Judith Stoddart Takes Position as University Distinguished Fellowship Program Coordinator

Dr. Judith Stoddart, Associate Chairperson for Graduate Studies in the Department of English, recently accepted the position of Coordinator for the University Distinguished Fellowship Program. In May 2002, Dr. Stoddart begins her new duties which include managing the budget for the program, working with the UDF Committee to screen recipients, and expanding development opportunities at MSU to increase funding for the program. “Judith demonstrated considerable commitment to graduate education for a number of years,” states Dr. Karen Klomparens, Dean of the Graduate School. “We are very excited about having her as part of the Graduate School staff.”

The University Distinguished Fellowship Program provides financial assistance to outstanding MFA and doctoral students entering Michigan State University. Students must plan to earn a Ph.D. or MFA and must demonstrate academic excellence and leadership potential. The Ph.D. fellowships provide four years of support, including health insurance, fees, and tuition waivers. The Graduate School funds the first and fourth years as a full fellowship without requiring any additional duties from the student other than a focus on his/her academic program. During the second and third years of fellowship support, students receive a teaching or research assistantship in their respective departments. Students working toward the MFA degree receive similar joint support from the Graduate School and their major department.

Dr. Stoddart comes to the UDF Program from the Department of English, where she has taught since 1990. She has served as the English Department’s Associate Chair of Graduate Programs from 1998-2002 and has taught such courses as Victorian Literature and Culture, 19th-Century British and French Realism, and Graduate Research Methods. In 1993 she earned the Honors College Award for Outstanding Teacher. A Rhodes Scholar, Dr. Stoddart received her M.Phil. degree in 1986 and D.Phil. degree in 1990 from Oxford University. As a National Merit Scholarship recipient, she earned a dual honors bachelor’s degree with highest distinction in English and French at Michigan State University in 1984.

Dr. Stoddart’s research interests center around Victorian literature, particularly prose writings from such authors as Victorian essayist and reformer John Ruskin. Her current research projects include the book-length study Circulating Knowledge: Forms of Information in Victorian England, which examines theories of reading, public opinion, and the public sphere in Victorian England; and Pleasures Incarnate, a book project which explores Victorian painting, poetry, photography and narrative as experiments in new theories of perception in the period. She has also presented at numerous conferences, such as the Interdisciplinary Nineteenth-Century Studies Association, the Pacific British Studies Association, and the Michigan Modern Language Association.

In addition to her impressive research and teaching record, Dr. Stoddart served on a number of professional committees which have given her a strong background for her new position. She participated in the Rhodes Scholarship Selection Committee for both Michigan and Indiana for a number of years. She worked as a project reviewer for the Broadview Press Literary Texts Series and as an Executive Committee member for the Midwest Victorian Studies Association. She co-directed the International Conference on Narrative at MSU in 2002 and directed the Modern Literature Conference at MSU in 1994. In addition to her duties in the English department, Dr. Stoddart worked on a number of committees at MSU, including the Executive Committee of the University Academic Council, the College of Arts and Letters Graduate Committee, the UDF Faculty Advisory Committee and the University Graduate Council where she served as chair in 2001-2002.

As UDF Coordinator, Dr. Stoddart will assist Dean Klompares in developmental efforts to increase fellowship funding for MSU graduate students. One innovation she plans to explore is a program similar to the Woodrow Wilson Foundation Responsive Ph.D. Program (http://www.woodrow.org/responsivephd/index.html). Dr. Stoddart believes that increasing funding for programs like the MSU University Distinguished Fellowship will help MSU to attract even more outstanding graduate students. According to Dr. Stoddart, “At MSU, we provide excellent training and a

(See “Stoddart” - page 13)
Inviting keynote speakers, evaluating abstracts, running registration and helping with the hundreds of details that make a successful conference, graduate students in the College of Arts and Letters are involved with initiating, organizing and running disciplinary conferences at MSU. Whether working on smaller regional conferences or large international professional meetings, graduate students make important connections with top scholars in their fields and gain valuable leadership experience to take with them as they pursue their careers.

