

Mentoring your Non-native English Speaking* Graduate Student
Socializing Your Graduate Student to Your Own Supervisory Style,
the Culture of Your Department, and the Discipline

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Agenda

- Opening – Welcome participants as they come in and instruct them to take the supervisor/student role perception survey. Nancy and Ashley introduce themselves.
- Part I – Ashley – Mentoring as socialization into the discipline
- Small Group Activity – Nancy: Groups of 3 to 4 – Compare your answers to the survey – similarities, differences? Compare your answers to the student sample. Observations? Now, discuss concerns/challenges you've had as well as successful strategies. Choose one challenge and one successful strategy to share out to the large group.
- Part II- Nancy – Tips and Strategies: How to build bridges, not walls.
- Small Group Activity - Ashley: Groups of 3 to 4 - Brainstorm Changes/Action – Find one thing you can do/change at the departmental level and two things you can do/change at the individual level. Share out to large group.
- Closing – Start slowly, be consistent, be persistent. Facilitating disciplinary socialization is extremely complex and challenging. Partner with someone in your department to try out mentoring strategies.
- Feedback- Human Resource Services will be sending a short feedback form via email – please help us make this workshop better by filling it out.

Introduction

Faculty/graduate student relationships are complex, multi-faceted and often span two or more years as they work together on research projects. Graduate faculty not only must serve as intellectual and professional mentors (preparing students to be competitive for employment), but must also supervise and not just be a research partner.

If the graduate student is employed through an assistantship, then the stakes are even higher – supervisors have a much more vested interest in optimizing their students' performance because of the inherent accountability with a funding agency.

20-30 years ago, the picture was quite different from what it is today – now many supervisors of international ESL graduate students come from non-English speaking backgrounds themselves, adding to the complexity of the communication situation.

Because of the complicated and high stakes nature of this relationship, building a strong and mutually respectful working partnership from the outset is critical.

Tips for Mentoring

Please note – if you find, after reading these tips, that you have some strategies that you'd like to share that are not listed, please contact us! Contact information is on the last page of this handout.

In general

- Keep open lines of communication – do not assume that your expectations are shared.
- Initiate contact with the student; do not wait for a problem to arise. Student quote: In the US, “if you don't ask anything then it means that everything is OK, but in Indonesia it means everything is wrong.”
- Recognize that graduate school is full of unfamiliar and often uncomfortable practices and activities for all students. Be willing and prepared to speak openly about expectations, and to explain and demystify academic and disciplinary language and practices.
- Many ESL graduate students are aware that frequent and informal interaction with professors is encouraged in the US, but often come from cultures where student/faculty relationships are very formal and distant, thus making the asking for guidance or feedback quite challenging.

Giving feedback about research

- Find out what research skills the student already has and which skills will need to be developed. Agree on a plan for developing and assessing them.
- Prior to starting research projects, discuss preferred ways of working and determine the amount of supervision needed. Type of supervision and feedback? Time and frequency of meetings? Preferred channel of communication (e.g. face-to-face, phone, e-mail)?
- Many incoming graduate students have never had a research methods course. If no appropriate courses are offered in the department or college, then it's the supervisor's responsibility to provide overt instruction in discipline-specific research methods. This will often result in better research!
- Provide low-stakes opportunities for development of public speaking skills (e.g. research presentations for other graduate students or faculty/staff in the department).
- Although new researchers in any field “may see data and evidence as incontrovertible, persuasive in their own right, disciplinary knowledge and expertise are in fact formed through interpersonal and textual negotiation over interpretations of that evidence”(Norgaard).

Giving feedback about teaching

- Develop ongoing, structured support within the department for professional development (= more competitive grad students plus better undergrad ed!) – orientations, teaching manual, consistent and regular follow-up through (e.g. teaching workshops, peer/faculty mentoring meetings).
- Create an online bank of activities and syllabi.
- Observe and discuss strengths and areas for improvement.
- Encourage your TA to observe others and discuss.
- Encourage ITAs to be open with students about their non-native speaker status.

