

ILIFF
SCHOOL of THEOLOGY
Denver



UNIVERSITY of
DENVER

JOINT DOCTORAL PROGRAM IN RELIGION

Mentoring Handbook for Faculty Mentoring JDP Students & Alumni

The JDP Mentoring Taskforce 2019

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PREAMBLE

An effective mentor is:

1. *Willing/able to listen*
2. *Willing/able to listen more specifically to students' interests and projects*
3. *Willing/able to be available*
4. *Willing/able to search for answers when you don't know*
5. *Willing/able to care*
6. *Willing/able to introduce students to key people in the field*
7. *Willing/able to introduce students to their affinity group outside of the school*
8. *Willing/able to be brutally honest, including the willingness to fail students when they don't measure up*
9. *Willing/able to give honest and careful feedback on their written work early on (including their course work stage)*
10. *Willing/able to establish accountability for oneself and for the students, including keeping students accountable for deadlines*
11. *Willing/able to keep proper boundaries, so there is no creation of codependency*
12. *Willing/able to bring to light what is not obvious to students*
13. *Willing/able to tell students that you are not their buddy or "friend"*
14. *Willing/able to check in with students regularly*
15. *Willing/able to establish clear expectations with students*
16. *Willing/able to be really present whenever you meet with students*
17. *Willing/able to keep a clear record of your students, their progress, and what you talked about the last time you met*
18. *Willing/able to find out from your students their intrinsic reason for wanting to pursue a PhD*
19. *Willing/able to encourage and give permission to students to ask for help*
20. *Willing/able to give guidance to students with the big picture in mind*
21. *Willing/able to encourage self-care on the part of the students*
22. *Willing/able to help students know that they need different mentoring in different stages of their program and that faculty in different stages of their career can provide different kinds of mentoring*
23. *Willing/able to inform themselves about the current JDP program through the [Portfolio](#) site and to guide students to this site on matters of policy and procedure*

HANDBOOK SECTIONS

How to Use this Handbook	2
Coursework/Early Stages	3
Exams	11
Dissertation	16
Beyond the Dissertation	17
Mentoring Across Difference	24
Further Reading and Additional Resources	32

HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

This handbook emerged from the work of a Fall 2019 JDP faculty mentoring taskforce, whose members surveyed current JDP students and alumni as well as JDP faculty to better understand how these groups viewed the role and relative success of mentoring in the JDP. They examined faculty mentoring practices and guidelines in various United States doctoral programs and worked to synthesize their learnings into this handbook.

This handbook is intended to support faculty efforts to mentor current and former JDP students by providing a brief overview of the likely needs at each stage of the JDP student “lifecycle”. Students enter the program with the JDP Assistant Director as their academic advisor and they work with that advisor to identify one or more faculty mentors in their intended professional area/s of specialization. JDP students are told they should try to secure at least one mentor by the end of their first year and provide the name of the mentor to the JDP office. When the student asks a member of the faculty to serve as a mentor, that faculty person may find this handbook particularly helpful in providing support to the student. As students advance through the program, they may request one of their faculty mentors to serve as dissertation advisor and/or committee member. Faculty members outside a JDP student’s exam readers or dissertation committee may also serve as student mentors.

The mentor differs from the JDP academic advisor in several key ways. Students go to their mentor for all things directly related to their specialized field of study and their professional goals. Students go to the academic advisor each quarter before pre-registration in order to ensure they are taking the required JDP courses, fitting in the required number of credits before comps, doing all the required paperwork for the JDP office and the Office of Graduate Education, and generally dotting their “i”s and crossing their “t”s to smoothly navigate the program. Mentors help students learn about and take advantage of all the opportunities for

professional growth in their chosen field, including learning opportunities (elective courses and non-academic workshops), conferences, publishing opportunities, professional societies, professional ethics and norms of behavior within the subfield.

COURSEWORK/EARLY STAGES

Prospective Student Inquiry and Admissions Process

For many students, the faculty mentoring and advising relationship begins during the inquiry and admissions process.

When responding to inquiries from prospective students, Joint Doctoral Program faculty can help set the stage for student success during the application and admissions process by suggesting each of the following items to prospective JDP applicants:

- Ask each prospective applicant to identify or discuss their reasons for considering an interdisciplinary doctoral program such as our University of Denver and Iliff School of Theology Joint Doctoral Program in the Study of Religion.
- Notice prospective students' abilities or affinities for doctoral-level work within the JDP's different areas of teaching and research focus. This will be helpful for the program and applicants, particularly among prospective applicants from marginalized groups, first-generation American students, LGBTQIA+ students, students with disabilities or international students.
- Ask them if they have thought about major and cognate fields of study that the program could support.
- Ask them which faculty members they are interested in working with. Name and recommend other possible core faculty mentors in the students' intended major and cognate fields of study at both schools.
- Encourage them to reach out to faculty at both schools before submitting an application to the program.
- Remind them to do their homework in researching faculty resources and the structure of the program, and how it relates to their research interests and supports their vocational goals.
- Ask them which ancient or modern languages they are already proficient in, and which additional research languages they may need add for doctoral level work. Do not assume that they understand the type of reading and translation proficiency standards required for doctoral program research skills - be ready to explain.
- Encourage campus visits to meet with program faculty and directors, and the JDP Office.

Lastly, please connect prospective students to the JDP Office, and please be sure to email the Program Manager about any inquiries you receive from prospective applicants.

First Term of Enrollment and Initial Meeting with Prospective Mentee

Do not hesitate to make yourself available to students soon after the start of their first term of enrollment in the JDP. Early support and direction is essential: email first-year students to introduce yourself and check in. The first term of enrollment is critical for retention and for the general well-being of each student. This is an important responsibility shared by all JDP core faculty, and should not be left to the JDP Office and program directors to carry out solely on behalf of the general program.

As the first term of enrollment unfolds, listen for signs of disillusionment with the program, or loneliness within the program, and signal options for care and support available to JDP students at both the Iliff School of Theology and the University of Denver. Consider connecting new students with students further along in the JDP process or ask a JDP colleague to recommend names of students further along in the program.

These expressions of attentiveness and caring as a JDP faculty mentor are especially important right after the pressure and challenges experienced by many first-year students at the end of their first term of enrollment. The faster pace of the quarter system, short assignment deadlines, and shortened grading periods for faculty at the end of each term may be a difficult adjustment for some. First-year students who have received their higher education degrees from schools on semester schedules, may not realize the rigors and pressures of the ten-week quarter system in the academic calendars of both I.S.T. and D.U. Remember also that the transition from the Winter Term to the Spring Term each year is hard on all of us, but will be even harder on first-year students who have never experienced the much quicker pace of a ten-week quarter system.

During the first-term of enrollment, and at your initial meeting with a prospective JDP mentee, listen and advise new students on the following professional and intellectual development items:

- Listen for pre-existing and emerging areas of research interests by supporting those interests and inviting students to consider broadening them further through coursework or independent studies with a faculty mentor.
- Invite students to navigate coursework and reach out to faculty at both schools.

- Encourage first-year students to begin identifying faculty with similar research interests in both schools, and to reach out for an initial conversation with one or more of these JDP faculty.
- Assist students with identifying theorists or methods, or schools of thought, essential to your shared areas of specialization and research. Do not assume that they know about these professional discourses and academic resources.
- Discuss the research languages relevant to the student's proposed areas of study and specialization, and how the student plans to demonstrate proficiency in the ancient or modern languages needed for doctoral level work in the student's primary or cognate fields.

