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Mentoring for Doctoral Student Praxis-Centered Learning: Creating a Shared Culture of Intellectual Aspiration

Abstract: This article explores the potential of doctoral student mentoring programs to serve as one bridge in the academic-practitioner divide in nonprofit education. This disconnect manifests itself in critiques regarding the marginalization of practitioners and lack of knowledge sharing. The paper examines the potential role of nonprofit doctoral student mentoring as a possible avenue for addressing the divide by developing the intellectual capacities of graduates to interact effectively in both the academic and practitioner domains. It stresses the importance of a particular form of mentoring and its ties to multiple, reinforcing opportunities for students if analytical, praxis-centered capacities are to be developed successfully. Ultimately, this article aims to stimulate discussion on the role and forms of mentoring of scholars who must develop praxis capacities rather than to offer definitive evidence of the superiority of one or another approach of assuring that result.

Keywords: Doctoral-level nonprofit education, mentoring, praxis, peer mentoring.

## Introduction

While nonprofit studies as a recognized field is relatively recent, it has developed sufficiently so that a tension between practice and scholarship has emerged (Feeney, 2000; Macduff & Netting, 2000; Mirabella & Wish, 1999; Salipante & Aram, 2003; Schuman & Abramson, 2000). As nonprofit management education programs began in earnest in the 1980s, they commonly aimed to develop meaningful connections with nonprofit organizations in ways that addressed the principal concerns of the leaders and managers of those entities (Mirabella & Wish, 1999).

Likewise, recent literature concerning nonprofits and nonprofit education has identified an urgent need to bridge a perceived theoretical-technical or professional-academic divide in the field.

Several attempts to explore these questions have recognized practice and scholarship as distinct domains and have sought to bring these together by offering new approaches to research (Feeney, 2000). These strategies have focused on collaboration between scholars and practitioners in the production of knowledge, relationship development between individual practitioners and scholars and the use of grounded theory research methodologies such as action and transparent research (Feeney, 2000; Macduff & Netting, 2000; Milofsky, 2000).

These approaches are doubtless important in that they allow practitioners to be knowledge producers as well as users. Nonetheless, a focus on shaping the character of research is but one component necessary for successful spanning of theory and practice. Feeney (2000), for example, has argued that scholars and practitioners evidence distinctive domains of authority, legitimacy and voice. This insight leads to a question for those who would design a doctoral educational experience in nonprofit and civil society studies: how do we develop Ph.D. students with the capacity, authority and legitimacy to act effectively in both scholarship and practice

when these domains have been so distinctive to date? But to address this concern requires that one address another, still more fundamental, matter: higher education continues to neglect the very mentoring processes that play a critical role in developing scholars capable of praxis. As Levinson et al. (1978), authors of a classic text on the topic, have argued,

Our system of higher education, though officially committed to the fostering of intellectual and personal development of students, provides mentoring that is generally limited in quantity and poor in quality (p. 334).

This article examines a nonprofit doctoral student educational and mentoring program that seeks intentionally to develop expertise and attitudes that encourage students to develop the analytical capacities to span theory and practice—to achieve praxis. Our emphasis on intentionality reflects Johnson’s (2002) claim that graduate student mentoring is too often neglected as a vital faculty role that must be undertaken with conscious forethought. Our own exploration of this issue considers the character of mentoring as well as the forms of learning and relative emphasis that such efforts may embrace. While we recognize that there is no single mentoring relationship or form, we nonetheless suggest a mentoring approach that we believe is likely to succeed in developing students with the high-level analytical capabilities necessary to achieve praxis. It should be considered a heuristic rather than a “single best way” and is offered in that spirit. Following a discussion of the need for mentoring strategies that enable doctoral students to attain praxis, the role of faculty in such experiences, and an argument for one such conception, we briefly describe elements of the [REDACTED] Governance and Civil Society Studies program to

suggest how that initiative is being framed and developed in light of the approach to mentoring we outline.

More specifically, we explore a nonprofit and civil society studies graduate program that has sought self-consciously to foster both formal and informal interaction and learning among a variety of mentors and their students and among participating students themselves. This aim is addressed by encouraging doctoral students to engage in a range of research and educational activities—including research, teaching and outreach efforts—with their mentors. We argue that an effective mentoring strategy should provide broad access to a varied group of scholarly, practice-based and peer mentors in order actively to encourage students to develop the intellectual capacities necessary to link scholarship and practice more effectively. Diverse opportunities provide different forums and experiences through which students may come to understand more completely how scholars and practitioners view, use and legitimate knowledge. That awareness may inform their own evolving understanding of their role(s) in the professoriate.

