"Mentoring" Students

Virginia Valian
Department of Psychology
Hunter College and CUNY Graduate Center, New York, NY

What mentoring provides
- professionally useful information
- help accomplishing tasks and reaching goals
- psychosocial support
- advocacy

Different conceptions of mentoring (not all mutually exclusive)
- single mentor model
- multiple (also called composite or mosaic) mentor
- circle of advisors
- workshops

Circle of advisor model
- no single person can provide all the information, constructive criticism, emotional support, and challenges that people need in order to become as effective as they can be in reaching their goals
- a circle of advisors changes as needs change; no one ever outgrows a need for advisors
- students play an active role in determining what they need, given a possible menu (see Menu, p 2)
- students work with their main advisor to think about who can fulfill their needs
- students work with their main advisor to work out how to approach others
- students can help and receive help from other students

Mentoring challenges
- helping students set realistic goals and monitor those goals
- anticipating student problems (see p 2)
- creating go-to list for different problem types
- developing workshops for issues of general interest
- avoiding over- or underinvestment in student
  - establish mechanism for changing advisors (after first year?)
- analyzing one's strengths and limitations (see p 2)
- developing sense of community for students
- working with students of different gender or ethnicity
- portraying your position as rewarding and desirable
- presenting students with demographically varied models of success
Activities

1. Menu of student needs
   a. choose from menu or add to menu
   b. format
      i. break-out groups
      ii. main group discussion
       - setting goals and tracking progress
       - information about how higher education works
       - constructive criticism of written work
       - information about prizes, awards, fellowships, and other benefits they might be eligible for
       - information about career trajectories
       - suggestions for and information about further education (e.g., grad school) or training (e.g., helpful background course)
       - speaking in public
       - attending conferences
       - performing research; working with a team
       - sympathetic critiques of self-presentational style
       - help with time-management and procrastination problems
       - recommendation of specific courses of action for various problems
       - challenges to do better
       - reassurance that they can be successful when they doubt themselves
       - information about how different people integrate work and personal lives
       - help with personal problems (family, friends, money, love, substance abuse)
       - advocacy
       - allies for changes they would like to make

2. Student problems
   a. list examples of difficult problems students have had
   b. format
      i. break-out groups
      ii. main group discussion

3. Analyze own strengths and limitations
   a. individually and anonymously, list 3 examples of each
   b. format
      i. break-out groups discuss common examples of strengths and limitations
      ii. main group summarizes and makes suggestions for work-arounds