Touching Base with Students Throughout Coursework

In the first and second year of study, it is helpful for students to meet with a faculty mentor related to their area of study at least once a quarter. In those meetings, the faculty mentor will likely ask how the courses are going, what new questions are being sparked and engaged by the student, and check in on progress across a range of topics. These topics might include the development of relationships with faculty who will serve to read exams and serve on the dissertation committee, language study, and the student's experiences of peer and faculty support in the program, and other questions and concerns raised by the student.

While students work with the assistant director to identify and register for courses, many students also want to consult with a mentor more closely associated with their field to assess the possibilities in front of them and to make decisions that will help with appropriate intellectual development in that field or cognate fields. For example, mentoring faculty may have a better idea about the need for language development, research experience in the field or methods courses that are essential to developing the skills necessary to research living communities, or areas of theory that must be engaged to be legitimate in a particular discipline.

Often a faculty mentor within either DU or Iliff will have a better sense of what the faculty colleagues in their institution are teaching, what the content and pedagogical strategies of the course will be, and can help students navigate decisions between courses when there are too many good options. When there are not choices that seem relevant to the student, the mentor can suggest classes that may not be obvious to someone outside of their field as a cognate area or can help discern whether this is a moment to develop independent studies to continue progress towards the dissertation research or disciplinary specialization.

Because of the interdisciplinary nature of our program, independent studies are a place where much of the depth work within a primary discipline of scholarly identification will take place,

and the mentor is essential in being sure that those independent studies engage the kind of work that is necessary to establish credibility within the research methods and content of the primary discipline(s) in which the student will be working. In addition, independent studies are useful as a means to establish a relationship with faculty who are potential exam readers, who teach courses that the student hopes to serve as a GTA, or with faculty who are likely to be on the dissertation. Some faculty do not get to teach their areas of specialization regularly in doctoral-accessible courses, so independent studies or serving as a GTA in a course become the primary means to initiate new doctoral students into their field. For those faculty to have an opportunity to meet the student, to have a hand in shaping their understanding of the content area, and to establish a mutual relationship of trust and honest feedback prior to the high stakes moment of agreeing to serve on an exam or on a dissertation committee is essential. Additionally, for areas of specialization to be engaged in the process of coursework rather than only crammed in during exams allows a better learning environment for student development.

Mentors can help students use their writing in course papers wisely as well. Course papers can sometimes be developed into longer pieces that are publishable in academic journals or that become appropriate for presentation at academic conferences. However, students are not always aware that this is a possibility, nor do the papers generally reach this level of sophistication in a 10-week quarter. Faculty mentors can ensure that even during coursework students are beginning to discover the journals in which they might publish, the conferences or guilds that are appropriate to attend, and to develop material that can begin to be shared in these venues. Faculty mentors may help students to shape final papers in courses that are open-ended towards these larger goals. Additionally, by asking about the topics of final papers across courses, mentors can begin to help students discern their primary research interests and questions, as these often show up in multiple settings across courses in ways that may not be obvious to the student, who is enmeshed within surviving the particular course they are engaging and may not yet have a sense of the scope of the larger fields in which they are working.

Throughout coursework, faculty mentors should continue to ask about the student's research direction and explore how what students are learning in coursework has been impacting it. These conversations are important moments in integrating disparate knowledges encountered in a number of classes (often in different disciplines) and allowing them to come together in the student's intellectual trajectory.

Encouraging Peer Mentoring/Cross-Cohort Relationships

Doctoral study can be isolating for students, and this sense of isolation can contribute to mental health issues, relationship disruption, and even dropping out of the program. While asking about the social supports that students have both within and outside the program may seem intrusive from the faculty perspective, for students it may be a lifeline of recognition and normalization of these common struggles. Students may have never navigated the kind of independent work necessary in a doctoral program, and they may have not developed strategies for building the support they need. This problem may be exacerbated for students who are members of underrepresented groups, who may be experiencing subtle or blatant forms of exclusion from their peers in the program. Asking directly becomes a signal of your awareness...do they have colleagues in the program that they can turn to when they have questions or concerns about what is happening in a class? Do they have study groups for exams? Do they have writing groups? Have they used the writing center for support at DU or Iliff?

As a faculty member in the JDP, you can also use your position to create a climate where collaborative rather than competitive relationships are nourished among students, and where just engagement across difference is the norm. For example, when teaching a required course in the JDP, you might consider how your [pedagogical methods](#) and assignments require and reward collaboration among students that allows them to build strength as a cohort as well as individual scholars. When you notice exclusionary or discriminatory practices in your classroom, you can intervene through conversations, activities, and strategic groupings to raise awareness and to encourage collaboration and engagement across difference. This is inevitably a complex task, and there are workshops and resources available that will help you build skills in this area if this was not part of your faculty preparation in your doctoral work. Demonstrating serious engagement across a diverse range of voices within your course content models this work for students in their own future teaching and research work.

Faculty are also encouraged to create opportunities outside of coursework for students to build networks and experience social support. There is a history in the JDP of monthly/weekly groups of faculty and students gathered around shared research interests or language study, reading dissertation chapters or sharing presentations for upcoming events. These both solidify and maintain relationships across cohorts and provide developmentally significant intellectual practice. Other gatherings support specific identity groupings, such as [students of color](#), [women and nonbinary students](#), or [international students](#) within the program. [Student affinity groups at DU](#) and [Iliff](#) can be supportive of students from underrepresented groups in our program across the graduate student population. Faculty mentors can be sure that their students know

about these groups early within the program and can encourage participation. Mentors may also know of scholarly networks within their guild that have a reputation for nurturing upcoming scholars and providing mentoring and resources to doctoral students. Additionally, just asking students about whether they have considered forming writing and study groups or partnerships and offering models for how these have been helpful either in their own development or in former student's development can help point students to these practices which lessen a sense of isolation in the work of the program.

Navigating Institutional Politics and Faculty-Student Conflicts

As a faculty mentor to JDP students, professional discernment in conflict situations between students and faculty can be difficult. Similarly, knowing what best to do when a student is struggling with a faculty colleague, or with a staff member from a specific department at DU or at IST, or while navigating institutional and faculty politics, can be very uncomfortable for you as a mentor, particularly if your identity and positional experience differ from those of your student or the faculty person they are reporting. However, not addressing such matters of faculty accountability and professionalism, or ignoring incidents and concerns reported to you by students due to one's conflict-averse feelings, can lead to retention issues and disrupt students' progress towards degree completion. It is particularly important that you listen carefully to students of color, women, LGBTQIA+ students, students with disabilities and international students, and respond with information, referrals or resources, because these students may be used to institutional responses that are less than optimal. We want the JDP to be a place where all students feel, and are, equally supported.

Although no two incidents in this least understood and most uncomfortable area of faculty mentoring and faculty-student relations will be alike, here below are a few general guidelines and sample scenarios for you to assist JDP students navigating institutional politics or dealing with faculty accountability and relational concerns.

If a student you are mentoring brings to your attention cases of grading-bias, habitual faculty non-responsiveness to emails or other communications, or of hostile situations arising from disagreements with an instructor or with other students in seminars or colloquia, please inform the JDP Director in a timely manner about the incident and the concerns reported to you by the student.