#### Learning and Mentoring as Processes of Adaptive Change: The Context of Student Learning

As we have considered this thorny challenge, our conceptual approach has been shaped in part by an insight first offered by James March. In an important article, March argued that organizational learning necessarily reveals a tension between exploration and exploitation (March, 1991). That is, organizations perennially confront the challenge of first, assimilating new learning, and then determining how to use or exploit that which has been learned. Similarly, nonprofit doctoral students who seek to apply their insights to practice must first be exposed to

new knowledge (exploration), then assimilate it by means of appropriate cognitive processes and then discover how and when that knowledge might be applied (exploited) appropriately. Praxis, or the process by which a theory or lesson becomes lived experience, demands reflective contemplation. In order to allow governance and civil society doctoral students to develop a capacity to engage in praxis-centered reasoning, curricula and other programmatic experiences must expose them to new ideas, constructs and theories while also providing a variety of venues and opportunities to refine and test those insights and to learn how they might be applied to practice. In so doing, students must develop a highly complex array of analytical capacities that not only must permit conceptual awareness and mastery, but also allow each to develop an additional capability to contextualize that knowledge in order to understand how it might best inform practice. In this sense, praxis is a supremely demanding intellectual sport, for it requires meta-cognitive reasoning that in turn informs high-level analytic mapping capacities. This form of cognition demands that students not only grasp a concept and how it relates to the world and the goals desired, but also go further and understand how that construct might be used and/or modified to be more adequate. Meta-cognitive reasoning must be learned and practiced and its mastery implies an ability to develop models of changing circumstances or concerns and to compare and contrast those against delimited criteria.

The imperative of exploring ideas and developing insights in order to secure a deepening of personal and professional identity and possibility as a scholar, and meanwhile increasing one's capacity to make sense of how those perceptions relate to professional practice, is necessarily adaptive in character and mediated at several analytical levels. First, individual drive and intellect mediate a student's capacity to grow intellectually as he or she engages a curriculum

and program of study. No matter how elegantly framed, no course learns itself. No matter how caring, vibrant or gifted, no professor alone is responsible for student learning. Students must address the readings and projects assigned and must actively participate in the discussions, must revel in the concepts supplied and must reflect energetically on the purport of those ideas if a seminar or a curriculum is to succeed. Would-be scholars must engage and engage deeply if they are to obtain all they can from the learning opportunities presented. It is clear that ultimately, only students may decide whether and to what degree they will participate in learning opportunities.

That said, it is equally evident that opportunity structures matter. A rich array of curricular offerings and possibilities, all other things equal, is likely to be superior to one that lacks diversity and depth. Similarly, one would expect a more talented faculty to provide a richer and deeper palette of opportunities for its students than a less able one. So, while programs may not control for educational outcomes directly, their architects may choose which sorts of options will be available and how those offerings will be organized, framed and presented. If individuals may be said to mediate their own learning, they surely do so within a program or organizational context that is at least partly prescribed by others.

The contextual character of learning suggests that the enterprise is as much a social as an individual activity. Students learn from interactions with peers, faculty and professionals and these exchanges allow them to test perceptions, reason comparatively and by analogy and reflect on what they are obtaining in their courses and research. In short, personal learning occurs in a distinctive (and changing) context mediated by individual capacities, socialization and discussion

opportunities and structured possibilities for exploration. Students adapt and change (and hopefully develop) as they encounter new ideas and fresh intellectual claims in a variety of venues and forms. Nonprofit program doctoral candidates develop (or even create) and modify their scholarly and personal philosophies as their curricula and experiences provide them the intellectual capacities and habits of mind to do so.

### The Faculty Mentoring Role as Facilitating Mutually Adaptive Learning

While this conceptualization encapsulates the learning context from the student's perspective, what role might faculty be said to play apart from being purveyors of course content and doyens of curricular design? We argue that, in the end, faculty members serve doctoral students as agents or facilitators of the processes of adaptive change that students must navigate and for which those same students ultimately are responsible. As they seek to facilitate adaptive change, professors mentor their students:

Mentoring is a personal relationship in which a more experienced (usually older) faculty member or professional acts as a guide, role model, teacher, and sponsor of a less experienced (usually younger) graduate student or junior professional. A mentor provides the protégé with knowledge, challenge, advice, counsel, and support in the protégé's pursuit of becoming a full member of a particular profession (Johnson, 2002, p. 88).

