



ELON
UNIVERSITY

CENTER FOR
Engaged
Learning

Call for Applications
Research Seminar on Mentoring Meaningful Learning Experiences
2023-2025

The [Center for Engaged Learning at Elon University](#) is pleased to announce the 2023-2025 Research Seminar on Mentoring Meaningful Learning Experiences. This three-summer research seminar facilitates multi-institutional research on mentoring meaningful learning experiences, including but not limited to high-impact educational practices (HIPs; e.g., internships, capstone experiences, ePortfolios, community-based learning, etc.). Researchers will take mixed-methods approaches to conduct qualitative and quantitative research.

We invite interested scholars and practitioners, regardless of discipline, to apply to join a multi-institutional cohort of researchers collaborating to investigate the quality characteristics of mentoring and how colleges and universities can foster *equitable* cultures of mentoring that:

- Support *all* students in identifying, developing, and maintaining personalized mentoring relationships;
- Build trust and empower students, particularly from marginalized communities, to identify mentoring relationships as normal, productive relationships worth pursuing; and
- Prepare faculty, staff, and students to participate in meaningful mentoring relationships that adapt to members' evolving needs over time.

Overview of Current Research on Mentoring Meaningful Learning Experiences

While the term “mentoring” does not have a universally accepted definition (Mullen and Klimaitis 2021), previous research by the Center’s staff and university partners informs the following definition of mentoring relationships:

Mentoring relationships are fundamentally developmental and learner-centered. Within [a] relationship-rich campus environment, mentoring relationships are distinct from other meaningful relationships (e.g., Mullen and Klimaitis 2021) in that they:

- Promote academic, social, personal, cultural, and career-focused learning and development in intentional, sustained, and integrative ways (Kram 1988; Crisp et al. 2017);
- Evolve over time, becoming more reciprocal and mutually beneficial (Fletcher and Ragins 2007; Ketcham et al. 2018); and

- Are individualized, attending to mentees' developing strengths and shifting needs, mentors' expertise, and all members' identities.

Although mentoring sometimes is conceptualized as a one-to-one hierarchical relationship, mentoring relationships function within a broader set of relationships known as a mentoring constellation. The number and nature of specific relationships within these mentoring constellations vary across individuals, time, and contexts, with different mentors and peer mentors offering varied forms of support and expertise (Sorcinelli and Yun 2007). As a result, mentors play significant roles serving one or more mentoring functions, though few mentors will serve all mentoring functions.

([Vandermaas-Peeler and Moore 2022](#))

Mentoring can lead to positive outcomes for students' grades, persistence in higher education, development, and social responsibility (Crisp et al. 2017), among other outcomes. These significant benefits may signal that mentoring should be considered an additional "high-impact practice" (HIP), though more research is needed to identify the quality characteristics or indicators of mentoring that lead to its high-impact outcomes and to explore how mentoring is distinct from other HIPs.

In part because "interactions with faculty and peers about substantive matters" is a key feature of HIPs (Kuh, O'Donnell, and Schneider 2017, p. 11), scholars have studied mentoring relationships associated with some specific HIPs more extensively. For example, the Center's 2014-2016 research seminar focused on Excellence in Mentoring Undergraduate Research, leading to [dozens of publications](#) and the development of the [Salient Practices of Undergraduate Research Mentors](#) framework. Yet less is known about mentoring other officially designated HIPs and the broader array of meaningful learning experiences that share HIPs key features (Kuh, O'Donnell, and Schneider 2017) or that are shaped by the key practices for fostering engaged learning (Moore 2021).

Research Seminar on Mentoring Meaningful Learning Experiences

To examine mentoring as a "high-impact practice" and to foster cultures of mentoring at higher education institutions, accepted research participants will join teams focusing on one of the following topics:

- Quality characteristics of mentoring that positively inform outcomes for students' learning, belonging, and persistence in higher education. Research questions could include:
 - What potential artifacts of mentoring relationships (e.g., educational plans, ePortfolios, reflections) facilitate assessment of this potential HIP?
 - How is mentoring distinct from other HIPs?
 - How do we acknowledge when a mentoring relationship fails? When is it worth persevering, versus when is it worth ending? What are some of the breaking points?
- Equitable practices to support *all* students in identifying, developing, and maintaining personalized mentoring relationships. Research questions could include:

- What are the touchpoints over a student’s higher education career that reflect opportune moments for identifying meaningful relationships that could develop into mentoring relationships?
- How do institutions foster continuity in mentoring over time, even as members of mentoring relationships might change? What does that continuity look like for institutions with high rates of transfer students, adult learners, students attending college while working full time, commuter students, and other “non-traditional” students?
- Strategies for building trust and empowering students and faculty/staff mentors, particularly from marginalized communities, to envision mentoring relationships as normal, productive relationships worth pursuing. Research questions could include:
 - How do institutions cultivate cultures of mentoring and normalize participation in mentoring relationships?
 - How can institutions help students assess their mentoring constellations or networks and identify gaps they’d like to fill?
 - How might mentoring relationships become increasingly reciprocal, mutually beneficial, and empowering for all members over time, particularly for members from marginalized communities?
- Professional development for faculty, staff, and students to participate in meaningful mentoring relationships that adapt to and develop with members’ evolving needs over time. Research questions could include:
 - How do colleges and universities prepare faculty, staff, and students to engage in sustained and meaningful mentoring relationships?
 - How could professional development adapt to different models of mentoring that attend to institutions’ unique cultural contexts for fostering cultures of mentoring?