For example, consider whether the alleged grading-bias is legitimately a skills issue, or if it is a relational disagreement, a micro-aggression, an ideological difference, a racialized bias, or a discriminatory situation? Remember that you have more power than the student in influencing

your faculty colleagues. At times the student needs a more powerful advocate, and you are the person with the positional influence as a faculty member to bring up the concern directly with your faculty colleague, department staff member, or with the designated director or chair of a particular department at either one of our two institutions.

Be professionally cautious about discerning or believing these types of allegations and complaints from a student against a colleague, but also be prepared to professionally verify the allegations and complaints by asking further questions and bringing the incidents and concerns to the attention of the JDP Director in a timely manner. Faculty lack of accountability with students is a serious retention issue that can lead the JDP and both of our two institutions into a range of liabilities and problems. Faculty accountability begins with each faculty mentor supporting the desire for healthy and professional behavior from all colleagues towards students as well as from all students towards each other, regardless of the range of differences or identities represented among each of the parties.

Specific JDP policies around faculty-student interactions, communications, and expectations can be found in the [JDP Faculty Manual and Policy Handbook](#).

The University of Denver [Policies and Procedures Relating to Appointment, Promotion, & Tenure](#) includes statements of responsibility such as: “Likewise, in their actions and words, faculty members shall remember that their primary role as an educator is to facilitate the intellectual development of their students. Creating a safe learning environment that promotes the concept of intellectual diversity, welcomes critical thinking, and fosters student growth shall be at the heart of their teaching endeavors.” See also the Office of Teaching and Learning resources on [Inclusive Pedagogy](#).

The [Faculty Handbook](#) of the Iliff School of Theology similarly includes statements of responsibility for advising and mentoring doctoral students (V.D.2.).

Practices for Keeping Track of Students

As you mentor over time within the JDP, you will begin to accumulate students at all levels of the program as well as your normal undergraduate or masters advising load. While at first it is not a difficult task to remember which students you are responsible for and where they are in the program, over time this becomes more of a challenge. You will thank yourself at that point for having created and maintained records of your conversations with your doctoral students along the way. This does not have to be a complicated system. If you simply create a document for each student after your initial meeting, each time you meet you can open the file, enter the

date and brief records of conversations you have had and any action items you agreed to during the meeting. By consulting this file prior to your next meeting, you can easily remind yourself of the student's research interests, plans for exams, and other details that may slip from your memory without such a record.

Meeting at least once a quarter may be challenging if you are not regularly on-campus or if the student is only present for courses. Students may have child care or work schedules that do not allow them extended time to come to your regular office hours. Many faculty have found that creating alternative forums for mentoring conversations can be useful. These meetings should always follow best practices for meeting with students, such as being in a visible place, not occurring in private spaces that might raise questions about appropriate relational boundaries, not requiring alcohol consumption, being offered to all students and not just those with favored status. But some faculty have found that letting all of their students know they will be working in a certain coffee shop on a weekend morning or weekday evening, or holding writing sessions for a certain afternoon once a week in the library, or meeting in a neighborhood park where the student's children can play during the conversation allows students with complicated lives to still have access to their mentor. For students who live at a distance, meetings by video or phone conference may be a way to bridge the gap and avoid requiring major travel to have access to you in a face-to-face meeting.

Personal / Mental Health/ Family / Caregiving Questions

Another area that can be difficult to ask about as a mentor to a doctoral student is how they are doing outside of the classroom. Faculty don't want to pry, and perhaps worry that many situations are legally out of bounds to bring up in casual conversation. However, students value being treated as whole persons with complex lives, and do not wish to feel like their work in a particular class is their entire world. Ignoring or downplaying struggles that students share about childcare, relationship struggles, financial struggles, work/life balance, experiences of racism or other discrimination they are experiencing in their program, mental or physical health struggles including addiction, and other obstacles to their flourishing can signal a lack of a trustworthy relationship with their mentor. Asking directly about areas of concern that have been shared and sharing available community resources for support or avenues to address grievances demonstrates professional care for the student as a whole person.

Faculty mentors are not expected to serve as social workers who address all of these concerns from start to finish. However, the manner in which faculty receive student struggles when they are expressed can make a world of difference to the success of their students. Faculty who express discomfort, panic, or avoidance signal that these concerns are extreme, rare, annoying,

or disturbing. Such a response can teach students that it is their job to struggle in isolation, and that any struggle is a sign of their personal failure rather than a reasonable response to the common economic and social context of graduate school. Faculty who express a sense that such experiences happen and that the community has resources to assist with them normalize student struggles as part of being a human engaging in a difficult but do-able program. Helping students to identify the offices on campus, resource personnel, and avenues to address their concerns will increase the likelihood that they receive any available assistance and continue to progress in their program.

Because of its larger student body, DU has [helpful resources and a full student outreach staff](#) if you think a student may be in [financial, emotional, or academic distress](#), or experiencing [mental health issues](#) that would benefit from professional care. It is important to take advantage of trainings and information offered to faculty in order to be aware of these resources and how to access them. For example, [CAPE](#) provides information about supporting a survivor of sexual violence, stalking, or harassment. Be sure you also know when you are [required to report what a student tells you](#) and let them know in these cases that, legally, you cannot be a confidential listener but you can send them to someone who can. These confidential listeners include CAPE, DU Health and Counseling Center, University Chaplain Services, and the [Ilyff Dean of the Chapel](#).

Asking directly about whether a student is considering harming themselves does not implant these suggestions in the student's head, but rather signals that you understand the depth of their situation and can help them seek help. While such conversations can be uncomfortable for those of us who are unused to having them regularly, they can save lives. On a smaller scale, offering everyday strategies for survival and self-care as well as for creating networks of communal support during the doctorate may help students engage in the program in a healthier way.

EXAMS

JDP students take four exams during the fall and winter of their third year. Mentoring students through the exam stage of the PhD can take several forms, depending on the faculty member's role vis-a-vis the exam being taken. For example, a faculty member might be both a mentor and an examiner for one comprehensive exam--or they might serve as a mentor for a student taking an exam with another faculty member. Mentoring a student through the modern language exam might include mentoring them through a language exam, coursework, or other processes involving DU's [Center for World Languages and Cultures](#) or other non-JDP institutions. It may involve helping them deal successfully with setbacks like exam failure. Ultimately, it will likely

involve helping the student either successfully transition to the dissertation proposal and writing stage, or helping the student reassess their vision for the future and end the program with a terminal Joint MA in the Study of Religion.

Students often have little understanding of what comprehensive exams are intended to do for them during the PhD program and afterward. There may be considerable anxiety about exams, and some students understand them as little more than a formal hurdle or hazing process, with less clarity on their broader purpose. Exams typically serve to demonstrate competency in a field, which is very useful when going on the job market, as most dissertations will be far too narrowly focused to reassure hiring committees that an applicant can prepare a full slate of courses at various levels in the field for which they are hiring. One or two exams may be used to work through material that will end up in the dissertation bibliography. Mentoring students around the purpose of exams can be helpful in giving them a sense of the immediate and long-term utility of their exams.

Finally, it can be helpful for students to learn that the final two exams--6030 and 6040--are also opportunities to begin working with faculty members who will likely serve on the student's dissertation committee. Asking potential advisors and committee members to serve as examiners for these exams gives the student (and the faculty members) the opportunity to work together and become familiar with one another's interests and expertise. Talking about these final two exams as helping transition the student from exam to dissertation proposal stage can help them make the best intellectual and professional-development use of those exams.