Organizing a disciplinary conference takes time, but graduate students find that it is time well spent. April Herndon, Ph.D. candidate in the American Studies Program, states, “The work put into organizing a conference is completely worth it. One of the important things I have learned to do is to incorporate my research with my teaching and with my other professional activities. Instead of existing separately, these three areas work together and will continue to do so. This is the kind of work I’ll continually be asked to do outside graduate school.” Alison Crane, Ph.D. student in the Department of Philosophy, adds, “In philosophy, committee work is a critical part of being in academia. For a department to function, everyone needs to step up and contribute. Organizing a conference emphasizes the importance of such cooperation. Involvement from a number of people, not just a few, coming together for a common goal has a large impact on its success.”

The teamwork required among graduate students and faculty helps to emphasize the unique roles both groups play. Dr. Grover Hudson, Professor in the Department of Linguistics and Languages, points out, “Graduate students usually believe that a faculty member needs to be involved in the decision-making due to his or her experience, but the faculty believe that students also have experience and perspectives on all these decisions which are also required.” Recognizing the contributions graduate students provide, many departments have given graduate students a large role in organizing important conferences. For the recent international conference on New Ways of Analyzing Variation held by the MSU Department of Linguistics and Languages, graduate students helped in the planning process immediately. Dr. Dennis Preston, Professor of Linguistics and Languages, states, “When I first made the offer to host the conference, I knew that we needed the input of graduate students immediately. They were involved in every aspect, starting with the initial planning meetings. They pretty much ran the conference.”

Several conferences in the College of Arts and Letters were initiated by graduate students themselves, bringing new ideas and opportunities to their departments and the University. In the American Studies Program, for example, graduate students completely developed and organized the Disruptive Disciplines Conference for graduate students around the country. April Herndon, Anthony Shiu, Tony Michel, and other volunteers publicized the conference by sending fliers to American Studies departments around the country and posting on a nationwide call for papers mailing list. They reserved the conference rooms, selected the abstracts for conference presentations, and arranged for Eric Lott of the University Virginia to be the keynote speaker. Dr. Lott, winner of the Modern Language Association’s Book Award and author of Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class, was the scheduled Spring 1998 Russel Nye Lecture Series speaker featured at the same time as the conference. “We asked Dr. Lott if he would allow us to name him as our keynote speaker and combine his Nye Lecture with our conference,” explains Ph.D. candidate April Herndon. “He was very excited to support us and agreed immediately. He even came to some of our conference sessions.”

Throughout the different departments in the College of Arts and Letters, numerous conferences have taken place with the significant input and action of graduate students. Each conference presented its own challenges and contributed to the educational mission of the university community. Many brought top scholars from around the country to MSU and attracted prestigious national organizations. A sampling of some of those conferences follows.
American Studies Program

Fall Festivals in Music and American Culture

The American Studies Program held the 2001 Fall Festival in Music and American Culture on September 26-27. After the conference last fall, the American Studies Graduate Student Organization spoke with the faculty advisor, Dr. Steve Rachman, and asked for more involvement in the conference’s organization. This is the first year that graduate students have played a significant role in organizing the festival at MSU. They serve on the conference advisory board with their own vote and have helped select the abstracts. The graduate students have also worked on new activities for the conference, such as the Women and Minorities Breakfast. Ph.D. candidate April Herndon has found that working on this conference has helped her with other major projects, like her dissertation. “It’s very satisfying to see a large project through to the end. For many, the only large project you work on is your dissertation. Before I began working on mine, I had this experience with the conference that helped me as I faced my dissertation.” The 2002 Fall Festival of the American Arts will take place at MSU on September 26-29. The conference will explore relations between music and American culture and will include scholarly paper presentations, musical performances, cross-disciplinary cultural studies, and other scholarly inquiries and performances in the area of music in the Americas. A conference such as this provides a unique forum to highlight the interdisciplinary nature of American Studies scholarship by allowing for alternative formats for conference presentations, something the National Association for American Studies has urged more of its conveners to do.

