

Yvette Conley Statement on Mentoring Philosophy and Practices

I have directed a National Institutes of Health funded training program for PhD students and postdoctoral scholars for fifteen years with a successful renewal pending for the next five years. In July 2020 I became Director of our PhD program. My mentoring philosophy and practices have matured and expanded over time to accommodate mentoring larger groups of individuals as well as continuing my one-on-one mentoring of PhD students.

One tenet of my mentoring philosophy is fostering persistence and resiliency in the individuals I have the privilege of mentoring. This focus comes not only from my experiences mentoring doctoral students, but from mentoring postdoctoral fellows and junior faculty and noting that often their biggest impediment to being successful is their lack of reserve for persistence and resilience. Brilliant and creative individuals with great potential to improve our world through science and education will have their talents go unrecognized if they can't survive their doctoral programs, the initiation of their career trajectories, and the rejections that come from submitting manuscripts, applications for funding, and less than stellar student evaluations of their teaching. In practice, I address persistence and resilience differently with every mentee since they will all come into their doctoral program with different backgrounds, experiences, and skill sets. I believe it is very important to identify a mentee's goals and aspirations including where do they see themselves and what do they see themselves doing 5 or more years after graduation and how they came about being focused on their current goals as well as what motivates them. I find out over time what their strengths and weakness are, what they perceive as barriers to their success, and what resources they have to assist them. The barriers they confront are sometimes professional and sometimes personal. I believe that as a mentor I need to create an environment for my mentees that allows them to be open about their strengths and weaknesses, allows them to experience disappointment and use it as teaching moments, and allows them to witness the disappointments experienced by others including myself and other established faculty. One example of how this has been approached is during our weekly nursing omics group meeting (attended by undergraduates, research staff members, PhD students, postdoctoral fellows, and faculty of all ranks) we will often have discussions about a faculty member's summary statement from their grant application or manuscript reviews, which of course lists strengths and weaknesses. Doctoral students get to see that every application, every manuscript submitted, and every investigator will have weaknesses, they will get to see how they address them, and they will get to see how they persevere over time. I initiated the weekly nursing omics group meeting for many reasons, but paramount was the idea that this added to the environment of collegiality that I think helps many of us build our capacity for resilience and persistence. When Pitt went fully remote in March 2020 it took us a couple of weeks to get our bearings and remotely initiate our weekly meetings via Zoom. It has been during these challenging times that I've appreciated these meetings even more. Students have echoed my sentiments. They have shared with me that they look forward to the hour we spend together as a group, that it has been a source of mutual support and that the weeks when we weren't meeting felt like there was a void.

Another aspect of my mentoring philosophy and practice is maintaining effective communication with a mentee. I was selected to participate in the University of Pittsburgh Institute for Clinical Research Education Mentor Training Workshop in the summer of 2019. While I had always known the importance of communication with mentees, the workshop helped me better understand different communication styles, what my predominant communication style is, and how my communication style might best interact with the communication style of a mentee. I'm now better prepared to ask questions around a mentee's communication style. One deliverable that has impacted my practice of mentoring is that I now incorporate communication goals into the individualized development plans (IDP) that I develop and review with all of my one-on-one mentees annually.

Fostering independence and promoting professional development are also key to my mentoring philosophy and practices. I believe that mentees need to be exposed to scientific content, methodologies, and experiences that take them out of their comfort zone and pushes the boundaries of their education and training. I can't tell you how many times a mentee has said "I'm so glad I took that course/attended that conference/went to that workshop – I had no idea that this would be something I'd love". As an example, I've had mentees who I recognized had great potential for informatics and statistics and others that this was definitely not their strong point. For those with potential for statistics and informatics, I've recommended courses at Pitt and Summer Institutes across the country and now have PhD students who have graduated after doing a dissertation project focused on statistical genomics who have moved on to prestigious postdoctoral fellowships that had previously never been occupied by nurses. They are very passionate about this area of research and I do not think they would be if it weren't for those exposures. These individuals are going to have a very unique skill set within the nursing scientific community – skill sets that are desperately needed.

I prioritize mentoring of my trainees and it is without a doubt my favorite way to spend my time and energy. I meet with my mentees individually weekly face to face with additional mentoring opportunities during research team meetings, scholarly group meetings, and other communications as needed. I have high expectations from mentees but they also receive the time and energy from me as well as the resources to meet those expectations and I believe their achievements demonstrate this. I have been Director of an NIH funded T32 for 15 years that provides support to PhD students and Postdoctoral Scholars. I have been sponsor or co-sponsor for 10 NIH funded F31 predoctoral awards, 2 NIH funded F99/K00 awards, 3 NIH funded K99/R00 awards, 1 NIH funded K23 award, 1 NIH funded K01 award, and 3 NIH funded KL2 awards funded through Pitt's CTSI. PhD students under my advisement have not only received NIH awards but have been funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Future of Nursing Scholars Award, the American Cancer Society, the American Nurses Foundation, the International Society of Nurses in Genetics, the Nightingale of Pennsylvania PhD student awards, the Jonas Foundation, and the NIH's Graduate Partnership Program. My PhD students have presented their research at international and national research conferences and I have coauthored over 100 manuscripts where my mentees across all

levels from undergraduate through postdoc have been first author. PhD students that I have advised have gone on to prestigious postdoctoral fellowships and then onto tenure stream Assistant Professor positions with many of my former mentees now tenured and holding administrative positions. Many of my former PhD students have received K and R-level funding from the NIH. My former PhD students are also active in professional societies and the community and I am a cheerleader for them throughout their career, often nominating them for opportunities and recognitions. For example, one of my former PhD mentees is a past President of the International Society of Nurses in Genetics, another is on the Board of Directors for the Three Rivers Donor Milk Bank, and another is now an Associate Dean of Research. I am very proud of my current and former mentee's accomplishments. I believe my time and energy were well spent!

I also believe very strongly that my mentees should not only be mentored by myself – they need to have other scientists that they receive mentoring from as well. I work with my mentees to figure out who these other mentors could be and work to establish team mentoring as they move through their program. This exposes them to other mentoring styles and provides them with expertise and other resources that I do not have and provides alternate career and professional advice. Science today is accomplished through teams of multidisciplinary investigators and this exposure to team mentoring better prepares them to work with teams to accomplish their science in the future.

My mentees and I have mutual respect for each other. I'm incredibly proud of what my mentees have accomplished and what they will do for our future. I am proud of my research accomplishments and my mentees have been a part of those accomplishments. The thing that I am most proud of in my professional career is my mentoring accomplishments and the fact that I am paying it forward, my mentees are paying it forward, and the future of nursing science will be better because I mentored some of these wonderful individuals

I will end by saying that my mentoring philosophy, practice and skills remain a work in progress. I continue to learn from my mentees and my experiences, and I continue to mature the skills that I think make a good mentor. As I reflect on my mentoring philosophy and practices, I also realize that they are highly related to the environment at the University of Pittsburgh, in other words my philosophy might not be realized elsewhere. I am very fortunate to be in an environment that provides the opportunities and the resources that allow me to execute my mentoring philosophy.