If you are giving an exam, meet with the student(s) taking the exam, and check in with them regularly on their progress. It might be helpful to have them write sample answers to questions for you. If you are giving an exam that more than one student is taking, help them form a cohort so they can study together. Ask them how they plan on using the exam texts in their later work. Give them a sense of what areas to focus on. Discuss a range of possible questions you might give them, and ask them about their research and interests so that these questions are useful to their future work. Remind them to answer the questions actually asked, and to stick to the texts on the list in their answers.

Mentors can also talk with students about the importance of getting to know faculty members, at least a bit, before asking them to serve as examiners. (Or, for the required exams, of the importance of meeting with examiners before the exam, to get to know their interests and styles.) Students might get to know these examiners through coursework, an independent study course, or by requesting meetings. "Cold calling" is rarely productive, and can result in a

student working with a faculty member whose interests do not align with theirs or who have a different understanding of what the exam should cover.

Mentors can also talk with students about the value of connecting with other students in the cohort to share texts, discuss common readings or approaches to exam writing, or submit practice exams, even when they are taking different comprehensive exams. Similarly, they can coach students about meeting with faculty other than their examiner to discuss texts that other faculty know well.

Mentors can also help students develop study strategies for successful exam completion. Exams are intended to demonstrate a basic competency across a field. They are not an opportunity to write another term paper. Students may want to think of one goal as being able to give an “elevator pitch,” or brief statement of the gist and importance, of each book on the bibliography. One way to do this is to take decent notes as they read (notes that are too voluminous and detailed will not help with the elevator pitch). Students will want to create a schedule of reading, and keep on track so that all the books get read and digested. Exams are intended to help synthesize material, so it may be helpful for students to practice putting different texts into conversation with each other as they read and take notes. One value of exams is that they provide a set of notes that students can refer to in the future as they prepare classes, lectures, and continue research. Study groups are a great way to be accountable to a reading schedule, and to divide up the task of note-taking. It will be helpful to read the texts with particular purposes or questions in mind. On standard exams, look at previous questions. For tailored exams, speak with examiners about likely questions/topics.

Language Exams

The JDP requires that students demonstrate proficiency in a modern language relevant to their field BEFORE they defend their dissertation proposal. For non-native speakers of English, English can serve as their modern research language. Students can demonstrate proficiency by passing a CWLC language exam; earning a B or better on the last quarter/semester of a second-year college-level language course, taken within the past five years; or submitting a transcript showing that they successfully completed a degree or major in the language within the past ten years.

Encouraging students to take the language exam in their first year of the JDP can help students stay on track. Some students come into the program with language skills and may simply need encouragement to continue improving their proficiency or expanding to additional languages. Others struggle with language exams (students may take the CWLC exam only three times per language). Mentoring students struggling with language proficiency may include logistical

support, including helping connect them to tutoring resources or to existing online resources (DU's Rosetta Stone subscription, e.g.), encouraging them to form a language study group, discussing ways to practice key skills in the language. It may include supporting them through anxiety about the language requirement, including social-emotional support through DU's and Iliff's resources. It may also involve helping them reframe their planned research project or area in such a way that they might use a different language, one perhaps easier for them to learn.

Exam failure

Mentoring students through comprehensive and language exams may involve supporting them in managing fears of failing those exams. It may also involve supporting them through failing a comprehensive exam or language exam. In those cases, it may be helpful to remind them that failing one exam is a serious thing but does not necessarily signify the end of the student's time in the JDP or their vision of a future career in academia.

Students may take the CWLC exam in any particular language three times. After that, they must find a different language or a different mode of demonstrating proficiency, like coursework. Students may retake a comprehensive exam once, at the end of the quarter following their initial exam effort. (Other options for partial retakes or differently timed retakes may be approved by the JDP Director, with the approval of the examining faculty.) If they fail a comprehensive exam retake, they are terminated from the JDP.

Students who fail a language or comprehensive exam may feel anxious and disappointed. Some may feel ashamed and some may feel angry. Mentoring may involve supporting them by suggesting different approaches to preparing for the retake, a different focus for the exam (for 6030 and 6040), different examiners, or other logistical and intellectual suggestions. It may also involve supporting them by helping them connect to DU mental and emotional health resources.

Leaving the JDP

There are several points during the PhD process at which it may make sense for students to reevaluate whether completing the PhD makes the best sense for them--and some required exits points, as noted above. This can be a challenging area for mentors and students alike. Discerning whether and when to leave the program can be difficult for students; mentoring can help students navigate the process toward a graceful exit and a positive direction for their post-JDP future.

Alternatively, conversations about leaving may uncover resolvable issues: changing potential advisors and committee members, shifting exam topics to more feasible or research/teaching-appropriate ones, finding supplemental income sources, taking a leave of absence, etc.

Mentors of students considering leaving should consult with the JDP leadership and should encourage students considering leaving to do so as well. Mentors should also be aware that the JDP offers the option of a terminal Joint MA in Study of Religion to students leaving the program after successfully completing their comprehensive exams, language requirement, and 82 credit hours of coursework. (Further details about this “opt out” terminal MA are in the [faculty handbook](#).)

Checklist for Examiners

- Meet with student to discuss interests, bibliography, possible questions or areas of focus.
- If more than one student is taking the exam, encourage them to study as a cohort.
- Offer access to previous exams as guides.
- Discuss goals of exam: demonstrate broad competence, synthesize body of material, not necessarily a research paper.
- Suggest they create a schedule for reading/note taking; offer to check in with them as they progress through that schedule.
- When discussing second readers, remind them to network with an eye towards dissertation committee.
- For tailored exams, discuss with student the possible usefulness of setting up exams in ways that also support other goals (dissertation bibliography, positioning in job market, etc.).

Checklist for Mentors

- Explain to students how they might choose their comprehensive exam examiners, and how they might use exams to develop a future dissertation committee.
- Explain to students the short- and long-term value of exams, including demonstrating competency in a field for the job market.
- Encourage students to consult regularly with their examiners, before the exam.
- Support students struggling with exams by suggesting different approaches to preparing for the retake, a different focus for the exam (for 6030 and 6040), different examiners, etc.
- Support students struggling with exams by pointing them toward DU emotional and mental health resources.

- Encourage students to start their work toward language proficiency early in the program, and point them to the various language proficiency options.
- Support students struggling with language proficiency by pointing them to DU and Iliff resources, including CWLC tutoring, Rosetta Stone support, and other options.
- Support students who are struggling in the program to discern whether there are options for resolving their challenges while remaining in the program.
- Support students who need to look at leaving the JDP to navigate the process toward a graceful exit and a positive direction for their post-JDP future.

DISSERTATION

The dissertation stage can be the longest and most challenging stage of the doctoral program. Mentoring students through this stage can be critical.

JDP students take the required dissertation proposal seminar in the spring of their third year, after they take their comprehensive exams. Mentors can help students make the most of this seminar and the work involved in developing a topic and crafting a proposal.

Some key topics might be:

- Helping students identify and narrow down research topics; getting a sense for better and worse research in your field.
- Helping students figure out their main argument(s) and the fields and disciplines they are in conversation with.
- Helping students diversify their research sources.
- Helping students develop their methodology.
- Helping students develop a tentative roadmap for the dissertation, including number of chapters, the focus of each chapter, methodology, and how the chapters come together.