As mentors, faculty assist students, via multiple forms of interaction, to make sense, to integrate, to attach meanings to, the flow of information and knowledge they receive. So, if curricular structures, guest speakers, class content and processes and field studies provide a context for

doctoral students to develop the high level reasoning capabilities required for praxis, it is mentors who serve as catalyzing agents as they do so. While not wholly responsible for student learning outcomes, faculty nonetheless must be ever concerned that students benefit as deeply as feasible from the range of educational possibilities offered to them. While not their only mentors, professors serve a uniquely important role in guiding students through the doctoral process and are therefore well positioned to broaden and deepen their experiences and reflections. The following section explores the skills and attitudes that faculty members must possess to serve as stewards of adaptive change.

Professors can help students integrate what they are learning and assist them to understand better the links between learning and action. Through their interactions with students, whether in class, as they pursue research or projects together, or in their offices in casual conversation, faculty can aid learners in developing a deeper awareness of their own intellectual and personal evolution and its relation to their aspirations and to those of others in their cadre or program. Ideally, faculty can design curricula and offer opportunities that do not so much shape individuals to a common model or claim, as ensure multiple opportunities for each student to develop robustly, personally and intellectually. Such curricula and mentoring equip nonprofit program doctoral candidates to develop an increasingly sophisticated understanding of their chosen field and to do so in a context that offers manifold opportunities for facilitated inquiry. The individual, group and organizational influences at play in a student's intellectual life and evolution are seamlessly interrelated. Individuals must intuit new meaning and learning—they must have leave to explore—but faculty and the curricular structure can encourage their

processes of interpretation and integration (exploitation). In the end, however, the student is responsible for the form and depth of conceptual integration attained.

This approach to the challenge of curricular design and mentoring dignifies the student or learner even as it also places specific claims on the faculty members engaged with that student. While we have, for the sake of convenience, clustered these faculty responsibilities together as “steward of student adaptive change processes,” we share the view offered by Chan et al. (2001) that faculty can only play the mentoring role envisaged here when they move away from a view of their task as one of serving as experienced and authoritative guide to adopt a perspective that emphasizes instead

... sharing control and meaningful reciprocity. In fact, it [mentoring] is about the deliberate creation of opportunities for common learning. It also is motivated by the quest to follow the lead offered by an individual student’s questions, concerns, or idiosyncratic understanding into new areas of academic exploration, even those that stretch and challenge our own sense of what we know (p. 332).

In this view, mentoring seeks to secure intellectual growth and development for the student as he or she experiences the curriculum and program. Facilitative mentors do not demand that students adopt one view or analytical perspective, but instead provide space for the learner to evolve and develop his or her own intellectual identity and possibility. Advice and counsel are offered, but in the spirit of assisting students to develop their own intellectual aspirations rather than on the view that doctoral candidates should ascribe to a particular view, approach or mind set. In

March's (1991) terms, faculty members are charged with facilitating possibilities for student exploration and exploitation of their learning. They must assist students to develop the analytical abilities both to explore and develop new knowledge and to understand how it might be applied to organizational or social reality. Nevertheless and ironically, as Allan Schnaiberg has argued recently when writing of his long experience with mentoring sociology doctoral students, many academic programs do not encourage their faculty to serve as mentors, to facilitate interactions that conduce to the development of the students with whom they work:

Beyond this, though, I should add that the institutional rewards in graduate programs are not offered for mentoring. Indeed, the advising structure favored by departments can serve to increase the anomie and/or alienation of graduate students. The truth is that advising is more co-action than interaction, and interaction is what really helps the student to understand what the nature of sociological work means for them as individuals (2005, 41).