Department of English

Literature of the Americas (LOTA)

Graduate students in the Department of English worked with Dr. Scott Michaelsen to create the Literature of the Americas Conference (LOTA). Begun in 1999, this cross-cultural conference focuses on the interrelations of the Americas in all of their diversity and complexity. This conference has brought in two outside keynote speakers and has provided a professional forum for graduate students from different MSU departments to present their work. As Ph.D. student Tammy Schneider explains, “Organizing a conference allows one to connect on a broader level with faculty and staff around campus and to gain awareness of the opportunities the University has available. It also helps to build a community of graduate students. As you work together, you get to know each other, share ideas, support each other, and expand your knowledge into other areas that you otherwise may not come in contact with. Such experience prepares you for larger conferences and participation in the larger academic community.”

Cultures of the Diaspora

In the Fall of 2000, Department of English doctoral students LaMonda Horton-Stallings, Tammy Schneider, Delores Sisco, Allyson Samuel, and Phyllis Burns decided they would like to use their experience organizing the LOTA conference to run their own graduate student conference on a much larger scale, with four keynote speakers and graduate student presentations from across the country. The students used money from the LOTA fund and then raised the rest of the money to hold the Cultures of the Diaspora Conference in Spring of 2001. Studies of the Diaspora examine issues surrounding the forced cultural, psychic or physical removal or appropriation of other peoples and cultures. The aim of the conference was to allow minority voices, both critical and creative, to be heard. Exploring literature, language, film and music in the twenty-first century, the conference included three keynote speakers: Diane Glancy, 1997 Wordcraft Circle Writer of the Year, Assistant Professor at Macalester College, and author of such creative work as Claiming Breath; Nora Chapa Mendoza, a Michigan artist whose work has appeared nationally and internationally and who has served as a member of the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs; and Michael Awkward, Director of the Center for the Study of Black Literature and Culture at the University of Pennsylvania and author of such works as Negotiating Difference: Race, Gender, and Politics of Positionality. Organizing this conference meant much more to the graduate students than simply having something to put on their C.V.’s. According to Tammy Schneider, “As the abstracts began coming in from around the world, we felt like we were doing something
important for the international community. The support we received from our keynote speakers, famous scholars, and artists who came for little or nothing to support us was amazing. One day, we hope to repay that outreach to the next generation of graduate students and artists.”

**Modern Literature Conference on Globalicities**

The Department of English held the Fall 2001 *Modern Literature Conference on Globalicities* at MSU October 18-20. Held every other year, this national conference combines studies in modern literature with critical theory. Thus, this conference draws not only literary scholars but also people working in social sciences and cultural studies. The Comparative Literature Program hosted the conference which was organized by Dr. Ken Harrow and assisted by Dr. Salah Hassan, Dr. Scott Michaelsen, Dr. Shelia Contreras, Dr. Lawrence Porter, Dr. Jyotsna Singh, and graduate student Olabode Ibironke. The conference explored issues related to global relations and how “global” has been described and actualized. It featured as its speakers Dr. Gayatri Spivak (Columbia University), Dr. Mahmood Mamdani (Columbia University), Dr. Saskia Sassen (University of Chicago), and Dr. Michael Hardt (Duke University). In spite of the events of September 11, presenters came from all over the world. Master’s student Olabode Ibironke participated in nearly every aspect of the conference, from publicity to collecting and organizing abstracts to maintaining the conference program. He found that being a part of the review process was very instructive: “The reasons the committee gave for accepting or rejecting a proposal gave me insights into what I should be doing whenever I make a proposal for a conference.” Dr. Ken Harrow points out that direct involvement in conferences has become one of the major activities for English Department graduate students. Through participating on panels and volunteering for conferences, graduate students interact more closely with top scholars and gain a unique exposure to the most recent work in their field. As Dr. Harrow explains, “A conference is one of the key places where intellectual ideas are exchanged and developed, and that experience is part of the total educational process where ideas are presented and discussed in class, in papers, and in the reading of material. The only difference is that here we have immediate access to major thinkers and debate their ideas, ideas often not yet appearing in print.”

