

Limed: Teaching with a Twist

Season 4, Episode 5 – Rapid Responses: Mentorship, Part 2

Matt Wittstein (00:11):

You're listening to Limed: Teaching with a Twist, a podcast that plays with pedagogy. Welcome back to Limed: Teaching with a Twist. I'm Matt Wittstein. This month, we conclude our shorter format questions and answers about mentoring with my friends and colleagues from the Center for Engaged Learning Research Seminar on mentoring meaningful learning experiences. Nira Rahman joins us from the University of Melbourne and Alexis Hart Allegheny College, Katia Levintova, University of Wisconsin Green Bay, and Gabi Pleschova, Comenius University, and Karina Hamamouche, Butler University, are back with a few more responses. Once again, we'll share our introductions, then listen in to some of the questions and responses. Enjoy the episode.

Nira Rahman (01:19):

I'm Dr. Nira Rahman. I'm an academic focusing on educational design and student engagement at the University of Melbourne, which is a large public research intensive university in Australia. It's a diverse globally connected institution with a significant domestic and international student population.

Gabriela Pleschova (01:41):

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

Katia Levintova (02:10):

Hi, I'm Katia Levintova, 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.

Alexis Hart (02:50):

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 (03:14):

My name is Karina Hamamouche and I am 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 is primarily focused on the undergraduate experience. We are a private institution, and the majority of our 4,500 students are undergraduates.

Matt Wittstein (03:40):

What's an overlooked or non-traditional mentor role on campus that faculty and staff should recognize as part of students' support networks?

Karina Hamamouche (03:49):

I am a faculty in residence at Butler, which means that I live in the dorm amongst other students. And part of the program involves eating meals in the dining hall. And I see so many meaningful relationships between undergraduate students in the staff and campus dining. Students are always stopping to say hello, talking about their upcoming events and sharing important news with the staff. Last fall, one of the staff members told me how excited she was to be invited to the football game because she is friends with a lot of the football team and they wanted her to be there to support them. Another one of the staff members regularly attends dance and musical performances because he's also a dancer and he wants to support the students. And so while these staff members are not necessarily mentors who are providing guidance and knowledge to these students, they are clearly a really important part of the student support networks.

(04:47):

And so although students should have a constellation of mentors, they should also have other people in their environment who are providing them with support. I think of peers as another important supportive relationship. Sometimes you might have peer mentors who are older mentors providing additional guidance and knowledge, but other times peers might be a really important form of support that doesn't necessarily fall under mentoring.

Alexis Hart (05:16):

On my campus, one of the food service workers in particular is an amazing support person for our students. She learns students' names and the classes they're in and connects with them every time they go into the dining hall, urging them to persist in their studies and to take advantage of other resources and opportunities. She hasn't earned a graduate degree and doesn't specialize in any academic field, but so many of our students would place her very high on the relationship rich mentoring map in the other meaningful relationships category due to their high degree of trust in her and the duration of time they spend with her throughout their four years on campus.

Katia Levintova (05:53):

It's actually custodial staff or people working at coffee houses or cafeteria on campus. They're here long after we are gone home to resume all the other responsibilities. They are literally here after hours when students are looking for more informal conversations, maybe some lessons on life. I know for many students, those members of our campus community are their most important mentors.

Matt Wittstein (06:25):

When you think about your mentees, students, colleagues, employees, any kind, what's one barrier they often face in seeking mentors and what can we do to lower that barrier?

Nira Rahman (06:37):

A common barrier is inequitable access, I would say. Too often, mentoring remains informal or invisible, reaching only the most confident and well-connected students. When mentoring is framed as individual genericity, students may hesitate to ask for support, worrying they will be a burden

or they will ask a silly question. Institution can lower this barrier by making mentoring visible, structured and expected, designed as opt-out rather than opt-in. Framing mentoring as a collective responsibility normalizes participation, enabling all students to engage more freely and equitably.

Matt Wittstein (07:26):

What's one thing mentors should stop doing because it unintentionally creates barriers or shuts students down?

Katia Levintova (07:33):

I'm not sure that there is something mentors are doing wrong, but there are things that we are not always doing. We need to be proactive and reach out to ourselves, especially to be or C students who do not always get as much mentoring attention as A or D students. I must admit that I tend to mentor student stars or students who struggle mightily, but I know I need to do more for a student who is in between.

Matt Wittstein (08:04):

What's a question mentors can ask that reliably deepens a mentoring relationship in meaningful ways?

Gabriela Pleschova (08:11):

I believe mentors should ask, "How are you doing?" They should show care for their mentees as whole persons, care for their wellbeing, worries, and difficulties. They may be undergoing through these difficult times. This allows mentees to talk about the things they find personally most salient or important in their life.

Nira Rahman (08:33):

Good question. All right. A question that consistently depends mentoring relationships is what matters most to you right now and what helps you show up fully in this context or participate in this context? This invites students to share not just their goals, but also their identities, values, and the barriers they face. It opens spaces to talk about structural limits as well as aspirations, which is essential if we want mentoring to support equity rather than reproduce inequity. By asking these mentors signal respects, listen relationally and co-create a space where students' knowledge, experience, and agency are valued. And in this way, the power dynamics is also addressed in a very equitable way, I would say.

Matt Wittstein (09:40):

What's a lesson you've learned from your mentees about how context shapes mentoring needs?

Nira Rahman (09:46):

One lesson I have learned from my mentees is that context and identity profoundly shape what mentoring feels like and what support is needed. Students' experiences around race, gender, first generation status and cultural background influence not just the question they ask, but how safe and visible they feel in seeking guidance or even how they ask the question or how they frame the question and their confidence or agency even. Mentoring that ignores these dimensions risk being superficial or being very tokenistic or performative, listening carefully, acknowledging this

context and tailoring support accordingly turns mentoring into a relational identity affirming practice that truly empowers students.

Matt Wittstein (10:44):

Should mentoring practices be different in different fields? Why or why not?

Gabriela Pleschova (10:48):

Each mentoring practice is a bit different, I think. This is because they reflect the personalities, mentoring styles, needs, and preferences in the mentor mentee pairs. This diversity of relationships can be very enriching.

Matt Wittstein (11:05):

What's one innovation you hope institutions adopt more widely to make mentoring more visible, accessible, or supportive across contexts?

Alexis Hart (11:15):

My Elon Summer Seminar research team and I found that giving students an opportunity to name their mentors and place them on the relationship rich mentoring map and then talk through that placement and the characteristics of their supportive, meaningful and mentoring relationships help them to make those constellations visible, to think more intentionally about all the areas of support they seek and benefit from as college students and to recognize other people they can add or would like to add to that constellation.

Matt Wittstein (11:47):

As we enter a new year and a new semester, we are excited to share some of the research activity, insights, and outcomes developed through the Center for Engaged Learning Summer Research Seminar on Mentoring Meaningful Learning Experiences. Join us next month to continue your learning journey about mentoring and mentorship. 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. Limed: Teaching With a Twist is a creation of Matt Wittstein, associate professor of exercise science at Elon University. Original music for the show was composed and recorded by Kai Mitchell, an Elon University alumnus. If you enjoy our podcast, please take a few moments to subscribe, rate, review, and share our show. We aim to bring insightful and relevant content to educators each month, and we would love to hear from you.

(13:00):

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