CHAPTER 6

Mentoring Interns

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Mentoring of interns is essential to assure that internships are an academic experience in which students learn about political science to justify the academic credit they receive. Mentoring is done mostly through personal communication, both oral and written, and can be facilitated by incorporating into the internship program components such as journals, class meetings, learning contracts, self-evaluations, and site visits. This chapter also briefly considers how to conduct mentoring in special situations, including those that are geographically distant from campus or are ephemeral, namely political campaigns.

INTRODUCTION

The main job of any political science intern's faculty sponsor is to help the intern learn political science. Mentoring is essential to that task. Personal interaction is the essence of mentoring, but the impact of such interaction can be maximized through an internship program's structure.

Not all internships are rewarded with academic credit. However, if an institution does give credit and charges tuition for those units, it incurs an obligation to provide the same degree of learning that would be available in a classroom course. Doing so involves more than just specifying the time that students must spend on course-related activities; interns must be provided with the stimuli and tools to understand what they are learning and how their experience fits into an academic discipline.

Consider the case of Sonia Smith, a journalism student at Georgetown who wrote about her internship at the online magazine *Slate*, which did not pay her as an intern but required her to receive academic credit. She enrolled in a one-credit course, "Internship in Business," missed the single class meeting, never met the instructor, and wrote a short reflection paper at the end to pass the course. She enjoyed the internship, but no matter what she paid for the course, she did not get her money's worth (Smith 2006).

Despite these shortcomings, Smith enjoyed and learned from her experience. Some interns do not: they may be limited to menial work, harassed by their supervisors, exploited for their free labor, or simply ignored (Perlin 2012). They may also concentrate so much on carrying out their assigned tasks that they do not recognize how their work relates to political science. If universities value internships because scholarly research has legitimized them as "high-impact practices" that lead to greater student retention (Kuh 2008), then universities must ensure that students learn.

David Thornton Moore (2013) has argued that while university administrators advertise their school's commitment to experiential learning, including internships, they have done little to define what is academically valuable about these programs or how that value is to be attained. Moore attempts to fill this need with an intensive analysis of the curriculum and pedagogy of internships. Specifying what academic knowledge and theoretical understanding students gain from internships and how they are guided to such learning makes it possible to justify giving academic credit. Moore emphasizes that faculty mentors have a role to play in both of these areas.

WHAT IS MENTORING?

Vasgird and Phillips (2019) offer a general definition of mentoring, albeit one intended for senior researchers mentoring their junior colleagues, writing:

> A mentor is someone who shares knowledge and serves as an experienced and trusted advisor. . . the role of a mentor has expanded and often includes supervisor, collaborator, professional development coach, advocate, and friend. . . Perhaps most importantly, a mentor is someone who takes a sincere interest in the future growth and development of a trainee. (Vasgird and Phillips 2019, np)

The task of a faculty member mentoring an intern is more limited than this in some ways, but broader in others. It is more limited in that it focuses on what the student does as an intern, a role that is usually part-time and of limited duration. A mentoring relationship developed through an internship program may sometimes grow to cover all aspects of the intern's professional life, continuing for years past graduation, but mentoring essentially relates to the internship directly.

On the other hand, while a mentor should certainly be interested in the student's future growth and development, guiding the intern's learning must be the immediate priority. Faculty are obligated to promote understanding of the academic discipline, in this case political science.

Intern mentoring, therefore, can be defined as *the interaction of a faculty sponsor with an intern in order to facilitate learning*. Mentoring can be contrasted with *monitoring*, or *actions taken to ensure that the internship is meeting certain standards*, such as the number of hours worked or the quality of that work. Mentoring is always supportive; monitoring tends to involve verification and enforcement. Although the two are theoretically distinct, in practice the distinction is blurred because internship coordinators typically perform both roles. For instance, a site visit can be purposed simultaneously to review whether learning goals are being met and to check on the student's attendance and job performance.[1] In the American system of higher education more generally, faculty are expected to both teach (mentor) and grade (monitor) their students, despite the inherent tension between these two roles. This chapter focuses specifically on mentoring; however, it should be noted that many mentoring activities overlap with monitoring functions.