Across all topics, we expect that research teams will attend to diversity, inclusion, access, and equity.

Research Cohorts and Seminar Logistics

The Center for Engaged Learning Seminar will support multi-institutional research addressing and surrounding this theme over a three-year period. Selected applicants will meet on Elon’s campus during the following weeks:

- **Year 1: June 18-23, 2023:** Participants will meet on Elon’s campus to collaboratively develop and plan multi-institutional research projects to be conducted throughout the following year at the participants’ own institutions. These research cohorts will enable larger scale studies and explorations of the impact of different institutional contexts.
- **Year 2: June 16-21, 2024:** Participants will meet to share their initial multi-institutional results and to plan a more sharply focused research agenda for the research cohort for year two.

- **Year 3: June 15-20, 2025:** Participants will reconvene to share their year-two results, to plan continuations of their work, and to participate in a conference on the seminar theme.

Participants will produce significant, concrete outcomes. [Past Center for Engaged Learning research seminars](#) have generated [edited volumes, journal articles and book chapters, white papers, and conference presentations](#) – as well as local initiatives on participants’ home campuses. Participants will be well positioned to use evidence-based assessments of student learning conducted as part of the research seminar to inform mentoring meaningful learning experiences at their institutions.

Elon University will provide lodging and meals for seminar participants during the seminar’s 2023-2025 summer meetings. In addition, each participant will be reimbursed up to \$500/year (up to \$1000/year for international participants) for travel to the seminar’s summer meetings at Elon University. Full reimbursement policies will be distributed to accepted participants. Other participant expenses, including additional travel costs and any research costs, will be paid by the participants and/or their home institutions.

Seminar Leaders

The 2023-2025 Center for Engaged Learning Seminar will be led by Sabrina Thurman, Titch Madzima, and Ashley Finley.

- **Sabrina Thurman** is Assistant Professor of Psychology at Elon University. As a first-generation college student from a low-income background, she is highly invested in working to increase access to higher education opportunities for historically underserved or excluded persons. She is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives that build belonging, while maintaining a strong sense of personal identity, and that improve experiences for all people of varied intersecting identities. She currently serves as Co-Supervisor for *First Phoenix: A First-Generation Student Peer Mentoring Program*. Her disciplinary research focuses on infant motor development.
- **Titch Madzima** is Associate Professor and Chair of Exercise Science at Elon University. He routinely mentors undergraduate research, has collaborated on multiple diversity and inclusion grant projects to support curricular and co-curricular innovations, and was recognized with the Elon College, the College of Arts & Sciences, Excellence in Teaching Award in 2021. His disciplinary research involves investigating the efficacy of exercise and dietary interventions to counteract the physical and psychosocial adverse effects of both cancer and cancer therapies.
- **Ashley Finley** is the Vice President of Research and Senior Advisor to the President for the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). She was previously the senior director of assessment and research at AAC&U and national evaluator for the Bringing Theory to Practice Project. Most recently she served as the associate vice president for academic affairs & dean of the Dominican Experience at Dominican University of California, where she implemented a comprehensive framework for student learning and success centered around high-impact practices, including holistic advising and ePortfolios. She has published a number of articles, book chapters, and monographs, including *Assessing Underserved Students’ Engagement in High-Impact Practices* (with co-author Tia McNair), *Civic Learning and Teaching*, and “Well-Being: An Essential Outcome for Higher Education.”

How to Apply

To apply, submit a completed application and abbreviated (4-pages max.) curriculum vita by **February 15, 2023**. The application, available online at <https://www.centerforengagedlearning.org/research-seminars/mentoring-meaningful-learning-experiences/>, asks for the following information:

- Which research topic above are you *most* interested in examining? Please explain why you are interested and how you would like to think more deeply about this issue in the seminar.
- How does this topic fit with your existing work as a scholar or practitioner? Does this mentoring meaningful learning experiences subtopic have a larger institutional context at your campus?
- What research methods do you anticipate employing to study this theme? Do you have experience using these methods (regardless of whether you have used those methods to study mentoring)?
- Are there unique demographic/background variables relevant to your research questions?
- What is the institutional context for your work? For example, are you at a teaching-focused institution, a research-intensive institution, etc.? Does your institutional mission prioritize certain values or educational activities?
- What kinds of expertise do you bring to the study of mentoring meaningful learning experiences?

More than one person per institution may apply, but [accepted participants from the same institution likely will join different research teams to facilitate multi-institutional inquiry projects](#). Applicants do not need to form multi-institutional teams before they apply; CEL Seminar leaders will create initial teams based on applicants' information, and accepted participants will have the opportunity to confirm or shift their team placement during the first summer meeting.

A review committee, including the seminar leaders, will review applications, make selections, and notify all applicants by **March 1, 2023**. Questions about the application and selection process should be directed to centerforengagedlearning@elon.edu.

To learn more about the 2023-2025 CEL Seminar on mentoring meaningful learning experiences, visit: <https://www.centerforengagedlearning.org/research-seminars/mentoring-meaningful-learning-experiences/>.

To learn more about the Center for Engaged Learning, visit: <http://www.centerforengagedlearning.org/>.

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