Additional options for supporting mentees might include:

- Workshop on turning a chapter into an article led by 1-2 faculty where students bring a chapter and 2 potential journals it could fit, peer-review their chapter in small groups with other students, get feedback from a mentor, and then submit the chapter to a peer-reviewed journal.
- Workshop led by 1-2 faculty where we have a few speakers discuss non-academic scholarship, its value, how to produce something of value, and where to publish. Again, this could involve students bringing in a public scholarship piece, peer-review with

others in the group, get feedback from the mentor, and then submit to a relevant public-facing publication.

- Help organize dissertation writing groups for students, like:
 - Sponsored writing camps or writing spaces that allow students to get work done on their projects.
 - Students set specific writing goals (number of pages, sections, chapters, etc.) and check in at the end about their progress.
 - Exchanging drafts towards the end with other students or mentors for feedback.

Once students reach the dissertation writing stage, many may live farther from campus or out of Denver. Supporting students working at a distance may include the following strategies for staying in touch:

- Regular check-in sessions via Skype/Zoom.
- Online goal-setting and progress monitoring.
- Assigning “dissertation buddies” for periodic check-ins.

Finally, mentoring may involve finding colleagues to consult/advise/collaborate with when working with students whose research context/perspective is markedly different than your experience

BEYOND THE DISSERTATION

Helping students with network building

Mentors play an important role in helping students establish contacts in the field through conference attendance, doctoral student workshops/events, and personal introductions.

Academics thrive on networks, and your networks are your students’ first entrée into the opportunities that they will need to thrive. You have access to senior scholars, committees, institutional resources, and information that many students and new PhDs won’t know about or know how to access. This is especially true of students who don’t have any prior familiarity with academia as a part of their own biography, in the work of a parent or friend. As their mentor, part of your job beyond the dissertation is to introduce students to those systems and networks, and to help them into conversations where they belong. This takes several forms: doctoral events and workshops, conference attendance and participation, introductions to publishers, and introductions to senior scholars in the field who can help new PhDs navigate academia. The biggest challenge of graduates of the JDP is that our program doesn’t have the

same national profile as other programs in religion, so the task of attracting attention in the field is more difficult. You can help even the odds.

Recent PhDs might already have participated in graduate student programs, but they might not be aware that many of these programs extend to “early career researchers” (or “ECRs”). Additionally, without an institutional affiliation, these new graduates usually will not have access to funds for participation and travel. As a mentor, you can help make your students aware of these opportunities, and you can advocate for these students and their participation in them. While funding is always hard to come by, try to think creatively, and introduce recent graduates to granting programs designed for ECRs, so that they can continue to maintain a research agenda and build a reputation among peers.

Likewise, guild-wide conferences beyond those targeted to graduate students and ECRs are critical sites and moments for professional development and networking. Attending these conferences as a recent graduate without an institutional affiliation can feel like being a bird pushed out of the nest with nowhere safe to roost. At the same time, however, attendance at these conferences is critical for continuing and presenting research, applying for jobs, and maintaining and building connections with other scholars. The simple act of checking in with your recent PhDs, and asking them what their plans are for the conference and whether they would like any introductions, support, or consultation, is helpful. Offer to take them out to coffee, read over a draft of a talk they are giving or a cover letter they are sending, or introduce them to colleagues. Invite them to receptions you are attending, especially those that are more narrowly targeted, such as those celebrating a publication or those hosting alumni of a program like FTE, and introduce the recent graduate to people who could be helpful, being sure to say something effusive about their research.

Introductions are key—especially to power brokers like publishers and senior scholars, like those who control program units, journals, grant programs, and search committees. Do this publicly, with the student present, but also consider following up with an email to remind the person of your enthusiasm and your recommendation of their work. Reputation is the currency of academia, and even the best graduate student or ECR has trouble establishing a reputation when publications take months or years to appear and even prominent publication venues are not widely read. You can leverage your own reputation and visibility to help recent graduates develop their own scholarly profile.

Writing recommendation letters

Following are tips for writing an effective recommendation letter - including phrases to avoid particularly when writing for Black, Indigenous, People of Color/Women of Color (BIPOC/WOC).

There is never an obligation to give someone a reference. If you're asked to write a reference and don't feel comfortable giving one, it's appropriate to politely decline the request for a reference. You can politely and diplomatically decline the request without offending the person who asked you. The trick is to do so without making your refusal sound like a personal criticism or a professional rejection.

The single most important task as a mentor of a recent PhD is to write truthful but powerful recommendations, and to submit them on time. Everyone is overworked and short on time, but when employers receive dozens or hundreds of applications for a position, they are looking for any means to distinguish between candidates, and a letter that arrives late from a recommender can tank an application even when all other materials are present. *Do not be late with your recommendation letters*, and do everything you can to help the applicant stand out while being truthful and fair. Be wary of language that qualifies different kinds of candidates differently; for example, take care not to describe female candidates as “kind” or “collegial” while describing male candidates as “brilliant” or as “a star,” and likewise be aware of the ways race might be coded into your words. Never give a reader any opportunity to exercise prejudice—yours or theirs, explicit or implicit. When white men dominate the academy, people are conditioned to expect successful candidates to be white men. Work to subvert this conditioning.

A letter of reference should provide information on who you are, the nature of the relationship with the person you are recommending, what makes them a good candidate, and specific skills and qualities of the person that you are recommending. It should also include specific examples of times they demonstrated these skills. Think carefully before saying yes. Only say you will write the recommendation if you can recommend the person without reservation. Follow the submission guidelines. Ask the person for whom you're writing the letter how to submit it. Make sure you follow any requirements, especially about where and when to send it and its requested format (for example, PDF, physical letter, etc.). If there is a submission deadline, be sure to submit it prior to the due date. A letter of recommendation should contain the following:

a) Salutation

When writing a letter of recommendation, include a salutation (Dear Dr. Jones, Dear Search Committee, Dear Fellowship Committee, etc.). If you are writing a general letter for repeated use by the student (e.g., Interfolio), the greeting should say, "To Whom It May Concern."

b) Paragraph 1

The first paragraph of the letter of recommendation should begin with your explanation of how you know the person you are recommending and why you are qualified to write the letter of recommendation on behalf of the person you are recommending.

c) Paragraph 2

The second paragraph of a reference letter contains specific information on the person you are writing about, including why they are qualified, what they can contribute, and why you are providing a reference letter. Use specific examples of times the student demonstrated these skills or qualities. If necessary, use more than one paragraph to provide details.

d) Summary

This section of the reference letter contains a brief summary of why you are recommending the person. State that you "highly recommend" the person or you "recommend without reservation" or something similar.

e) Conclusion

The concluding paragraph of a reference letter contains an offer to provide more information. Include a phone number and/or email address within the paragraph and include the phone number and email address in the return address section of your letter, or in your email signature.

Helping students with academic publishing and public scholarship

If you are a mid-career scholar or beyond, the publishing market has shifted significantly since you first began publishing. Even though you have continued to publish, the conditions for new PhDs and the opportunities available to them will be different than the ones you encountered at the beginning of your career. Avoid the temptation to rely on what worked for you, or to base your recommendations about what will and won't "count" on your experiences. Digital humanities projects can carry as much or more weight as traditional articles and monographs,

and they are often viewed more positively, especially among potential funders and employers who value pedagogy and cater to STEM undergraduates. Many colleagues and employers value exposure and engagement as much as peer review, exclusivity, and prestige. Online publication and publication in popular venues are not necessarily un-scholarly, can be a part of an impressive portfolio, and for many employment opportunities can be more impressive credentials than the ones valued at places like DU and Iliff.

