

Limed: Teaching with a Twist

Season 4, Episode 4 – Rapid Responses: Mentorship, Part 1

Matt Wittstein (00:11):

You are listening to Limed: Teaching With a Twist, a podcast that plays with pedagogy. This month and next month, we're going to have some quick fire reactions from some of my friends and colleagues, Alexis Hart from Allegheny College, Gabby Pleschová from Comenius University, Katia Levintova from University of Wisconsin at Green Bay, and Karina Hamamouche from Butler University all participated in the summer research seminar about mentoring meaningful learning experiences. I asked them to share their responses to some audience and self-generated questions about mentoring just to get some reactions and some first thoughts that folks might be able to use in their mentoring practices. I hope you enjoy this quickfire format. I'm Matt Wittstein, so as we get started, I've asked each of our speakers to introduce themselves and then I will read a question and we'll hear what their responses are.

Alexis Hart (01:32):

Hello, my name is Dr. Alexis Hart. I am a professor and chair of the English Department at Allegheny College, where I also serve as the director of writing. Allegheny College is an undergraduate only private liberal arts college with approximately 1300 students and is located in Meadville, Pennsylvania.

Karina Hamamouche (01:56):

My name is Karina Hamamouche and I'm an associate professor of psychology at Butler University. Butler University is a mid-size comprehensive university in Indianapolis, Indiana. A comprehensive university is one that has some graduate programs, but program is primarily focused on the undergraduate experience. We're a private institution and the majority of our 4,500 students are undergraduates.

Katia Levintova (02:23):

Kai. I'm Katia and I'm the professor of political Science, democracy and Justice Studies and Global Studies at the University of Wisconsin Green Bay. I also am a faculty mentor for the first year seminar that I have been doing every fall for 15 years. Our university is a public university with the student enrollment of about 11,000. We are public, regional, comprehensive university serving predominantly northeast Wisconsin.

Gabriela (Gabi) Pleschová (03:03):

My name is Gabriela. I work as associate professor at Comenius University Bratislava Slovakia, which is a public university in central Europe. It's a research university with about 20,000 students standing in a broad range of degree programs at Bama and PhD levels. About 87% of our students are local Slovakian students and the rest are international students.

Matt Wittstein (03:34):

What's one misconception you regularly hear about mentoring that you wish your colleagues would let go of?

Alexis Hart (03:40):

I wish colleagues would let go of the misconception that mentoring is only one way. That is that the mentor must be more senior or more experienced in the field than the mentee. As a writing center director, I have been mentored by numerous undergraduate writing consultants who are working with writers every day in the writing center. Similarly, numerous undergraduate students have helped me to see my field of rhetoric and writing studies in new and interesting ways.

Karina Hamamouche (04:08):

The biggest misconception I hear about mentoring is about how much time it takes. Of course, it does take time to build meaningful relationships that are centered on trust, but there are so many small things that we can do to facilitate meaningful mentorship that does not take an immense amount of time. So for example, putting snacks in your office that are easily accessible to your students is one really easy way to create a welcoming environment that can then lead to conversations that build trust. Additionally, asking students how they are when they enter class or what is one thing you're looking forward to this week is a really simple way to try to facilitate interactions with your students that can then build deep, meaningful relationships.

Katia Levintova (04:56):

The biggest misconception is that mentor should have all the answers at all times, but a good mentor guides students to answers but never decides for students. Mentor can share resources and connect students to others who can help. We are never a one stop shop. Another small misconception that I hear about is that mentor is there to only deliver positive messages, but we can also deliver our truths. We're not constant cheerleaders. I think of myself as a professional friend.

Matt Wittstein (05:34):

What's a small concrete action that faculty or staff could take right now to help a mentoring relationship grow more intentionally?

Gabriela (Gabi) Pleschová (05:43):

I think it may be really helpful to talk about mentoring at various occasions during classes and institutional workshops in informal conversations, talking about our experience, how mentoring was a helpful satisfying practice.

Katia Levintova (05:58):

One small action to take is to literally take a student to some of the resources on campus, walk with them to the wellness center, to financial aid, or to the learning center, do it together. Introduce students to your colleagues at those service offices. Ask questions together.

Matt Wittstein (06:19):

What's one misconception students bring into your specific mentoring context? For example, research, student support or leadership roles.

Karina Hamamouche (06:28):

One misconception that students bring into my mentoring context is that you only need one mentor. Instead, you need a constellation of mentors so that each mentor can bring a unique perspective

and different skills and knowledge. So for example, I tend to mentor a lot of students in psychology research, and that can be one context that I could be an appropriate mentor for many students. However, I always encourage my students to also get experience with other professors. So for example, I am not a clinical psychologist and a lot of my students want to go on to clinical grad school. It would be a good idea for them to find a mentor who has gone down that path because they can provide different guidance. Then I can. So encouraging students to have multiple mentors that fit multiple different functions of a mentoring relationship is a really important misconception.

Katia Levintova (07:23):

I often hear the students do not use resources because they want to figure things out themselves, which is very laudable, but why reinvent the wheel? Why not ask for that help, which is freely offered and encouraged to be used? Or, I hear that students were told that college professors are such minis that I hear to fail them and with them out, which is what I call the high school urban legend. It takes entire first year seminar to distribute students of that notion in an entire semester's time and to show them that college professors truly care and are very invested in their success.

Alexis Hart (08:02):

I'm going to respond to a slightly revised version of this question. One misconception that often impedes students from seeking a mentor for an undergraduate research project is the idea that only students with a average or an A in a professor's course are eligible or suited for doing an extended undergraduate research project. I've been lucky enough to convince several students otherwise and to see them gain an enormous amount of confidence as practicing scholars that carries over into their coursework and other areas.

Matt Wittstein (08:35):

I hope you enjoyed this shorter episode. We'll be back in January with a few more quick fire questions and then we'll resume our longer episodes to learn more about mentoring research in February, March, April and May. Limed: Teaching With A Twist is a podcast produced in collaboration with the Center for Engaged Learning at Elon University. For more information, including show notes and additional engaged learning resources, visit www.centerforengagedlearning.org.

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