**Department of History**

**Diaspora Paradigms: New Scholarship in Comparative Black History**

The Comparative Black History Ph.D. Program at MSU trains students to understand the historical experience of peoples of African descent in Africa and the Western hemisphere. Students explore the connected yet distinct cultures of these various societies and examine ways that culture, ideology, and racial politics affect the experiences, definitions, and conditions of African peoples in different parts of the world.

The 2001 conference, **Diaspora Paradigms: New Scholarship in Comparative Black History**, brought to MSU a number of top scholars from around the nation. These included: Dr. Kim D. Butler, Associate Professor of Africana Studies at Rutgers University; Dr. Ruth Simms Hamilton, Professor of Sociology and Urban Affairs Programs Director, African Diaspora Research Project at Michigan State.

*Participants in the College of Education’s Color of Fear Conference.*
University; Dr. Robin D.G. Kelley, Professor of History and Africana Studies at New York University; Dr. Chana Kai Lee, Associate Professor of History at the University of Georgia; Dr. Larry Eugene Rivers, Professor of History at Florida A & M University in Tallahassee; and Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Professor of Anthropology and of Social Sciences at the University of Chicago. The comparative nature of the conference meant that panels were organized according to examinations of a particular theme across national, social, and ethnic lines. Participants came from around the United States and from several foreign countries.

Dr. Darlene Clark Hine, John A. Hannah Distinguished Professor of History and a pioneer in the field of Comparative Black History, provided leadership to graduate students Dawne Curry, Eric Duke, Solomon Getahun, Yasuhiro Okada, Leslie Rollins, Meredith Roman, Marshanda Smith, Chantalle Verna, and Matthew Whitaker. They worked alongside faculty members Dr. Peter Beattie, Dr. Christine Daniels, Dr. Laurent Dubois, and Dr. Daina Ramey for two years to prepare for this conference. Leslie Rollins explains that in addition to the usual organizational skills one gains working on a project of this magnitude, “you also learn to negotiate, compromise, and problem solve as you work with a number of different people.” The graduate students will continue working together on the editorial board that will publish the papers from this conference.

**Department of Linguistics and Languages**

**New Ways of Analyzing Variation Conference**

In October 1999, the Department of Linguistics and Languages held the *Annual Meeting of the Michigan Linguistics Society*. The gathering had a long history but was not held the previous year. To assure its continuation, the linguistics faculty proposed that the graduate students run the conference. Eager for the opportunity, the students formed committees to organize and hold the conference. The newly formed Linguistics Student Organization facilitated the work done for this project.

Running the conference in 1999 helped prepare the graduate students to organize the international *New Ways of Analyzing Variation Conference (NWAV)* in 2002. This highly prestigious conference is the major international annual conference in sociolinguistics and previously has been held at schools like Stanford, and Duke. MSU brought several innovations to the conference. One such innovation is replacing the usual keynote speakers with what faculty advisor for the NWAV conference, Dr. Dennis Preston, calls “plenoquiums.” MSU invited leaders in the field to moderate panels about main issues facing sociolinguistics. The conference plenoquiums were moderated by Dr. Gregory Guy from the University of Toronto working in the area of sociolinguistics and general linguistic theory; Dr. Lesley Milroy from the University of Michigan working in the area of sociolinguistics and social science; and Dr. Donna Christian, President for the Center of Applied Linguistics in Washington, D.C. who spoke on applied sociolinguistics.

Graduate students organized the calls for papers, the abstract evaluations, and the information about the conference completely by email and on the web. Doctoral student Bartek Plichta served as the conference web master and helped to run an on-going Powerpoint presentation room where participants could display their work. According to Erica Benson, Linguistics Ph.D. student specializing in sociolinguistics, “graduate students had a good sense of ownership in the process of organizing this conference. For example, instead of hiring professionals to design the conference logo or to create the web page, we did these things ourselves. The department gave us much of the responsibility for running the conference.”

According to Dr. Preston, nearly half of the conference attendees are graduate students. The conference provides a venue for them to meet with potential employers and to receive helpful feedback on their work. Paul Balgoyen, Ph.D. student in Linguistics, found that “the more experienced and prestigious scholars were very interested in mentoring the newer ones.” Erica Benson agrees: “One of the best things about being so closely involved in this conference was seeing how supportive the established faculty were with newer scholars. The famous scholars were just as interested to talk with graduate students as with other top scholars.”

