

MENTORING PHILOSOPHY – JULIE B. SCHRAM

I approach mentoring partnerships with the underlying belief that a mentor, above all else, is a facilitator, providing inclusive opportunities for students to explore something new by either communicating about or providing students with openings to independently investigate research questions that interest them. I encourage personally driven learning in a supportive and inclusive environment through collaboration, experiential learning, and self-assessment. I often rely on tiered mentorship in laboratory settings and strive to work with people from a wide variety of backgrounds to enrich learning opportunities for myself and my students. To achieve this, good communication is absolutely essential. Using effective, clear, and thoughtful communication is a critical component of ensuring that the goals of both mentor and mentee are achieving personal and professional goals. Ensuring that clear communication happens takes continued attentiveness to update and respond to the needs of the mentor and mentee.

One method that has become a core part of establishing my mentoring relationships is use of contracts (web-workshop “What matters in mentoring” (four 2-hr sessions) offered through the Center for the Improvement of Mentoring Experiences in Research (CIMER) at Univ. Wisconsin-Madison). When I start a new mentoring relationship, we discuss and fill out the contract together and then revisit it yearly to update the contract stipulations as needed. I have used the contracts to communicate and establish baseline expectations for myself and for the student. Some of the aspects stipulated include the type of feedback students prefer and frequency of meetings. In this way, I set the stage for the development of a collaborative relationship that values individual and shared research goals and vision of success while establishing a framework for reaffirming or revising our progress and set the timing and frequency of feedback. I believe this personalizes and customizes feedback that will best benefit this type of working and mentoring relationship.

In addition to providing research training opportunities to students, I continue to seek mentorship training opportunities. I treat mentoring with the same care and attentiveness I do my research and teaching. One recent example of this is my participate in the Coastal and Estuarine Research Federation (CERF)’s Rising TIDES (Toward an Inclusive, Diverse, and Enriched Society) mentoring program associated with the 2019 CERF conference. Rising TIDES is funded by the NSF and is part of an initiative to promote opportunities for underrepresented minorities. As part of this program, I am serving as the mentor to two students, all other mentors are working with one student. I have already established a mentoring relationship with the students I am working with in this program, I mentored them during summer 2019 as part of the Oregon Institute of Marine Biology (OIMB)’s Experience Marine Biology on the Oregon Coast (EMBOC) Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU).

As part of the EMBOC REU at OIMB, I have mentored five students since 2017. During these programs I have utilized tiered mentorship training to encourage and facilitate each person’s development as a researcher and mentor. As part of this mentorship plan, I worked with a local high school teacher, with whom I was jointly awarded funds from Partners-in-Science program run by the Murdock Charitable Trust to provide professional development training and research opportunities to a local high school teacher to help develop new science curricula. This partnership has fostered collaboration between high school, undergraduate, and graduate students at the Oregon Institute of Marine Biology.