This mentoring stance, difficult as it is, is perhaps more humble or less grand than imagining oneself as the source or font of wisdom for another, but it can be deeply gratifying nonetheless. This is so because even as it grants a place of honor to the learner, it allows broad scope for faculty engagement and growth as well. Mentoring faculty may experience enhanced career satisfaction, a quickening of their own creative energies, a sense of fulfillment arising from sharing their knowledge and experience and a delight in the growth and success of their mentees (Levinson et al., 1978). This perspective accepts the centrality of the student's experience and the nearly dialectical relationship of individual learning to the context in which learning

opportunities are offered. In this view, professors catalyze dialogue and offer learning opportunities, insights and guidance. They do not demand that students “look like them,” intellectually or otherwise. Above all, they undertake their efforts with a keen eye to student needs, concerns and development.

Nonetheless, this approach does not simply reify the learner. That is, it does not imagine the mentoring relationship as a simply consumerist one in which the purchaser is permitted to trumpet his or her wants, however ill or poorly formed or unwise and expect that they will be fulfilled. Bluntly, it does not assume that the student always knows what he or she should learn or even how and why learning should occur. This perspective avoids the “sandbox problem” pointed up by Feeney (2000) in which roles are sharply and simplistically dichotomized and because so sharply drawn, almost ordained to descend into conflict or worse. Instead, this perspective entails a far more complicated relationship between faculty mentor and mentee. It takes seriously the student’s needs, desires and concerns and requires that faculty account for those as a primary claim of the mentoring relationship even as it acknowledges the deep learning and expertise that faculty may bring to the proverbial table. The result is an association that recognizes the needs and aspirations of the learner as well as the knowledge and wisdom that professors may possess.

The aim is to create a symbiotic relationship in which both participants are open to learning and to new experiences and willing to change and to adapt as needs and the context change. Ideally, mentoring creates a bond in which faculty and student are joined in the common cause of discovery rather than in a principal-agent relationship. After all, this time consuming and

demanding partnership may continue actively for several years, and perhaps for decades, and it demands much of both parties if the student is to attain the analytical sophistication demanded by a praxis focus. It appears only prudent to expend that energy in a fashion that allows each to grow from the efforts undertaken to allow the doctoral candidate to develop his or her potential.

This mutually adaptive mentoring strategy manifests one other significant attribute; it assumes that students are aware of the need to develop their own intellectual voice and standing even if they are uncertain how best to do so. This stance implies that nonprofit program doctoral candidates should be encouraged to employ several faculty members as resources for their personal intellectual and professional development and not seek simply to rely wholly on the capacities of one person for the purpose.

This form of partnership nevertheless runs a risk of being commodified or instrumentalized by either or both parties. That is, immature students or individuals who do not enter into relationships with faculty with an open mind and genuine regard, may not grow as hoped and may be unable to garner the necessary support to deepen their learning sufficiently to move ahead. Similarly, faculty must be mature, open and self-reflective. They are likely to be most effective when they are consistently empathic and exude emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995). This conception of mentoring implies trust between the participating faculty, especially the primary advisor and the doctoral student so that each may proceed to explore the possibilities for intellectual and personal development that their relationship offers without fear of exploitation or game playing. These relationships must not be viewed as opportunities for partisan advantage, however conceived, for either participant. Instead, each contributor must deal

with the other with respect, openness, a genuine and enduring interest in their shared interest in their area of exploration, as well as development of the student's capacities. Anything less is likely to risk undoing the relationship and unhinging its vital possibilities.

Students will find this balancing act challenging as they must at once seek out faculty with an eye to how their talents, interests and yes, personalities, may interact with their own but they may not do so in a simply exploitative way. If they do, they are likely to lose that faculty member's confidence and goodwill and therefore, engagement. For their part, faculty, especially principal advisors, must also understand that while their role may be critical and their power position altogether obvious, their overarching responsibility is to serve the students with whom they interact as those individuals increase their capacities (Blevins-Knabe, 1992). Like the students they serve, this role requires balancing competing claims and responsibilities. Nonprofit doctoral program faculty members must at once honor learner hopes and desires even as they seek to help those with whom they work deepen and enliven their interests and expertise so they may emerge more fully as scholars.

One way to capture this complex collaborative relationship is to suggest that student and mentor alike must seek to create and maintain a joint interest in the potential of the intellectual imagination and a shared aspiration for the attainment of discovery and learning. Each must nurture a culture in their relationship of mutuality and support (Hardy, 1994). We conceive of this not as demanding a common substantive claim, but instead as a mutual desire for discovery in which primary and secondary mentors and their mentees strive together for excellence (O'Neil & Wrightsman, 2001). All parties are responsible for maintaining this relationship and must

engage openly and with trust to do so (Hess & Mullen, 1995). Conflicts and disagreements are likely but should not be seen as enduring impediments or obstacles to be avoided so long as each party to the relationship continues to believe that their interaction is driven by the common claim of intellectual attainment and growth for the student and that these may be obtained by their continued engagement.