**Department of Philosophy**

**3rd Annual Graduate Student Philosophy Conference**

Graduate students in the Department of Philosophy ran the 3rd *Annual Graduate Student Philosophy Conference*, held October 5-6 at MSU. The goal of this conference is to bring together some of the best work currently being done by graduate students in socio-political philosophy and value theory, areas of strength at MSU. The conference provides an environment where graduate students working in this area can discuss their work. According to one of the organizers of the 2001 conference, Alison Crane, this conference “allowed students to teach themselves. Graduate students who presented found the audience gave insightful comments for revision.” Alison Crane and M.A. student Christopher Martin served as co-chairs of the organizing committee for the 2001 conference. In addition to the normal organizational duties, they selected this year’s speaker, Dr. Lucius Outlaw of Vanderbilt University, by vote among all the philosophy graduate students. Volunteers on the committee publicized the conference by mailing invitations to graduate programs, using a web site, and sending conference information to a national organization which compiles graduate student conferences in philosophy. To include an interdisciplinary element within the conference, the committee welcomed submissions from and attendance by graduate students from other disciplines as well as philosophy. Participants came to MSU from as far away as California and Arizona. Philosophy graduate students throughout the department put in a good deal of effort to make this conference
a success. Alison Crane explains, “Overall, organizing a conference gives one an enormous sense of achievement. It was great to see how many people helped with the conference.”

Romance and Classical Languages

TROPOS Conference

The name TROPOS represents three areas of graduate student involvement in the Department of Romance and Classical Languages: a journal, an annual conference, and an organization. The journal TROPOS was created by graduate students at MSU 31 years ago to provide Romance and Classical Languages graduate students with an environment where they could publish their academic and creative work in a variety of languages. Graduate students have taken responsibility for the solicitation, selection, and publication of pieces for the journal. Two years ago, TROPOS editors Dan Nappo, Alyssa Holan, and Candice Bosse decided to create a new venue for graduate student development, the TROPOS Conference. Thanks to this new conference, graduate students from around the country have the opportunity to present their research in front of their peers in a less formal environment.

Working closely with Department Chair Dr. Deidre Dawson, graduate students participated in all aspects of the conference. After selecting papers for the conference, the graduate students divided sessions into thematic and geographical groupings, including: peninsular Spanish, the Middle Ages, Latin American Spanish, and French—including francophone areas of Africa, Canada, and the Caribbean. The graduate students involved the faculty by asking MSU professors to moderate panels that coincided with their areas and languages of expertise. The keynote speaker was Dr. Stephen Dworkin from the University of Michigan, well known for his work in romance languages and linguistics. One important aspect of working on this conference was the way in which graduate students mentored each other. As Stacey Mackoviak, third-year graduate student and one of the current editors of the TROPOS journal, says, “The founders of the TROPOS Conference last year encouraged us to carry on the conference. This year, when we had questions, we could go to them for advice and receive their input about the direction we want to take this conference in the future.”

According to Dr. Karen Klomprens, Dean of the Graduate School, organizing disciplinary conferences represents an important step graduate students take to prepare for careers outside graduate school. “One fascinating part of being a graduate school dean is learning about the professional development activities across the different disciplines. As graduate students have shared their conference experiences with me over the past few years, I’ve come to understand and appreciate what excellent professional development opportunities these are for students in the humanities.” Taking the initiative in activities such as these, graduate students in the College of Arts and Letters already contribute to their larger disciplines outside MSU. Bringing conferences to MSU, they participate in their own learning and create the experiences they deem important to their wider education.

College of Education--Color of Fear Conference

Other colleges at MSU also encourage graduate students to organize and run disciplinary conferences as part of their professional development. A recent example is the Color of Fear Conference held January 25, 2002 by the College of Education. This workshop was built around the award-winning film of the same name, which examines the state of race relations in America as seen through the eyes of eight men of various ethnicities. The aim of the discussions that day was “to illustrate the type of dialogue and relationships needed if we are ever to have a truly multicultural society based on equality and trust.”

