

# Moving It Forward

The Power of Mentoring, and How Universities  
Can Confront Institutional Barriers Facing  
Junior Researchers of Color

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September 2018

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**Moving It Forward: The Power of Mentoring, and How Universities Can Confront Institutional Barriers Facing Junior Researchers of Color**

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# Preface

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In 2005, the Foundation began a pilot project to award grantees with supplemental grants to support their mentoring relationships with junior researchers of color.<sup>1</sup> The grants were made an ongoing part of the William T. Grant Scholars Program in 2007, and, in June 2018, we built on these efforts and broadened eligibility for the awards to include principal investigators of major research grants.

Our goals for these mentoring grants are two-fold. First, we seek to strengthen the mentoring received by junior researchers of color and to position them for professional success. Second, we want to support faculty in developing a stronger understanding of the career development issues facing their junior colleagues of color and to strengthen their mentoring relationships with them. In the longer term, we hope this grant program will increase the number of strong, well-networked researchers of color doing empirical work on the Foundation's research interests and help foster more equitable academic environments that support researchers of color.

To realize these goals, the awards of \$60,000 for mentoring doctoral students and \$110,000 for mentoring postdoctoral fellows typically support the junior researchers' stipends, conference travel support, and methods training. The program requires the mentee and mentor (the "dyad") to work together to prepare a detailed mentoring plan to advance the mentee's research and publication opportunities, and the mentor's knowledge and skills to support junior colleagues of color. The program also provides grantees with access to career consulting; an annual meeting about career development,

publishing, and grant-seeking; and guidance on mentoring junior researchers of color (Wilson-Ahlstrom, Ravindranath, Yohalem, & Tseng, 2017). Since 2005, the Foundation has supported 50 dyads, in addition to holding convenings focused on mentoring and career development for dyads, additional grantees and their mentees of color, and mentoring consultants. To date, over 130 mentors and mentees have participated in these meetings, along with more than 14 consultants.

A recent stock-taking of the mentoring program revealed successes in the mentees' professional advancement, as measured by research skills, academic publications, and professional trajectories, as well as mentors' richer understanding of the challenges faced by junior colleagues of color and the skills to better support them. It also revealed areas in need of improvements, including helping mentees better prepare for their first jobs and better equipping mentors and mentees to address race in their mentoring relationships and work. Importantly, the stock-taking also revealed that scholars of color face difficult institutional environments, and that institutions themselves are the entities that are best positioned to address barriers to career development and advancement. An approach focused solely on mentoring relationships, while quite useful, also has limitations, given the institutional barriers that stand in the way of the professional development of junior researchers of color and their pathways to further success and leadership. That is, institutions must undertake sustained, systemic efforts to move the field forward in creating the institutional contexts that position junior scholars of color for success.

1. The Scholars and research grant PIs are White or are themselves researchers of color.

# Introduction

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Many universities struggle with the promotion and advancement of scholars of color (Sethna, 2011). In 2005, for instance, scholars of color represented less than 12 percent of full professors and less than 4 percent of female full professors in the United States (The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 2007-2008, as cited in Turner, Gonzalez, & Wood, 2008). These numbers were only marginally better in 2016, when 19 percent of full professors at research universities were scholars of color. This demographic picture contrasts sharply with the composition of students at our nation's colleges and universities. In 2008, the undergraduate population across all degree-granting institutions was 35 percent students of color.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, it stands in sharp contrast with the composition of the general population in the United States, which is 39 percent non-White.

**S**tudies have shown that the underrepresentation of scholars of color among full professors and higher education leaders is not merely a problem of supply, but one of institutional climate and structured supports and pathways (Turner, Myers, & Creswell, 1999; Turner, Gonzalez, & Wood, 2009; Hune, 2011). It's clear that in academic settings there are barriers to advancement for scholars of color and that addressing these barriers will require institutional change (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2010).