Again, this stance can be maintained by a collaborative dedication to discovery on the part of both faculty and student. When such a spirit prevails, differences typically may be addressed to mutual satisfaction and with consequent growth for all involved. Successful collaboration involves choice on the part of both primary parties. Each must choose to remain engaged through dialogue. That conversation is not equal in structural terms since the faculty members so engaged possess more power than their mentees in their relationships. Jarvis (1999) has labeled these relationships dialogic collaboratives with hierarchic elements. They suggest a special ethical responsibility for faculty to behave in ways that foster reciprocal collegial relationships despite their difference in status. The opportunities for abuse are clear, but so are the possibilities for mutual advancement. Mentoring faculty must adopt this view as an ethical imperative if the differences in power between student and professor are not to become problematic. What is vital in this relationship and what appears necessary to maintain its reasonableness and focus is a shared culture of intellectual aspiration, a superordinate claim. Faculty should remain focused on assisting their mentees to develop their capabilities to the level necessary to engage in praxis, while students should seek thoughtfully and systematically to move ahead to achieve just that set of capacities.

While faculty mentors play a crucial role in designing and developing the context in which nonprofit doctoral students can develop so as to navigate and integrate the concerns of both scholarly and practice-based domains effectively, they are by no means the only source of such support and assistance for students.

### Mentoring: Beyond the Faculty

Mentoring models abound, but most focus on one-to-one relationships with a single mentor working with another individual. Such approaches count on a lone individual to serve a variety of roles: encourager, supporter, guide, teacher, advisor, sponsor, counselor, and role model (Bartell, 2005; Johnson, 2002). Furthermore, “arguably, the majority of mentoring experiences are informal and unplanned. Individuals may receive advice, insight, knowledge, or support from people who have not been assigned specifically as their mentors” (Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2001, p. 10). As conceived here, however, effective mentoring includes one-on-one interactions as well as other approaches, including mentoring circles and participation in professional activities. In our view, mentoring programs that provide a variety of mentors, faculty, peers and practitioners, through a spectrum of relationships (Bartell, 2005; Johnson, 2002; Whittaker & Cartwright, 2000) heighten the potential that students will be equipped to connect scholarship and practice in meaningful ways. Such mentoring may come in the form of expertise, may take the guise of important contacts, may involve sharing a fresh perspective on a question or research concern or may, for example, simply be well-reasoned counsel concerning how best to prepare for a job interview. The point is that students are encouraged to see a variety of individuals as resources that may provide them various forms of support as they work to become thoughtful scholars. No

single person may offer all of these dimensions all of the time, but several individuals and forms of interaction, experience and counsel can.

So, while nonprofit program doctoral students may have an advisor and primary mentor, they may nonetheless call upon several individuals to assist them in a variety of ways and truly to think of those others who assist them as mentors as well, albeit secondary ones (Russell & Adams, 1997). This stance both provides students a necessary stability and focal point, in that they do indeed have a principal advisor or “go to” person, while also offering them much broader access to multiple forms of expert and tacit knowledge. This understanding of the mentoring relationship implies a two-way street. To offer all it might, this strategy demands that students continuously and actively reflect on their own intellectual trajectory and map their needs and concerns against the capacities of the specific faculty with whom they elect to work. This requirement in turn suggests that faculty must be open to assisting a variety of students in different ways and be willing to consider how their own talents may chart against those students’ emergent needs.

Put differently, students must have access to a variety of mentors, primary and secondary, each of whom may offer different capacities and support. Doctoral program organizational cultures must be designed to encourage student interactions with faculty as well as professionals. Such opportunities permit students to seek out the expertise, perspectives and support of a variety of individuals, both within and beyond the academy. We believe that strong encouragement of such relationships can assist students in deepening and strengthening their analytic capacities, while

also allowing each to develop their own views concerning how scholarship and practice may be joined.