With the support of Dr. Brian DeLany, Professor of Education and Coordinator of Doctoral Programs, Ph.D. student Lorraine Gutierrez organized the meeting and Ph.D. student Ann Hooghart helped publicize the meeting. They invited Venice Smith of MSU Human Resources-Multicultural Development and Rodney Patterson of MSU Student Affairs to moderate.

Lorraine Gutierrez saw strong connections between issues brought up in the workshop and issues she will face in her own classrooms. She reported enthusiastic support from the department and college. “Organizing a conference like this showed me that our ideas as graduate students are welcome and that we can create our own experiences for our training.” According to Dr. Brian DeLany, “It was worthwhile for graduate students to have this experience so they can take it with them in later positions. It also allows us to break out of the typical hierarchical molds graduate students and professors can become stuck in.”

Already, working on this conference has inspired graduate students to initiate other events in the College of Education. Based on the success of this conference and graduate student interest, Lorraine Gutierrez has initiated a film festival to be held next year based on issues surrounding race relations and diversity. Thus, students continue to have an important role in their professional development. Anne Hooghart explains, “We’re educators and teachers who try to promote the idea that students come with learning and knowledge themselves. In our roles as students, we are in charge of our own learning. Putting on this workshop allowed us to practice what we teach.”
diversity of experiences which make our graduate students very competitive in the job market. Initiatives such as the Responsive Ph.D. build on strengths we already have to create additional career opportunities for students. The environment of a large public university prepares students to work in a broad range of academic and non-academic settings. However, there is a large funding gap between private and public institutions. Increasing graduate student fellowships at MSU will help us to be more competitive in our recruitment of top students.”

Dr. Stoddart replaces Dr. Les Manderscheid, who stepped down this year after coordinating the UDF program since its inception in 1994. Associate Dean Tony Nunez served as the interim coordinator for the current recruitment cycle. Current UDF Faculty Advisory Committee members include: Dr. Steven Edwards (Advertising), Dr. Susan Florio-Ruane (Teacher Education), Dr. Robert Hausinger (Microbiology & Molecular Genetics), Dr. Anil Jain (Computer Science & Engineering), Dr. John McCracken (Chemistry), Dr. Steve Matusz (Economics), Dr. Mike Shields (Accounting & Information Systems), Dr. Brian Silver (Political Science), Dr. Linda Spence (Nursing), Dr. Robert Tempelman (Animal Science), and Dr. Karin Wurst (Linguistics and Languages).

“We look forward to Judith’s leadership and to her insights on graduate education in the humanities, including development of an MSU-based program similar to the Woodrow Wilson Fellowship Foundation Responsive Ph.D. Program,” states Karen Klomparens, Dean of the Graduate School. MSU has a long tradition of educational excellence and of financial support for its graduate students. Working with the UDF Committee, Dr. Stoddart will play an important role in continuing this tradition.

Why Mentoring Graduate Students Matters
By: Kevin Johnston, Coordinator, MSU TA Programs

“Recent research has shown that graduate students in productive mentoring relationships can gain great advantages over their poorly mentored peers in job placement, research skills, and teaching ability.”

Kevin Johnston, Coordinator MSU TA Programs

During a long conversation with a former professor of mine about research I’d undertaken that dealt with 1930s Mississippi tenant communes, he earnestly remarked, “I think you have something important to say about this. Something no one else can.” I beamed, shuffled my feet, muttered my typically southern “Aw, shucks!” and floated out the room armed with some important confidence (and very little memory of anything else he’d said). All his interest and support, seemingly distilled down to that one short comment, conveyed to me a genuine and necessary trust in my abilities. Subsequent conversations with him (and other faculty and colleagues) continue to serve as my most meaningful professional support.