Giving feedback about writing

- Recognize that writing is situated, not portable – not a neutral ‘tool’ (writing a good lab report ≠ writing a good dissertation ≠ book review ≠ a proposal, etc.)
- Read up on writing in your field.
- Infuse your courses with activities designed to raise awareness of textual features – examine structure of readings, point out how these can be used in writing.
- Provide models of major text types (conference proposal, abstract, lab report, thesis/dissertation proposal, etc.).
- Arrange writing workshops with faculty and/or for peer review.
- Become familiar with the WSU Graduate Writing Center and the services they can offer; share this information with your students.

Interesting Facts

- Almost 12% of the 2.2 million graduate students in the US are international graduate students for whom English is not their native language.
- Approximately 33% of all doctoral degrees awarded in 2005 were to non-US citizens, the majority of whose native countries were China, India, and South Korea.
- Approximately two thirds of these students are in science and engineering programs: in 2006, 64% of all engineering doctoral students were international, as were 56% of graduate students in physics and 55% in mathematics.
- After graduation, 74% of these international students have firm job commitments in the US either as postdoctoral fellows or in industry.
- Non-US citizens accounted for 58% of all postdoctoral fellows in 2003. The majority of those who stay are from China and India.

TOEFL Requirements

The TOEFL is a language proficiency test. Note below that a score of 80 for WSU is the minimum. Faculty sometimes do a disservice by provisionally admitting a student with scores lower than 80. Faculty or departments should commit to supporting building the student’s English language capabilities (such as paying for a half a year or year of intensive English courses) if this is the case. The TOEFL score does not include a writing performance test, nor does it test for verbal communication skills. Plan accordingly.

WSU Minimum TOEFL Scores	Paper	Computer	Internet
For disciplines other than those listed	550	213	80
Business Administration Chemical Engineering Communication (Master's Program) Computer Science Electrical Engineering English Environmental Science Technology Management	580	237	93
Communication (Ph.D. Program) Mathematics Pharmacology and Toxicology	600	250	100

Additional Resources

- Ater Kranov, Ashley (2008). "It's not my job to teach them writing." *A Study in the Roles and Responsibilities in Constructing Disciplinary Expertise among ESL Graduate Assistants and Faculty in the Sciences and Engineering*. Saarbrucken, Germany: Verlag Dr. Muller.
- Casanave, C. P. & Li, X. (2008). *Learning the Literacy Practices of Graduate School: Insiders' Reflections on Academic Enculturation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Council of Graduate Studies (2008, December). Data Sources: International Enrollment in Graduate Schools. *Communicator*. 41 (10), 4-5.
- Norgaard, R. (1999). Negotiating expertise in disciplinary "contact zones". *Language and Learning Across the Disciplines*, 3(2), 44-63.
- Paltridge, B. & Starfield, S. (2007). *Thesis and Dissertation Writing in a Second Language: A Handbook for Supervisors*. NY: Routledge.
- Swales, J. & Feak, C. (2004). *Academic Writing for Graduate Students: Essential Tasks and Skills, 2nd Ed.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Swales, J. & Feak, C. (2000). *English in Today's Research World: A Writing Guide*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

* The facilitators recognize that the terms English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Non-native Speaker are politically charged. We also recognize that the dominance of English in many research fields at the expense of other languages is potentially problematic. While native English speakers may indeed represent a minority around the globe, English continues to be the international language of research. What is different in the 21st century is that many supervisors of international ESL graduate students come from non-English speaking backgrounds themselves, adding to the complexity of the communication situation.

If you have questions, or would like help implementing any of these suggestions, please visit the Teaching ESL Students Resources page at www.cltl.wsu.edu/esl and/or contact us: Nancy Bell, Assistant Professor, English Department, nbell@wsu.edu or 335-1322 Ashley Ater Kranov, Assistant Director, CTLT, kranova@wsu.edu or 335-6212

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