In light of this, the William T. Grant Foundation and the Forum for Youth Investment developed *Moving it Forward*, which centers on strategies for acknowledging and confronting such barriers. Derived from insights gleaned from grantees of the Foundation's mentoring program, the guide focuses on the pivotal role of effective mentoring relationships in providing junior researchers of color the supports they need to thrive in careers inside and outside the academy. Beyond providing guidance to mentors, though—which the companion publication *Pay it Forward* does in detail—we have focused here on the collective responsibility necessary to nurture and sustain mentoring relationships and realize their benefits. Specifically, we've tailored the information toward institutions and the decision makers who have a hand in shaping the professional climate at universities. As Levison and Alegría (2016) note, effective mentoring is one aspect of creating an institutional climate that is truly diverse and inclusive.

First, we outline the qualities of effective mentoring and describe what strong mentoring relationships look like. Next, we discuss strategies for effective mentoring that take shape outside of the mentor-mentee relationship, such as inside and across academic departments. Because mentoring junior researchers of color involves acknowledging and understanding issues related to identity, privilege, and cultural sensitivity, we unpack the ways that mentors can think about mentoring across difference, as well as strategies for carrying out and supporting effective mentoring at both the mentor-mentee level as well as in the institution. Finally, we provide an overview of strategies for fostering sustained change at the institutional level, including considerations for faculty recruitment and retention and community development writ large.

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**One Scholar likened the mentoring grant to a career intervention through which he became aware of the contradiction between the academy's apprenticeship model of professional development, which rests squarely on mentoring, and the relative invisibility of discussions concerning how to mentor. In light of this experience, he now includes mentoring as a key component of his graduate course on professional development. The goal of the course is to prepare students to be faculty who think intentionally about the practice of mentoring even before attaining their first full-time position.**

2. 13.9 percent Black, 12.9 percent Hispanic, 6.8 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1.1 percent American Indian-Alaska-Native.

# Understanding Mentor and Mentee Responsibilities

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At its core, mentoring is a relationship. The mentee enters the relationship to identify and learn to pursue long- and short-term goals, and, in the words of a former William T. Grant Scholar, “the mentor looks out for the interests of the mentee over and above their own interests.” Such relationships, of course, do not happen organically.

**D**espite the importance of mentoring to graduate research training and professional development, there is little conversation in the academy about what effective mentoring looks like and how to achieve it. Academic units typically assign each graduate student to an advisor with the expectation that the advisor will serve as a mentor, but that does not mean the advisor will do so (or do so effectively). We should recognize that: 1) the responsibilities of both the mentor and the mentee are complex and crucial for one another to understand; and 2) external supports are needed for the relationship to be effective. It is unrealistic to expect that an individual mentor will know or even learn how to do it all without these supports, or, in turn, that an individual mentee will understand how to manage the relationship.

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*Pay It Forward*, a guide for mentoring junior scholars, calls attention to the suite of roles that mentors may undertake in supporting someone toward a successful career path (“Mentors can serve as coach, career counselor, champion, confidante, and critic”), and specifies the particular skills that are attached to these roles, such as how to be a good listener, how to protect mentoring time, and how to deliver feedback in a constructive manner.

## The Mentor’s Responsibilities

From the beginning, the mentor should be aware of the power dynamic that exists between a mentor and mentee, and how this informs the relationship. Building on this, the mentor needs to be able to facilitate open communication, as well as know when to take the lead and when to step back, how to provide direction while also giving encouragement, and how to validate another person’s perspective and experiences. These skills manifest, for instance, in being able to provide feedback on the mentee’s research or professional development that is constructive and developmental in spirit rather than overly corrective or judgmental.

A second piece of the mentor’s work involves coordinating with other faculty in the mentee’s constellation. This includes identifying internal and external networks and individual scholars that the mentee should get to know and then brokering the mentee’s access to them. If the mentee is already at the qualifying paper or dissertation stage of their program, the mentor’s work may include helping the mentee manage departmental politics or relationships with other committee members. When needed, the mentor may also advocate on the mentee’s behalf.