Nonprofit Education at [REDACTED]: An Integrated Approach to Doctoral Student Mentoring and Development

In our work at [REDACTED] to develop a mentoring program of the sort described here, we have focused on two key areas. First, we have considered the challenges associated with the faculty doctoral mentoring role and developed the conception outlined above. Second, we have begun to create an organizational culture of mentoring that facilitates the emergence of interactions, both formal and informal, among a variety of mentors and students and across multiple functional areas. That is, we have applied March's (1991) insight to mentoring processes. Organizations may either encourage or discourage the activities of mentors as they seek to assist candidates to develop their abilities. In our view, as important as their primary and secondary mentors may be, students still need multiple opportunities to test reflections and insights, as well as to interact with practitioners, if they are successfully to develop praxis capabilities. Such opportunities allow Ph.D. candidates to test the efficacy of theoretical knowledge against practical reasoning and professional needs and concerns. These opportunities expose students to different reasoning processes and thereby allow them both to model and to evaluate them. We have been guided by several premises drawn from the view of mentoring outlined above as we have sought to develop these opportunities for collaborative exchange. Each approach has been designed:

- To encourage a shared culture of intellectual aspiration for excellence
- To discourage competition among students in favor of peer to peer exchange and engagement

- To maximize student roles in planning and executing events and experiences
- To promote doctoral candidate access to multiple faculty and diverse intellectual perspectives
- To encourage reflection on the need for praxis by permitting Ph.D. candidates structured opportunities to interact with practitioners whether through dialogic forums or via outreach and applied research projects
- To allow students ample chance to engage with mentoring faculty in the design, conduct and reporting of research
- To provide opportunities for doctoral candidates to reflect on the role of teachers in developing praxis.

Brief descriptions of these forums for engagement follow. Each is aimed at encouraging exploration and exploitation of learning among students and mentoring faculty alike. The combination of approaches and forms of engagement allows for both formal and informal mentoring experiences. Each may be either episodic or longer-lived as suits the needs and interests of those engaged.

#### Visiting Scholar Workshops

These events occur once per semester and provide doctoral students, faculty members and local professionals an opportunity to engage with a scholar concerning his or her thinking on an issue of interest. Visitors normally present their arguments to which graduate students and professionals respond. These events require a half-day of engagement and provide ample



of the program allows interested students opportunities to become engaged with faculty teams applying research and scholarship to provide support to nongovernmental and nonprofit organizations. Not all students desire to be involved in these efforts, and not all possess the necessary capacities to do so when they first begin study. But a praxis focus requires that mentoring faculty seek to assist those interested to develop the capabilities to test and to develop research findings and theories in this way. This strong form of engagement demands that faculty possess the necessary abilities to provide such services, a consciousness of the need to develop these abilities in students and a willingness to design opportunities for candidates to do so. All are significant organizational challenges, but each outreach or applied research experience contributes to a vital dialogue concerning the nature and needs of scholarship and how those may relate to the imperatives of nonprofit organizational leadership and management. Each project provides opportunities for students to work along side their faculty mentors and to interact with practitioners as they work to realize praxis and not simply to discuss it.

### Experiential Learning in Seminars

The curriculum of core nonprofit-oriented courses at [REDACTED] has been designed to encourage students to become familiar with the leadership, governance and management concerns of organizations of interest to them. These classes require that students interview principals, review financials and annual reports and related information in order to come to understand the central concerns confronting specific nonprofits or nongovernmentals and to offer potential strategies to address them. Often, indeed, courses require that students actually assume roles in organizations and reflect on the tasks and responsibilities they undertook as these relate to their evolving understanding of relevant research and theory. The opportunities to develop

praxis-centered reasoning via such experiences are legion. These experiences also provide access to a range of potential professional mentors.

### Teaching Opportunities

Nonprofit and civil society doctoral candidates are also afforded opportunities to lead or assist with undergraduate courses that typically demand that they confront how to marry the demands of scholarship and learning with the needs of students to be prepared for professional responsibilities upon graduation. Almost by definition, these responsibilities demand that doctoral candidates grapple with developing the analytical reasoning capacities necessary for praxis since what and how their students learn will need to inform their work as they embark on their careers. In an important sense, this face of doctoral preparation demands that students join their academic mentors in the quest for praxis—success demands synergy even as it requires deep awareness and understanding.