At the same time, traditional peer-reviewed journal articles and monographs remain critically important. It is common now (and expected, in most circles) that students will have published one or more journal articles during the PhD. Some of your students might be familiar with the process of publishing in these venues, but others might not be. Your advice and help is very important when these recent PhDs are testing the market for their ideas. They will need input on which journals and publishing houses are suitable and have good reputations, and which ones are to be avoided. They likely won't know how to interpret a revise-and-resubmit decision, and they won't know the conventions around responding to reviews. Many ECRs are not aware that even the most eminent scholars receive rejections regularly, and they may take rejection very personally and question their value as scholars. Be available to them as they encounter these moments, and do so proactively—your graduates might not think to contact you about these matters, but they will probably appreciate you offering your help.

A scholarship and publication agenda is a scholar's opportunity to curate their own public image and persona, and you are very well positioned to understand and comment on their posture toward the field, having seen them through the dissertation. Do whatever you can to help your students navigate the conventions of academic publishing, including the unwritten rules, which are changing constantly. At the same time, the act of curation ultimately belongs to the student, not to you, and especially as they move further from the dissertation, the balance of responsibility for their trajectory shifts to them. Try to find ways to support and advise them but also let go, respecting their decisions about the kinds of work they choose to do.

Encouraging students to prepare for the academic job market

Consider holding a workshop with other JDP faculty members to help prepare students for the academic job market. It could have break-out sessions focused on various sub-topics:

- How to position oneself to work at a community college (Stanford has a good resource on this).
- Positioning oneself for industry-related professions, NGOs, and other non-academic professions. **Websites like the Versatile PhD allow for institutional subscriptions that**

give graduate students advice and resources for using academic credentials and materials to access non-academic employment.

- Navigating a predominantly “white, male” academy as a BIPOC/WOC.
- Cover letters, job talks, teaching dossiers, and diversity statements, how to negotiate an offer, etc.

Mentoring students through the search for an academic position begins with the understanding that most students will not find tenure-track faculty positions. The academic job market is brutal, unbalanced, and increasingly part of the gig economy. Part of your role will be helping students think expansively about their career possibilities, including whether they are willing and able to live as contingent faculty, in a string of adjunct, term, or temporary positions. But if students do want to pursue traditional faculty employment, they will need all the help you can give them in the application process. The fact that consultants (like *The Professor Is In*) can charge candidates \$500 and up for simple consultations about job search materials and processes suggests that recent PhDs are not getting support in these matters from their mentors on a consistent basis.

Job application materials vary widely from institution to institution. Some require only a cover letter and CV, while others ask for multiple supporting documents: teaching statements, research statements, diversity statements, transcripts, teaching dossiers, proposed courses, sample work, etc. Most require letters of recommendation, although some institutions are moving to a system of asking for such letters only from those on a short list. At the next step of the process, job talks and teaching demonstrations present new opportunities for applicants to distinguish themselves, but also new places for anxiety and uncertainty to pop up.

Applicants are asked to provide the bewildering array of materials listed above, and many will have known no precedent for this kind of writing in the past. The pedagogy course in the JDP prepares students to produce some of these materials, but your input will be critical for helping them tailor their statements for different kinds of institutions with different expectations. Similarly, [DU's Career Center](#) offers help with CVs and cover letters, mock interviews, advice on digital marketing of oneself, a wealth of online articles, and other professional services that JDP students should take advantage of, but these are not specific to Religious Studies so your advice and recommendations are extremely important to your mentee's success. Note that the Career Center's services are open to all JDP alumni as well.

Coming out of a PhD, students might feel pressure to emphasize research in every instance, but in many (if not most) jobs, teaching is a higher priority, and a heavy emphasis on research and publication in a cover letter can disqualify a candidate. Help your students write to the context

of their potential employer. Likewise, many faculty at Iliff and DU have been trained to be hyper-focused in a particular micro-discipline, but most faculty at small liberal arts colleges will be teaching in departments of one or two people, covering everything taught about religion at the college. Instead of focusing closely on the narrow specialty represented in the dissertation, help the student think creatively about how to signal the ability to teach across an undergraduate religion (and/or philosophy, history, gender or cultural studies, etc.) department.

Recent graduates who reach the campus interview stage of a job search typically do not have much context for what they will encounter there, aside from their experiences watching similar searches play out at Iliff and DU. Coach them on what to expect. Anecdotally, many recent PhDs report discomfort and uncertainty about what to wear (an especially difficult problem for candidates who are not white men), whether to disguise relationship status by removing or adding a wedding ring, etiquette during a meal with administrators or the search committee, whether to have a glass of wine with dinner, and the like. The answers to these questions might seem obvious to you, but for students who are not used to navigating in the world of faculty, they and other questions like them produce intense anxiety, and it is easy to find conflicting advice. Give them your best read of the situation, given your knowledge of the institution they're visiting and the people you know there.

Likewise, the job talk is an intimidating moment. Many candidates treat it like a conference paper, but that format (of reading a manuscript along with some slides or handouts) might not serve them best. Share some examples of what you've seen succeed and fail in job talks, and coach the student in what pitfalls to avoid. For institutions that value teaching highly, help your student to tailor the job talk to that audience, showing off their pedagogical chops and engaging the audience. For institutions that value research and publication, help the student emphasize their unique contribution to the field. In all cases, an offer to listen to a practice run might be warmly accepted.

In the event that the student receives a job offer, nothing will have prepared them to negotiate. This moment is unprecedented in the training provided by a PhD, and it differs from any job they might have negotiated in "the real world." Help them think about what to ask for in terms of compensation, load, research funding, mentoring, and moving costs, among other things. Given the difficulty of the job market, many recent graduates will want to jump on any offer they might receive, so your counsel will be useful to them as they experience this for the first (and perhaps only) time in their career.

Encouraging students to prepare for non-professorial careers

Smart PhD students are cognizant of the rapidly shrinking market for professors and the rapidly growing numbers of (often under-employed) PhDs in religious and theological studies. They are preparing for many potential job opportunities, both inside and outside of the academy. Some have, from the start of their doctoral program, intended to do something other than follow in your footsteps as a professor. It can be very intimidating for a student to talk to a professor-mentor about using their PhD for a different career outcome, and some students in this position will assume that you will disapprove their choice, or they may feel they are disappointing you, their respected mentor. You can immediately ease those fears by proactively bringing up the issue early in your relationship. Ask if they have a variety of different career plans in mind and what priority they are giving to each. Ask how they see their personality, skills, knowledge, and values fitting into each potential career. Be supportive of a wide variety of career options.

The JDP has put considerable effort into developing [a model called “From PhD to Career”](#) to help students think about a range of career options and how to make the most of the resources at Iliff and DU to leverage each of these possible career goals. You might devote a mentoring session to working through this model with your mentee, talking about what aspects appeal to them and what transferrable skills they are gaining that might open additional doors for them. Being self-reflective is an important trait for discerning the best types of position to apply for and you can start them down that road early.

SPECIAL CONCERNS IN MENTORING ACROSS DIFFERENCE

Introduction

Navigating the academy as both student and professor can be challenging. Mentorship across lines of difference and privilege must focus on allyship, demystification, diversity of approaches, utilizing peer mentoring strategies, avoiding academic cloning, offering psychosocial support, and fostering an environment of mutual respect (Turner and Gonzalez 2015, 4-7). In *Modeling Mentoring: Across Race/Ethnicity and Gender* Caroline Sotello Viernes Turner and Juan Carlos Gonzalez document both challenges and strategies for mentoring across difference, especially considering that due to generational structural and institutional inequities in faculty hiring, many mentoring relationships will occur between cis-gender, male-identifying, white faculty and students who possess various markers of difference. Furthermore, most mentoring/mentee relationships have diversity in positionalities, privilege, and identities. This

section offers strategies for JDP faculty to acknowledge and negotiate markers of difference and privilege, which can help foster mentoring relationships grounded in value, respect, and compassion.