Many notable monographs and hundreds of articles on mentoring published in popular and academic publications in the last decade point to mentoring as an effective and increasingly popular strategy for facilitating graduate student professional development and success. These works follow 1970s and 1980s faculty development movements and higher education efforts to use mentoring as a means for developing and retaining junior, female, and minority faculty. Recent research has shown that graduate students in productive mentoring relationships can gain great advantages over their poorly mentored peers in job placement, research skills, and teaching ability (Johnsrud, 1990; Wunsch, 1994).

But mentoring as a model for training graduate students most often occurs for their role as researchers. Most of the literature on mentoring in higher education supports its benefits to research productivity, not teaching. This singular focus on research has been described as “the final irony.” The work we are best preparing future faculty to do—the research—often is not done well (or quickly enough for tenure review) because their scholarly contributions are “delayed, side-tracked, or rushed” while teaching, advising, and curriculum development—for which they are unprepared—become burdensome (Slevin, 1993).

Although perhaps all Research I institutions suffer some aspect of this “irony,” my conversations with MSU graduate students and faculty reveal that we have some outstanding mentoring going on here. Not only do our graduate students become some of the most successful research faculty in
the nation; they also have a chance to develop mentoring relationships with some of the best teachers on campus. The Graduate School’s Certificate in College Teaching Program (CCTP) allows teaching assistants to work with outstanding faculty mentors of their choice in a teaching/learning project they’ve designed to enhance their pedagogical prowess. Graduate students also have access to a wide range of faculty professional development workshops where they have a chance to meet and interact with some of MSU’s best research and teaching faculty. The benefits these informal mentoring opportunities provide are innumerable.

I have also encountered some confusion, resistance, and skepticism about mentoring at MSU from both faculty and students. Some graduate students express confusion as to what a mentoring relationship would work best for them. Some faculty resist having to put in even more time into a nebulously defined relationship that many believe should develop on its own, at its own pace. Other faculty are skeptical and graduate students fearful about putting stock into a professional relationship focused on something other than research.

How can we structure graduate education to ensure more emphasis on mentoring, and on mentoring for teaching improvement? If researchers claim that mentoring is the best framework for acculturation of future faculty, how do we go about creating a receptive mentoring environment? The proper mentoring relationship? Using one of the most powerful descriptions of an approach to mentoring I've encountered, Jan Allen, Associate Professor in the University of Tennessee’s College of Human Ecology, describes her approach to mentoring this way:

“The mentoring relationship, like any successful relationship, must be defined by its participants. For me, mentoring is exposure. As a mentor, I want to expose the academy and professoriate as accessible to graduate students; demystify its rules and processes for acceptance and success; guide students to experience its culture as a collaborator, co-investigator, and co-teacher; and expose my work as valuable, not just my research but my teaching and service as well. Further, I must expose the challenges we face in higher education—funding and budget crises, balancing and integrating so many roles and expectations that compete for our time and departmental resources, valuing teaching as an important scholarship at a research university. Graduate students must understand these issues in order to join both the academy and in the dialogue for its reform. Moreover, I take a risk and expose myself, who I am as a person and why I have chosen this profession. It’s what for me is the meaning of my humanity: a willingness to share what I have—my knowledge, my skills, myself—with my students.”

For Professor Allen, mentors in many ways serve as the crucial “gatekeepers” of the academic profession. She also intimates that they can serve graduate student professional development in so many other ways, ways that some might find hard to define. Though most people probably base their understanding of a proper mentoring relationship in a belief that someone “who has accomplished” in one way or another assists someone else “to accomplish,” ask ten people to define mentoring and you are likely to get ten different answers. Words like “teacher,” “guide,” “parent,” or “overseer” might be what they use to describe a relationship that is paternal, maternal, motivational, caring, sensitive, and tyrannical, often all at the same time. Like good teaching, we are not always sure how to define mentoring. “But, we [claim to] know it when we see it.” I have benefited from mentoring of all sorts, through formalized programs and informal conversations, and often from faculty and colleagues outside of my work’s purview. I’ve also found that some of the most effective mentoring I have ever received or provided didn’t reveal itself until long after it had occurred.