Research on faculty mentoring of political science interns is thin. Although Pecorella (2007) uses the word *monitoring* instead of mentoring, he asserts the importance of "continual faculty sponsor-intern discussions throughout the experience, incorporating questions, challenges, and, if necessary, faculty-intern confrontations over the nature of the internship experience" (2007, 84).[2] Doherty's (2011) scholarship focuses on mentoring in a specific context, namely, a program designed to make women students feel more confident about seeking political office by placing them with women legislators who serve as their mentors. In the case she describes, legislators were selected for their desire to play this role, and many intern supervisors also regard themselves as mentors (Sosland and Lowenthal 2017). However, mentoring by a faculty member is distinctive in that it usually involves focusing on generalizable job skills and holistic career readiness, as well as advancing a better understanding of politics.

Research in related disciplines offers useful insights about the nature of intern mentoring, such as that of Rothman (2007), who, like Sosland and Lowenthal (2017), studied the role of site supervisors. She performed a content analysis of suggestions from 345 business students about ways supervisors could improve the intern experience, finding a consensus that good supervisors defined tasks clearly, communicated well, and made their expectations transparent (2007). In political science, faculty mentors should define the nature and type of academic learning that should occur through internship

activities (such as the relation between information and power, or the role of veto points in the legislative process) and communicate those expectations to the intern.

In the area of education, Crutcher and Naseem (2016) reviewed over 30 empirical studies on mentoring new teachers published in education journals since 2000, and they determined that effective mentoring practices involved "(a) critical reflection and feedback, (b) modeling, (c) collaboration, and (d) knowledge about the needs of novice teachers" (2016, 40). Their conclusions equally apply to political science internship faculty, whose focus should be on the general needs of up-and-coming political scientists, as well the specific needs of students that they discern through one-on-one consultations.

Finally, Kaslow and Mascaro (2007) digest a great deal of research and capitalize on their personal experience with mentoring clinical psychology doctoral students who work in academic hospitals. They define mentoring as "a unique and distinctive personal relationship in which more experienced faculty members, clinical supervisors, or professionals who are trusted advisors and wise people engage in a variety of interactions with the interns and postdoctoral fellows whom they mentor" (2007, 192). They clearly distinguish mentoring from supervising, noting the same person may do both, but the functions differ: "The mentor has greater investment in the personal and career development of the protégé than is the case in supervision where the focus is primarily the development of competence" (2007, 192). In other words, the mentor seeks to help mentees develop a better understanding of their personal and professional goals and how to attain them.

Mentoring should also be beneficial to the mentor as well as the mentee. Vasgird and Phillips (2019) identify the personal and professional yields for experiential learning mentors:

> (M)entors typically find satisfaction in sharing their knowledge and experience, and renew their enthusiasm for the profession. It can help the mentor develop and enhance professional networks, extend their professional contributions, and contribute to the advancement of the field. Mentors can gain the opportunity to learn about new research areas, build a strong research program, gain new friendships, and affect the future by leaving a part of their expertise and values in every trainee. (Vasgird and Phillips 2019, np)

Essentially, faculty mentors develop a legacy through their interns, and have the potential to energize their own work by expanding their own networks and scope of their research.

All of these studies provide useful suggestions for what mentors should do. However, since faculty mentors are responsible for assuring that academic learning takes place, their roles should also be considered in relationship to the curriculum and pedagogy of internships.

THE CURRICULUM OF INTERNSHIPS

Although many political science internship programs require an affiliated classroom course, the curriculum we are concerned with is that of the internship itself: what students are expected to learn from their work experience. We can consider this in terms of *learning goals*.