What is privilege?

Privilege means having a professional, political, and/or social advantage--intentionally or unintentionally--resulting from a number of factors including (but not limited to): race, class, gender identity, ethnicity, nationality, institutional position, societal structures, political policy decisions, citizenship status, and more. Many of these privileges overlap in ways that enhance power for some while further marginalizing others. As mentors, recognizing our intersectional privilege is vital when providing guidance to students in various positions of precarity while acknowledging their own precarious identities.

As a result of intersectional privilege, white cis-identifying faculty are overrepresented in mentor positions in many institutional spaces, while institutions continue to work to recruit students and junior faculty from marginalized identity positions. This generational privilege has produced an environment in which “mentoring across difference” (e.g. race, gender, ability, culture, color, etc.) is the normative model. Institutional protections for junior and contingent faculty, which reserve mentoring roles for senior faculty better-positioned to handle the labor the role entails, often reinforce this situation. Mentoring thus often requires learning how to navigate a number of potential differences in identity markers e.g. culture, race, ability, gender to foster a productive partnership between mentor and mentee.

Building trust and being an ally to the student are crucial for maintaining such a relationship. This can manifest in a variety of ways (e.g. listening supportively to a student’s experience of discrimination, supporting a student’s activism, taking a student to the ombudsman to file a complaint (if warranted), walking a student to counseling services (if warranted), etc). Such acts show a willingness to understand cultural and community differences in seeking out assistance while also centering the student’s need to be heard and their experience acknowledged as “real”. Listening with empathy (without centering yourself in the conversation) and recognizing that seeking assistance may be difficult will help build the student’s trust in you, and reinforce that their well-being as a person matters.

Types of Privilege

- Institutional: Position and power within an institutional system/framework.
- Personal (e.g. gender, race, class, ability, etc.): Positionality with respect to social and identitarian communities.

- Societal/systemic: Political, social, institutional, economic, and other public systems/frameworks that exacerbate inequity and/or marginalize certain groups.

What is difference?

Difference lies at the heart of identity. Ironically, communal, cultural, and other social “publics” produce spaces of “shared difference” in which identity markers diverging from a perceived norm bind the group. As an idea, difference has also become a catch-all for every experience, identity, and aspect of ourselves through which we carve out our “uniqueness” -- our individual identities. Difference defines our existence since each of us experiences a diversity of experiences, relationships, interactions, etc. that shape those identities. In this sense, negotiating difference is a fundamental aspect of mentorship as well as a vital skill for participating meaningfully in the various “publics” in which we participate. In mentorship, faculty mentors and mentees should recognize difference as strength. It is important for faculty mentors to communicate with language that acknowledges struggles and inequity often linked to a mentee’s “difference” as well as potentially their own. Shared experience of difference can make space to have a conversation of how to recognize the pain of such struggles and consider how such differences can be strengths. It is vital to avoid reductive and reconciliatory language that can minimize differences, foster “competitive oppression” narratives, or disparage experiences of inequity. The goal is to communicate across/with difference rather than to reconcile, minimize, or efface diversity of experience.

Types of Difference

- National/Cultural/Language
- Race/Ethnicity/Community
- Gender Identity
- Class/Social Community
- Religion
- Ability and Accessibility
- Colorism

Resources for Learning about Difference and Privilege

On-Campus Units for Diversity and Inclusion

The [Graduate Student Government](#) page has a number of resource links to various offices on the DU campus that provide academic, psychological, logistical, and counseling support for graduate students from marginalized/minoritized communities.

[The Office of Diversity and Inclusion](#) (ODI) and the [IRISE](#) research and teaching initiative are vital academic on-campus resources that include workshops on research/teaching within diverse communities as well as ongoing learning opportunities for faculty, staff, and students.

[The Center for Multicultural Excellence](#) (CME) offers courses, workshops, counseling, and learning opportunities to support faculty and students holistically as members of the DU and broader Denver community. Additionally, international graduate students often face multiple levels of “othering” and require specialized support.

[International Student and Scholar Services](#) provides a number of resources for incoming and continuing international students including visa questions, financial aid concerns, and resources for community support. The external website links as well as links to other support services on campus such as ODI and CME are helpful.

[Disability Services Program \(DSP\)](#) The University of Denver’s Disability Services Program supports students by providing accommodations at no cost to students with documented disabilities.

On-Campus Support and Resources

As a mentor, it is a good idea to become familiar with this list of support groups/services. Helping new students (especially those from traditionally minoritized communities and marginalized groups) find these resources and use them effectively will be an important bulwark against communal isolation and academic issues. There are unique challenges faced by international students of color that include cross-sectional racial and ethnic identifications that are often unsettling and disruptive. Being sensitive to these racial and ethnic negotiations that international students of color often perform and remaining informed about resources that can assist this process should be an integral part of mentoring students from these communities.

The [Program Units and Services](#) page maintained by the Center for Multicultural Excellence is an excellent resource for finding support groups on campus. Here, there are student-led groups that engage in support, activism, and outreach to various marginalized/minoritized communities.

Supporting Students through Reflective Practice

Academic guidance that reflects faculty positionality and difference

When counseling students through adversity that manifests both personally and professionally, the first step is to acknowledge one's own privilege and positionality with respect to the power dynamics both within and outside of the university setting. Specifically, ask yourself: "In what ways, am I empowered within this space? What aspects of my identity afford cultural privilege? How can I responsibly acknowledge and address this privilege when mentoring students?" As academics, researching a new idea is a well-honed skill. Engaging with the extensive research and literature available on mentoring across difference (see selected bibliography here) can be helpful in determining what acknowledging privilege and difference can look like as a mentoring practice.

Practical advice that is mindful of community and personal challenges faced by students

When offering students strategies for navigating personal challenges that impact academic performance, keep in mind a few things: 1) Maintain professional distance while demonstrating compassion, empathy, and care; 2) Acknowledge your intersectional positionality and privilege in the situation; 3) Barring Title IX reporting mandates, be discrete and protect the privacy of the student. Building trust, particularly over racial, gendered, class, etc. boundary lines is paramount to a successful mentoring relationship. For example, Turner shares an experience mentoring a black man as a latina woman in which she found that navigating gender differences proved the most challenging as they both identified with marginalized racial communities. Her student Luke struggled with how to conceptualize their relationship since other women in his life had specific "gendered" roles (e.g. wife, mother, etc.). He also mentions accompanying Turner during fieldwork and often having someone assume he was in charge (Wood and Turner 2015, 67-68). This example demonstrates the complexities and intersectionality of identity that impacts a mentoring relationship and how these identities are inflected through both personal and societal biases.

Advising students how to navigate institutional challenges considering their positionality and precarity in this space as well as that of the faculty member

Many faculty members from marginalized communities face particular burdens within the recent institutional push to better address concerns of diversity and inclusion. Additionally, these burdens are compounded for contingent faculty, untenured faculty, and other limited term instructors within the university framework. Faculty members of traditionally marginalized communities often engage in additional uncompensated labor of being a source of comfort and counseling for students from underrepresented communities. This happens for a number of reasons including institutional and public prejudices and pressures that lead faculty from marginalized communities to become

more involved in mentoring students struggling with issues that are personally relevant for the faculty member. In order to best assist students, acknowledging these pressures and constraints of faculty privilege and precarity is imperative. Moreover, making sure students understand how faculty privilege and precarity impacts their ability to serve as a mentor protects both students and faculty in this relationship.