Perhaps the only immutable conclusion I have reached concerning mentoring is that faculty and students need to think more meaningfully about what it means to mentor or to be mentored. Good mentoring doesn’t just “happen.” And the stakes are exceedingly high, too high to risk professional hopes on ill-defined notions. Mentoring’s organizational and relational details can understandably confuse both mentors and their charges. What are the proper relationship boundaries? What should I expect from my mentor? How many mentors should I have? What are the objectives of the relationship?

Though some basic factors make mentoring work (see the inset on page 15), no singular model exists for defining the “proper” mentoring relationship, just as those who are involved vary greatly in personality, motivation, workloads, and expectations. Because most students and faculty have only partially formed concepts of what it is we should expect from the relationship, neither benefit fully from the potential mentoring could bring. Consequently, higher education suffers. We live and work within an organic community based upon critical thinking, intellectualism, and interested communication. We work and thrive in a community critically dependent on careful sharing. The mentoring relationship is a shared, symbiotic experience, a microcosm of Academia. Considering well the details of mentoring greatly enhances the educational/professional experience for everyone involved, including those
we teach. Both faculty and graduate students should consider what it is they want out of mentoring and realize that any opinions they first form will change and evolve with the relationship itself. Mentoring takes effort from all parties involved. Interested mentors can lead, cajole, criticize, and support. Thoughtful graduate students can learn to recognize that help can come from many places and often in what are at first unrecognizable forms.

Higher education must respond to increasing calls from policy makers and the public to improve teaching. Academia itself is engaged continually in multi-various dialogues concerning the reform of higher education. In that context, we must develop future faculty more comprehensively for their multiple roles as teachers, researchers, and as citizens in the academic community. Good mentoring may be the crucial key to transform graduate student development.

Finally, under the best conditions, mentoring opens both mentor and protégé up to greater professional and personal possibilities. By believing that I could create something professionally meaningful and by telling me so, my mentors have fulfilled what for me is the most important goal of a mentoring relationship: the creation of a shared belief between mentor and protégé that all the mystery, joy, and possibility of an accomplished professional is possible. So, mentors: Impart to those with whom you have developed a professional relationship your trust in their abilities. Graduate students: Ask for guidance! Listen carefully! Share your thoughts and findings with your peers and colleagues! For both groups, a rich and vibrant academic future awaits!

Kevin Johnston can be contacted at kmj@msu.edu


Effective Mentoring

Effective mentoring requires attention to at least three key factors: 1) a clear and agreed upon set of objectives; 2) clear and open communications; and 3) training, periodic program review and evaluation. In a recent survey of MSU’s TA Program Teaching and Learning Listserv, I asked participants to complete the following two sentences. Here are a few of the many responses I received. See how respondents’ comments reflect the key factors.

“To be a good mentor, one must . . .”
- “… reach out, and not wait for your protégé to approach you.”
  Stephanie Chervinko, MSU Counseling Psychology doctoral student
- “… give respect to protégés in order to receive it.”
  Bert Skillen, MSU Zoology master’s student
- “… develop a good rapport with your protégés based on mutual respect.”
  Dr. Patricia Greene, MSU Department of Romance and Classic Languages
- “… model appropriate behavior as well as listen to protégés’ feedback.”
  Rory Kraft, MSU Philosophy doctoral student
- “… set clear expectations about the mentoring relationship.”
  Dr. Diane Williams, University of South Florida Center for Teaching Development
- “… be a good listener.”
  Mary Bradley, MSU Counseling Psychology doctoral student
- “… know when to influence actions and when to observe actions.”
  Dr. Tariq Abdelhamid, MSU Agricultural Engineering/Building Management

“For a positive mentoring relationship to develop, protégés must . . .”
- “… not be afraid to ask for what they need.” (Stephanie)
- “… not fear showing personal weaknesses and vulnerabilities . . .” (Tariq)
- “… see feedback as helpful, and appreciate what they’re being offered.” (Mary)
- “… actively engage with the mentor.” (Rory)
- “… never fear asking questions!” (Patricia)
- “… respect the mentor for who they are: position, status, and age are superficial.” (Bert)
- “… be able to take advantage of the mentor’s particular experience and expertise without expecting the mentor to be all knowing.” (Diane)