In some programs every intern will have the same goals. This is particularly appropriate if all the interns have similar placements, such as with different members of a state legislature. At the other end of the spectrum, interns may have different learning goals relevant to their individual placements. In such cases, the relationship between placement and learning goals can work in two directions: an intern may accept an internship because it sounds interesting, and may need help developing a credit-worthy set of learning goals for that placement; or an intern may have a prior idea of what they would like to learn, and need help selecting an appropriate placement by which to do so. The faculty mentor can help in both of these situations by helping students clarify their goals and by exploring what learning is likely to transpire in a given placement. The mentor should also help the intern stay focused on the political science content of what they are learning. A learning agreement (sometimes called a learning contract, as highlighted in Chapter 8 by Lowenthal and Sosland) can be used to help articulate goals; such agreements are discussed more thoroughly below.

During the placement search, mentors should help students distinguish between the nature of an organization as a whole and what is involved in a particular internship position. Students may make

two kinds of wrong assumptions. First, they may assume that everyone in a particular kind of organization—a business, a public relations agency, a media outlet—does the sort of work that is implied by the organization's overall purpose. In truth (and as faculty are aware), organizations often encompass multiple functions that are political in nature, such as lobbying or regulatory compliance. Second, while interns tend to be drawn to organizations they have heard of, some of the most substantive placements can be with small nonprofits or grassroots campaigns, among others, which tend to be understaffed and willing to give interns substantial responsibility in return for their much-needed labor.

Many campuses now have a centralized internship office that maintains a database of possible placements (see chapters by Chávez Metoyer and Simpson, Braam, and Wilson). While such an office can be a useful resource, the staff is unlikely to have as complete an understanding of the academic goals of an internship program as the faculty sponsor does, so an important mentoring task is to help students evaluate these placements. When students come to the program with placements they have landed on their own, perhaps through family or other personal connections, mentorship involves helping the student evaluate these as learning opportunities. Finally, some students will feel so lucky to be offered any type of placement that they will want to accept it immediately. Here the mentor can compel the student to pause and consider their options by requiring formal approval before the placement can be accepted for credit. The placement agreement form in the supplemental resources section is one way of formalizing such an approval.

Once an intern has been placed and has been at work for a week or two, it is time to develop more structured learning goals. Moore (2013) suggests that these can be sorted into six categories: facts and information, concepts, skills and competencies, social and organizational knowledge, personal development, and values and ethics. The learning agreement form included in the supplemental resources section includes fewer categories: *facts, skills*, and *ethics*. Requiring interns to complete this form only after a discussion with the faculty mentor encourages them to think about their goals more analytically, and many students will need help distinguishing these academic goals from work tasks. For example, a legislative intern may write: "make sure all constituent requests are answered promptly." While doing so would certainly require some learning, the focus here is on the work achievement; instead, the mentor can help the intern consider what *factual knowledge* (e.g., knowing which state office is in charge of which function) and *skills* (e.g., effective telephone communication) are involved, and also scrutinize the *theoretical connections* to political science (the function of constituent service in representative government, in this example).

Leaving aside these general matters, mentors must ensure that political science content is recognizable in the intern's learning goals. If politics is defined as the authoritative allocation of values (Easton 1953), the mentor can help the intern understand how such an allocation is occurring through the internship activities. For example, in the common situation where an intern is working on constituent services, the mentor might ask what values the constituent is seeking, who has the authority to provide those values, and what the role of the elected official is. To consider how this works more specifically, we now turn to pedagogy.

THE PEDAGOGY OF INTERNSHIPS

Following a detailed discussion of the pedagogical differences between the classroom and field experience, Moore (2013) condenses this discussion into a number of issues. Three of them are particularly relevant to the pedagogy involved in mentoring. First, the kinds of knowledge involved are distinct: students in the classroom are taught abstract categories, with examples used to illustrate them. On the other hand, interns in the field encounter these abstractions as real human experiences, sometimes painful ones, such as a constituent facing eviction, or a restaurant owner seeking legislative relief to avoid bankruptcy. The mentor can help the student relate the concrete to the abstract. Second, professionals in the field are likely to think differently from academics, with an orientation toward how to get things done, rather than how to understand them or about the lessons that can be drawn from them. The mentor can help the intern see how understanding and effectiveness are related. Finally, the concepts and relationships are presented in some logical order in the classroom; in the field, they can come up at any time, without their theoretical context being apparent. The mentor can help the student see how an event is part of a process (Moore 2013).

