

## **EXHIBIT 2: ESSAY ON MENTORING OF DOCTORAL STUDENTS.**

I believe a good mentor is also a good motivator. My mentoring philosophy therefore is a set of personal motivations that have guided my life as a teacher and a student. At the practical level, mentoring for me involves being a good teacher while striving to nurture student creativity. I motivate students by inviting them to talk about their hopes and fears regarding their research.. I am sensitive and attentive especially to those who are struggling to jumpstart their dissertation projects. Many students struggle because they are unable to situate their research ideas in the context of large socio-political systems. I try to motivate them to think and engage me in conversation about the scope of their ideas in light of how they might improve individual and social well-being. By motivating and inviting them to think at a broad level, I often succeed in invoking their passion to contribute to human well-being in whatever way they can. This approach has worked well as most of my students came to the discipline because they ‘want to do good and be helpful’.

Usually I begin my mentoring relationship by being a good listener and guiding their thoughts about their research projects at a broad level. Once they feel comfortable with me, I help them continue the process of narrowing down the topic of inquiry. I spend more time at the stage of formulating a question than at any other stage of dissertation writing.

I have found it difficult to pin-point what exactly facilitates students to think about their research subject more passionately than the fact they want to complete a dissertation to meet an eligibility criterion for the Ph.D. degree. Being a good listener and an engaging conversationalist, and being able to relate to their experiences, I find, helps. What helps more, is their success. They become motivated as they begin to understand the scope and meaning of their research. In accelerating this process, I encourage them to write articles for publication. I meet with all students who are writing articles at least once a week not only to give them feed-back but also to keep them focused on their task. Most of the time we begin by setting up a time line for finishing the article. I should confess that I put pressure on them to finish the article in the scheduled time. Usually I encourage my students to present several parts of the article in various conferences locally and nationally. The experience of getting published and presenting in

conferences usually makes them more confident, and therefore more creative than otherwise. Not surprisingly, dissertations benefit from publications and conference presentations.

Across all mentoring relationships I have maintained, I have found to hooks which appear to empower the mentoring relationship process. They are self – belief and hope. Obviously, most Ph.D students are internally motivated. This in combination with self-belief and hope, provide my students with the tenacity to maintain and excel. On my part, I try to nurture self-belief by providing them with skills, co-authoring, encouragement, highlighting their accomplishments.

I have found that mentoring is a process that builds on strengths, openness, and kindness than on deficits that some students may have. I have had a welcoming sign for the last twenty years or so on my office door which reads “Here, at whatever hour you come you will find light and help and human kindness” – Schweitzer. I have found that an essential component in cementing a good mentoring relationship is being cautious about what you say. I am always reminded of the power of words, so well expressed by Longfellow in his poem, “I shot an arrow into the air, It fell to earth....An the song from beginning to end, I found again in the heart of friend’. I have learned not to immediately point out deficits. If my mentee needs additional resources such as better statistical skills to be successful, I encourage him or her to acquire the skills needed. I mention those s/he already has and encourage them to add a needed skill. I address issues from a strength perspective. Addressing them optimistically.

Mentoring demands sacrifices. For the last twenty years of my career I have spent several hours weekly, mentoring and working with students. At least on two occasions, I found that the students needed to conduct further statistical analysis as a consequence of certain surprising results they obtained. I offered them rigorous training in the use of statistical software which helped them complete excellent dissertations in time for their planned graduation. I also spend time, especially with the ones who are entering the academic labor market, coaching them in the art of interviewing. I make sure that their vitas are well presented without typographical and grammatical errors. Being highly accessible helps the mentoring process.

I have an open door policy. Students are asked to either call or email me at times need. With a

high level of availability, I help create strong bonds that are nurturing, supportive and intellectual. During episodes of emotional stress, I lend them my ears and support them like a good friend. I have also referred them to personal counseling.

Mentoring relationships seldom expire. I am in close contact with all my students who have taken academic positions. Most noticeably, a few of them have achieved recognition and positions in ways that overshadow the visibility and prominence I have in the community of social work educators. This is certainly a great reward. I believe sustained mentoring is important. I have published so far 2 books, 11 book chapters, 55 peer reviewed articles, and also have presented at conferences with 63 students. In spite of the hard work involved, I believe this type of hands-on work is an invaluable opportunity for students.

Finally, my commitment to graduate students and mentoring is indicated by the number of students I have encouraged to write thesis at the Master's level, so that they find their transition to Doctoral studies smooth and rewarding. I present data below on the number of Master's students I have worked with.

M.A Thesis Committee – member =11;

M.A Thesis Committee – Chair =11;

In the final analysis mentoring is about nurturing a family of scholars. Regardless of where they are, and who they are, I will and have continued to support each and every one of my students. I have grown with them as a scholar and have only tried to give back to the academic community many folds of what my own mentors like Prof. Lyle Shannon of University of Iowa and Prof. Jay Weinstein of University of Eastern Michigan gave me while I was a student.

Respectfully submitted,

Vijayan K. Pillai, Ph.D.