currencies of success” that contribute to local and disciplinary contexts. Academic currencies of success, or scholarly currency (Montgomery 2018a), are the recognized and highly valued forms of output associated with validating successful scholarly engagement with a topic and the production of knowledge. In many cases, these currencies are peer-reviewed publications, the acquisition of funding, chairing sessions or panels at disciplinary society meetings, or the bestowal of highly prized awards and honors, among others. The production of currencies of success is critical for most forms of formal reward and recognition. Yet, the production of these can originate from personal scholarly interests or intended community contributions. When mentors are able to cultivate mentees in being productive in service to both personally defined career aspirations and the needs of the mentees’ community is likely to lead to increased retention. Indeed, why would individuals be eager to leave an environment where they can work at the intersection of their motivations and local needs, while producing markers needed to externally demonstrate success?

Mentoring effectively and in ways that support the production of recognized currencies in service to personal aspirations will likely require radical re-envisioning of the “spaces” in which

mentoring occurs, to facilitate the construction and cultivation of environments that promote self-efficacy broadly, especially for women and other individuals from backgrounds underrepresented in STEM (Emdin 2016). This level of support can transcend mentoring to encompass advocacy. Mentoring combined with advocacy is not about guiding someone through a pipeline with

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blockages and inequities, but about clearing the pipeline. This view departs from our common conceptualizations of the primary problems of the pipeline being supply driven,

i.e., a lack of sufficient diverse individuals who enter *and* advance as well as individuals who “leak” from the pipeline. Rather, I focus on the problem being failure to assess accurately the structural problems with the pipe itself. In this regard, as Weiston-Serdan states: “It is not about using mentoring to manage symptoms, but leveraging mentoring to address root causes” (Torie Weiston-Serdan 2017, p. 6).

If we break from the pipeline analogy altogether and see the context in which mentoring, goal attainment, and advancement occur as an ecosystem, then effective and progressive mentoring is not about helping those mentored “adapt to toxic water and polluted air”, but to “help them purify the water and clear the air” according to Weiston-Serdan’s (2017) concept of critical mentoring. Impactful and effective mentoring is then centered in a learning environment or context of tending an ecosystem in support of an individual pursuing specific goals therein (Montgomery 2018c). The beauty of this approach is that the environment better serves the particular individual, while ultimately being changed into a better state to support others as well. This is mentoring as transformation. This is mentoring as progressive environmental stewardship.

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## Join the CSWEP Liaison Network!

Three cheers for the 150+ economists who have agreed to serve as CSWEP Liaisons! We are already seeing the positive effects of your hard work with increased demand for CSWEP paper sessions, fellowships and other opportunities. Thank you! Dissemination of information—including notice of mentoring events, new editions of the CSWEP News and reporting requests for our Annual Survey and Questionnaire—is an important charge of CSWEP. For this key task, we need your help. Visit [CSWEP.org](https://www.cswep.org) to see the list of current liaisons and departments for whom we'd like to identify a liaison. We are also seeking liaisons from outside the academy. To indicate your willingness to serve, send an e-mail with your contact information to [info@cswep.org](mailto:info@cswep.org).

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