Mentoring requires systematic contact between mentor and intern, because mentors can also help interns deal with practical problems that could arise at any point during a semester. For some students, an internship will be their first experience working in an office; others will have office experience, but not on a professional level. Experienced interns may be surprised to encounter new types of problems. Internships may begin with drudgery, such as hours of filing, and interns need help figuring out how to secure more meaningful tasks. They may also need advice about dealing with difficult workplace colleagues. More seriously, interns may encounter abusive supervisors or harassment at their worksites; fortunately, this is not common, but interns need active support when it happens.

Mentors learn about these issues through four types of personal contact: *meetings*, either one-on-one in the mentor's office or as part of a group, such as in an internship class; *journals* kept by the intern and read and responded to by the mentor; *written reports* usually generated at the midterm and always at the end of the internship; and *site visits* by the mentor to meet with both intern and supervisor. Each is considered separately below.

Meetings

Many internship programs require that all interns attend class weekly or biweekly. A course usually includes a curriculum that includes readings and assignments; even so, it is also desirable to include some time for the interns to compare notes on their experiences since the last meeting. Simply put, interns benefit from learning from each other and often share complementary experiences. In addition, if an intern is encountering problems, other interns may have suggestions about how to handle them. From the point of view of mentoring, the instructor can use such discussions to help interns make theoretical generalizations and broader comparisons. If appropriate, students can also be asked to relate theoretical concepts from assigned reading to observations about their experiences as interns. To use an example from personal experience, asking students to read Max Weber's essay about bureaucracy and then evaluate the degree to which their placement organization is bureaucratic can lead to fruitful discussions, both of Weber's concept and about their own situations (1993 [1922]).

Ideally, the internship should carry the same academic credit as any other course, and the concurrent seminar should count as another course. If this is not possible, adjustments need to be made to prevent placing unreasonable time demands on the intern. A part-time internship should involve 12–15 hours a week at the placement for the student to integrate as fully as an intern can into the office; 10 hours per week is a minimum, but anything less generally limits the learning potential. Other adjustments might involve the number or length of the class meetings. Based on 40 years of intern supervision, I have found that none of these adjustments will work as well as counting the program as a two-course package, but they may be necessary.

In cases where a paired internship class is not feasible, the instructor should meet personally with interns on a regular basis. The purpose of these meetings should be the same as that of the mentoring portions of a weekly class, discussed previously. One way to do this would be to focus on discussion of the student's internship journal, discussed in the next subsection.

Journals

All internships should require a journal even if there are class meetings, because writing about one's experience contributes to understanding that experience. Some instructors assign a journal that is no more than a simple log. Chizeck says, "Minimally a journal should document the hours spent on site and give a description of the activities and events the student encounters," and adds that "a journal is really the minimum writing to be expected from a student" (2004, 8). As an experienced internship mentor, I believe that requiring only a log abandons most of the learning potential of a journal, and I agree with Chizeck who maintains that a more substantive journal is a more useful teaching tool. Thus, by providing guidance about what should be explored in the journal and how to discuss it, the mentor needs to ensure that journal writers connect practice with theory and also reflect on these linkages. A sample set of guidelines is included in the supplemental resources section.[3] Included in it are a weekly assessment of progress toward the intern's learning goals, but there are some advantages to avoiding an exclusive focus on such goals. Many interns find themselves in unanticipated circumstances or engaged in aspects of the internship they had been unaware of initially. The guidelines encourage interns to reflect more

deeply on any elements they found interesting, a process that can open the door to new learning and corresponding learning goals. This will be discussed further in the section on learning contracts, below.