Working closely across the JDP, faculty can ensure all students in the program are supported appropriately, without placing an undue burden on faculty from marginalized communities. This means limiting the number of mentoring relationships faculty undertake to ensure proper support and commitment, pairing students with mentors than can be supportive while being mindful of faculty positionality and precarity (perhaps something that can be collaboratively decided through faculty meetings), and having faculty participate in regularly-scheduled mentoring workshops, and providing resources through which basic principles of academic mentoring across difference can be addressed (such as this mentoring manual).

Assisting students in locating community resources for personal and professional challenges, while maintaining ethical distance

Sometimes, our students suffer in ways that are not only heartbreaking but compel us to respond with more than just words. We want to assist students in navigating life challenges, personal adversity, financial insufficiency, etc. to ensure their success. Some of this is very important as we cannot function as cogs within the university system, lacking empathy or flexibility. However, it is just as important to remember that our professionalism is what grounds our ability to assist these students through whatever calamity they are facing. Ethically engaging with students about personal issues means: 1) Empathizing through listening; 2) Providing community and campus resources that can offer support; 3) Offering academic flexibility; 4) Working with the student to construct a plan for moving forward. The idea behind this process is to ensure that you are personally invested without being overinvolved emotionally-maintaining ethical distance.

Collaboratively constructing a plan to deal with the situation the student is negotiating shows your investment in the well-being of the student. Hold self-care “check-ins” with the student after they implement the plan to track progress while ensuring the student has emotional support and counseling as needed. In particular, faculty from marginalized communities and those that are untenured/contingent should also make sure that their empathy for a student does not lead to overinvolvement, although this

holds true for all faculty. This four-part process is intended to offer an adjustable blueprint for maximizing support while maintaining an ethical distance.

Faculty in situations of precarity should minimize mentoring relationships to ensure they do not undertake an untenable burden which will ultimately, not serve the student or faculty member. Sometimes this means listening to students and offering resources and then introducing them to a senior faculty member better-equipped to help. Other times, it means, coming up with a plan with the student that relies on external support organizations that will perform regular self-care “check-ins” with the student such as counseling services and support groups.

Empathizing with students by listening to their experiences and understanding how this informs the challenges they face

Listening with empathy to students share their experience is a crucial aspect of successful mentoring relationships. Often, listening can provide the support the student needs. Lecturing students about what they should have done or what they should do or questioning their commitment to academic study can have a chilling effect on open communication. Rather, in mentoring relationships, recognizing that students need faculty to acknowledge the challenges they face and how this impacts their ability to succeed within the university setting can be empowering for students from marginalized backgrounds. This type of listening assigns value to the challenges these students face, making them real, rather than imagined hurdles to overcome. Furthermore, listening with empathy empowers students to seek assistance to navigate these challenges and believe they can be mitigated. Finally, listening speaks to the broader importance of recognizing the incommensurability of resolution and the experience of difference. Rather than offering advice or solutions directly, active listening shows the student that there is value in recognizing that not all issues can be resolved; but, they can be named and addressed. Moreover, offering psychosocial support in the face of adversity can be remarkably impactful in building confidence and drive, necessary skills for completing a graduate program. Showing students respect for their capacity to succeed academically while empathizing with the challenges they face can forge the trust and sincerity necessary for a successful mentor/mentee relationship as seen in Elvia’s statement below regarding her faculty mentor Alfredo.

In addition to providing me with career-related support, Alfredo provided me with psychosocial support, particularly in times of crises...despite the various familial obligations and difficulties I experienced during my graduate schooling years, Alfredo was extremely supportive, always maintained high expectations

for me, and never questioned my commitment to an academic career. (Turner and Gonzalez 2015, 167)

Responding to students in ways that recognize faculty member's social position, power, and other markers of privilege and difference

Recognizing one's privilege in institutional, social, gendered, racial, class, ability contexts as a faculty member is critical to mitigating a student's precarity in a mentoring relationship. All faculty members are in a position of power over students, limiting how comfortable students are with asking for help or even revealing they need it. It is important to reassure students by disclosing the privileges the faculty mentor holds and explaining how those privileges may impact/limit the mentoring relationship. For example, students who are facing discrimination due to an identity marker within institutional spaces may not feel comfortable seeking out resources on their own. It is possible their experience has been one of rejection or marginalization within such spaces and they may not have the confidence that such organizations would be willing to help. Recognizing and acknowledging that seeking help through institutional means may be difficult and require some assistance, signals to the student that the faculty member is an ally.

Additional Resources for supporting students

Helpful Blog

Education Week has a [series](#) on addressing racism through teaching and how to support traditionally marginalized students that may be helpful/relevant.

Links to On-Campus Support

[Graduate Student Government](#)

[Center for Multicultural Excellence](#)

[Cultural Center Programs and Services](#)

[Campus Life and Inclusive Excellence](#)

[Office of Diversity and Inclusion](#)

[IRISE](#)

[International Student Resources](#)

[Career Development](#)

[International Student & Scholar Services](#)

[DU Ombuds Office](#)

[Disability Services Program](#)

Selected Bibliography on Mentoring Across Difference

Modeling Mentoring Across Race/Ethnicity and Gender edited by Caroline Sotello Viernes Turner and Juan Carlos González (2015)

The Blackwell Handbook of Mentoring: A Multiple Perspectives Approach edited by Tammy D. Allen, Lillian T. Eby (2010)

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“Making Space for Graduate Student Parents: Practice and Politics” Kristen W. Springer, Brenda K. Parker, Catherine Leviten-Reid in *Journal of Family Issues*. Volume: 30 issue: 4, page(s): 435-457. (September 17, 2008)

SAGE Handbook of Mentoring and Coaching in Education edited by Sarah Fletcher, Carol A Mullen (2012)

“Fostering Academic Self-Concept: Advisor Support and Sense of Belonging Among International and Domestic Graduate Students” by Nicola Curtin, Abigail J. Stewart, Joan M. Ostrove in *American Educational Research Journal*. Volume: 50 issue: 1, page(s): 108-137. (February 1, 2013)

“Mentoring through reflective journal writing: a qualitative study by a mentor/professor and two international graduate students” by Dannelle D. Stevens, Serap Emil, and Miki Yamashita in *Reflective Practice: International and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. Volume: 11 Issue: 3, page(s) 347-367. (June 18, 2010)

“Mentoring minority graduate students: issues and strategies for institutions, faculty, and students” by Kecia M. Thomas, Leigh A. Willis, Jimmy Davis in *Equal Opportunities International*. Volume: 26 Issue: 3, page(s) 178-192. (April 3, 2017)

FURTHER READING AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

JDP Portfolio

[American Academy of Religion Career Guide for Racial and Ethnic Minorities in the Profession](#), 2006

[How to Mentor Graduate Students: a Guide for Faculty at a Diverse University](#) (University of Michigan)

[Political Theology Network Mentoring Spotlight](#)

[FTE Mentoring Consortium](#)

VIDEO: Karen Russell TedX [“Modern Mentoring: the Good, the Bad, the Better”](#)