### Peer Mentoring Circles

The program at ██████████ has also sought to encourage, without requiring, graduate student discussion and research support groups. In our view, peer-to-peer mentoring is a critical dimension of doctoral student success. Colleagues can critique one another's work and research, offer suggestions on program choices and processes and, more generally, provide the tacit knowledge so significant to success in graduate study. These groups can also help students to understand the various milestones associated with progress toward their degree while removing the veil of mystery that often surrounds these events. Perhaps most important, these venues permit these activities to occur in an atmosphere of openness and shared experience among

groups whose memberships are self selected and self-sustaining. To date, these groupings have emerged both around topical areas and around shared personal sympathies. Both types appear to provide strong support to members so long as these remain dedicated and serious in their participation. Faculty members have no required role in these efforts except to encourage their creation and to suggest that their mentees participate in them when appropriate. But faculty support can matter to these efforts in a variety of informal ways. For example, when aware of the interactions within the groups through conversations with their mentees, they can suggest resources that might be useful as well as serve as touchstones for additional student reflection on the topics under consideration. These opportunities for mutual exploration of the group's experiences within the safety of the mentor-mentee relationship allows students opportunities to refine their communication and analytic skills even as they seek to integrate their ongoing learning.

### Faculty advising

Doctoral students are also afforded opportunities to work intensively with faculty, often, but not exclusively, their primary mentors, to design and conduct research, as well as to consider their trajectory and how the available curriculum may best support it. This may take the form of collaborating on research for a scholarly article or book or on developing a proposal for public or foundation support of a research or outreach endeavor. Or, it may simply be time spent together discussing key concerns or ideas as these are emerging from class work or from reading for subfield examinations. This role affords faculty members maximum opportunity for thoughtful exchanges with those whom they are seeking to mentor and it is these "significant moments" that play a vital role in the development of an organizational culture that sustains the opportunities

for students here outlined. If professors are not open to providing students a range of possibilities for development and to viewing that landscape broadly, the students are unlikely to do so. Thus, recognizing the key role of faculty members in developing a cohesive and integrated approach to mentoring, the [REDACTED] program has sought to catalyze a vigorous discussion among faculty members concerning mentoring strategies and styles and how these might be evidenced in individual faculty-student relationships, as well as in the broader organizational envelope of the School [REDACTED].

### Concluding Observations

We have argued that mentoring may be seen as a critical mediating process in the development of nonprofit organization and civil society scholars who possess the ability to understand and evidence praxis forms of reasoning and critical capacity. We have also sought to contend that a model of mentoring that is student centered and multifaceted in character is more likely to produce those intellectual capacities than is a view that doctoral candidates should be aligned solely with one faculty member, or that they may obtain all or nearly all of the knowledge they will require as successful scholars from only one person. We have suggested instead that mentoring relationships should be mutually collaborative and enriching and that they ought to be mediated by far more than professorial inclination. Nonetheless, that orientation matters profoundly to the success of the mentoring relationship. Principal or primary faculty must be willing to view their role as *primus inter pares* and to encourage their mentees to seek out others who may possess knowledge and capacities they do not and not view this as a weakness but as a normal part of a healthy relationship. They must seek mutuality in their relations with students

and to orient those relationships to shared aspirations for learning and excellence as opposed, say, to advancing their own work alone.

If these attributes are vital to the success of mentoring at the individual scale, it seems clear nonetheless that if knowledge exploration and exploitation are fully to be realized, they must also be self-consciously sought in the curricular and program design available to doctoral candidates. We have used [REDACTED] efforts to provide multiple opportunities for its doctoral candidates to develop needed praxis reasoning abilities through a series of structured opportunities (that may be mixed or matched by students) as one example of how a common culture may be developed to secure the forms of dialogue necessary both to support healthy mentoring experiences and the high level reasoning and awareness that praxis demands. We do not doubt that there are many ways this imperative may be addressed and offer our experience as one illustration rather than as an ideal model or type. However specifically framed, in our view, all doctoral programs that aspire to produce scholars who may understand and contribute to professional capacity and progress must address the dimensions and challenges we have outlined. Curriculum alone is likely to be insufficient. Mentoring is likely to be critical to the development both of individual student capacities and to the creation of an organizational culture that stresses the place of praxis in academic inquiry and professional academic roles. But not just any form of mentoring is likely to produce scholars with the capacities and habits of mind to engage in praxis. We have sought to outline one approach that, when coupled with the availability of a variety of supportive curricular, outreach and research and peer support opportunities, appears well situated to do so.

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