Written guidelines for journaling are a good start. However, the essence of journal-based mentoring is the instructor's feedback. Such feedback should be frequent, ideally once a week, and should help point the intern toward deeper reflection on what has been observed, its meaning, and how their understanding relates to the intern's learning goals. For example, the mentor might pose questions for the intern to reflect on in the next journal entry. For the intern, it is best to write the journal as soon as possible after the experience, and rapid and consistent feedback from the instructor helps cement the learning.

Learning Contracts

The document that sets both realistic and aspirational goals for the internship—recognizing that these are likely to evolve during the course of the internship—is commonly labeled a "Learning Agreement" or "Learning Contract" (see supplementals).[4] In the Suffolk University program, a separate *Placement Agreement* was used at the very beginning of the internship to signify agreement about hours, schedules, and general responsibilities, whereas the *Learning Contract* (or *Learning Agreement*) was used to articulate learning goals. Using two separate documents helps make the distinction between these purposes clear to the intern and the supervisor.

The initial choice of placement should reflect learning goals in a general way. However, until the intern settles into the job and understands both what the organization does and their own role in it, specifying goals can be difficult. For this reason, it is advisable to make the learning contract due two weeks after the internship has started, and to allow (or periodically require) adjustments to the goals as the internship continues. As noted above, the mentor helps students discern the differences between work goals (e.g., "get an email newsletter sent to everyone on the mailing list") and learning goals ("learn what role electronic communications play in relations between constituents and their representative"), and once the document is complete, the mentor should review the learning agreement and directly and quickly address any such confusion, either in writing or in person.

Goal attainment is also more likely when self-aware interns establish their own learning goals, and mentors can be a big help in keeping those goals top of mind by providing instructions for interns' self-reporting. The form included in the supplemental resources section asks students to think about their skills, factual knowledge, and ethical awareness, and then to develop goals for further learning in each area. These goals then serve as the basis for interns' written and oral mid-term and final self-evaluations.

Intern Self-Evaluations

Most internship programs require a final written report from the intern. It's useful to require a midterm report as well so that the mentor can intervene to help the student correct any problems that may not emerge through journaling or class discussions. An example of instructions for mid-term and final self-evaluations, extracted from my course syllabus, can be found in the supplemental resources section. Internship courses can be used to require oral presentations of both reports, which can help a student meet the oral communication goals of an institution or department and also enable opportunity for peer evaluation and feedback. An important role for the faculty mentor is to help interns improve on the midterm report by clarifying their attainment of learning goals and modifying those goals as appropriate. This can be achieved by the final report; however, if placed at the end of the semester, not all students will read the instructor's comments and it will be too late to implement suggestions. A final opportunity for mentoring comes during site visits, which ideally should be part of every internship.

Site Visits

Surveying internship programs at a medium-sized state university in the late 1980s, Chizeck (2004) found that social science programs featured "little faculty involvement" (5). Site visits, however, can add value both to an internship program and the process of mentoring, and should be included wherever possible. Without them, faculty mentors can find it difficult to understand the potential of a placement

site or help the intern evaluate the learning opportunities at a specific site.

Site visits advance monitoring as well as mentoring; they help prevent the rare situation when a student claims to be doing an internship but isn't; and a final site visit gives the supervisor a chance to give a more nuanced evaluation of the intern's performance instead of simply filling out a written form (such as the prompt in the supplemental resources section). Much more importantly, site visits allow the faculty mentor to observe and evaluate several aspects of the intern's environment: the physical setting, the social atmosphere in the office or on site, and the personal relationship between intern and supervisor. Based on these observations, the mentor can discuss with the intern how to increase the value of the experience and suggest improvements both to the intern and supervisor. For these reasons, best practices include site visits at the midterm and end of the internship. If time permits, a site visit at the beginning can be used to negotiate and sign the placement agreement.[5]

It is worth mentioning other advantages of site visits. With respect to the educational institution, site visitations convey to students that internships are opportunities offered by their university, not simply outside activities they are doing on their own, and this understanding will bear fruit later through alumni relations. Site visits can also strengthen relationships between the academic program and the site supervisors. In my experience, students and supervisors frequently express their gratitude for faculty members' visits. For the individual faculty member, these efforts can provide openings for research, as well as wider familiarity in general with the various political settings where interns work.

