



“I’m Just Wondering What to Do”: Mentoring Undergraduate Students in an Interdisciplinary Research Group

Rebecca Price
rebecca.price@pitt.edu
University of Pittsburgh

Lessons Learned

- Librarians serve in intensive mentoring roles when students undertake projects without faculty mentors in their own discipline.
- Librarian mentors assist with each part of the research process, including refining the research question, finding resources, narrowing, and synthesizing.
- Just-in-time instruction means mentoring undergraduate researchers as they develop their own research questions and write reviews of the literature.
- Just-in-time mentoring means being available via text, email, and in person.
- Producing publishable literature reviews increases undergraduate students’ proficiency and confidence in reading, writing and using the research tools available to them, further preparing them for their future endeavors.

Background and Frameworks

According to the Council of Undergraduate Research (2016), undergraduate research has the following benefits:

- Enhances student learning through mentoring relationships with faculty
- Increases retention
- Increases enrollment in graduate education and provides effective career preparation
- Develops critical thinking, creativity, problem solving and intellectual independence
- Develops an understanding of research methodology
- Promotes an innovation-oriented culture

Nora and Crisp (2007) created an often-cited framework for mentoring undergraduates. They found that three latent constructs capture a mentoring experience:

- Educational / Career Goal Setting and Appraisal
 - Specifically, engaging a mentee in discussions about both academic and career goal setting (p. 349)
- Emotional and Psychological Support
 - A primary focus on “providing encouragement, following up on issues, guiding the student through their goals,” an “emotional safety net” (p. 349)
- Academic Subject Knowledge Support Aimed at Advancing a Student’s Knowledge Relevant to the Chosen Field
 - Students need academic knowledge to reach their career goals (p. 349)
 - Even when a mentor does not possess that specific knowledge “the student is guided to a professional that possesses that information” (p. 350)
 - Librarians match searchers with resources....It’s what we do!

The 2016 ACRL Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education is particularly resonant with undergraduate research groups:

- Authority is Constructed and Contextual
- Information Creation as a Process
- Information has Value
- Research as Inquiry
- Scholarship as Conversation
- Searching as Strategic Exploration

References

Association of College and Research Libraries. (2016). *Framework for information literacy for higher education*. Chicago, IL: Author.

Council of Undergraduate Research. (2016). *Fact sheet*. Retrieved from www.cur.org/about_cur/fact_sheet/

Nora, A., & Crisp, G. (2007). Mentoring Students: Conceptualizing and Validating the Multi-Dimensions of a Support System. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory and Practice*, 9(3), 337–356.