Special circumstances

Some types of internships pose special problems for monitoring. This section addresses two such circumstances: geographically distant internships, and internships in political campaigns.

On-site internships in Washington, DC and in other countries have been growing in popularity. However, unless a university possesses the resources to maintain its own center in one or more of these places, it is easier for the institution to contract with an established organization that provides on-site placement assistance, supervision, and evaluation. In DC, the Washington Center and American University are very different examples of such programs (see also Chapter 13 by Chin), as are Educational Programmes Abroad (known in the US as EPA Internships) and the International Partnership for Service-Learning in the countries where they operate. These organizations provide supporting documentation, such as supervisor evaluations and confirmation of the work done, and in some cases grant transferable credit from an accredited institution. However, the home-campus-based faculty mentor should maintain contact with the intern throughout the internship and require at least a weekly journal submission. If possible, a mid-term site visit increases substantially their ability both to mentor and assess, but it is the rare university administration that can be convinced that such visits are worth the expense.

Electoral campaigns remain popular sources of political internships. Rife with learning opportunities, they do present a few potential dilemmas that need to be addressed early in the process. First, campaigns are largely volunteer-driven, and campaign staff often consider interns as just another kind of volunteer. It is often difficult to convince campaign staff to set aside special opportunities for interns, and virtually impossible to enforce any agreements that are made. To deal with this, the mentor needs to help the intern understand that their responsibilities will correspond to their capabilities and the willingness to work that they demonstrate. This is true in many placements, but much more so in a campaign.

Second, campaigns end—abruptly—on election night. A final meeting between the intern and supervisor will be almost impossible to arrange just before the election (everyone will be too busy) and just as difficult after the election when the offices are closed and staff have moved on, either to a vacation or their next job. The faculty mentor should work with the intern to find a supervisor who will be available to provide a personalized assessment when the election is over, filling out and returning any evaluation forms, and meeting with the intern and sponsor—off-site or virtually if necessary—to discuss that evaluation.

CONCLUSION

Mentors play an essential role in ensuring the academic quality of internships. Today, university administrators, career services staff, and students tend to view internships only in relationship to career development, or as providing an inside track to a future job (Berg 2014; Perlin 2012). It is the mentor's job to show the student that an internship can be so much more, and that if the intern wants academic credit, it *needs* to be more. Fortunately, doing so is not difficult. In general, students enjoy writing about their experience and discussing what they learned with their peers. When faculty mentors insist on regular journaling, class discussions, personal meetings, and evaluative reports, and also provide consistent, targeted feedback, interns gain a greater understanding of the political science discipline, which is a vitally important goal of any political science course.

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ENDNOTES

1. Conversely, the documents and personal conversations used to mentor (discussed later in this chapter) are also a source of information about the intern's performance, and in the case of internships which earn letter grades, may be one of the considerations evaluated for that grade. This is not unique to internships.
2. If we rely on the definition of "mentor" in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2021) as "a person who offers support and guidance to another," then *mentoring* is a more accurate term for what Pecorella calls monitoring.
3. This document is adapted from guidelines developed by the late Helen Graves of the University of Michigan-Dearborn. She created it for Canadian Parliament internship positions, and I used her rubric in my teaching for over 40 years.
4. I prefer the term "agreement," because I find that the term "contract" implies too legalistic an arrangement.
5. Some faculty may want their students to build or have a sense of agency over this aspect of the process, leaving the direct learning contract negotiations up to them.