Finally, the mentor should be able to help the mentee think through where she or he is headed, and help them identify a path to get there. This involves not only making time for regularly scheduled focused conversations, but helping develop a timeline and detailed plan to meet relevant milestones, such as methods training, content expertise, or presentation skills. While this work may seem intuitive, it requires explicit and intentional effort.



## The Mentee's Responsibilities

Just as the mentor is accountable for learning what her or his role entails and how to serve it well, mentees also have responsibilities. Specifically, mentees must identify what to expect from a mentor and what it takes to manage the relationship. This sort of “mentorability” is typically lacking in conversations about mentoring. But, as a mentoring expert shared, “taking advantage of the good counsel and the leadership senior people can offer” can be pivotal to effective mentoring relationships. Indeed, without such preparation, it is hard for mentees to know when the mentoring relationship is not effective.

As another consultant noted from her own experience as a graduate student: “Some students were having a hard time with their advisors, but it took them some time to even understand what was going on, because they had no one to talk to about what they were supposed to be getting from the relationship.” Even after her peers figured out that something was not working well, they had trouble identifying viable next steps. Because of the power asymmetry, the students often did not know what to do, and believed their options were limited. She recalled: “There was no one to really complain to—and they didn’t want it to backfire. It is intimidating going to a dean, so the feeling was that you just have to luck out.”

## The Mentoring Contract

At the inception of the mentoring relationship, a “mentoring contract” can be a valuable tool in setting expectations, protecting mentoring time, and structuring that time effectively. Such contracts allow the mentor and mentee to craft a vision of what research and publication opportunities might look like for the mentee and how opportunities might transpire during the course of the relationship. For a postdoctoral fellow mentee, a starting point might be to envision what the fellow’s CV would need to look like at the end of her award to make her competitive in the job market, for instance, developing a dissertation chapter into a peer-reviewed journal publication. For a later-stage doctoral student, a goal might be getting the dissertation proposal passed and preparing for the dissertation research. Regardless of the mentee’s career stage, the work outlined in the mentoring contract might include a joint research project with the mentor that can become a peer-reviewed journal publication. Importantly, the contract should specify not only what will happen as a result of the relationship, but also the skills that the mentee would need to develop toward that end, e.g., conceptualizing a study or coding data, and how these skills would be developed.

The mentoring contract is a cornerstone of our Foundation's mentoring program, along with annual post-award grantee program reports (twice in the first year of the award) from both mentor and mentee. Taken together, these structures allow mentors and mentees to set, evaluate, and reset goals for the relationship. Said one former mentee: "The proposals and reports helped us to be very detailed about how often and when we were meeting, and what we were going to meet about." Another former mentee, who now serves as a graduate program coordinator in her department, uses a similar contract in her current work with students, as it helps to structure their goals and devise strategies to support them.

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The mentee can use the mentoring contract to develop ownership in the mentoring relationship and in her or his own professional development over time. One mentor saw the value added when the mentee used the mentoring contract to chart her professional development and advocate for herself in the relationship as a way of promoting that development. The mentee noted that routine monthly meetings, which were set aside solely for discussion of the mentoring relationship (not necessarily the research products attached to it), were another critical space for her development of ownership. For instance, through the meetings, the mentee recognized that she waited longer than necessary to ask for project feedback from her mentor. As a response, the pair decided that the mentee would hand in weekly progress reports on all projects so that she could receive feedback, even on minor issues, in a more timely manner.

# Understanding Collective Responsibility

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Responsibility for supporting the professional development of junior scholars of color resides both inside and outside of the mentoring relationship. Mentees often benefit from more support than a single mentoring relationship and mentor can provide. Collective responsibility can help position the mentee for professional success, encourage the mentor to serve as an effective advocate in that process, and support the mentee in advocating for her or himself.

**B**ecause they have greater resources and capacity than any single person, institutions, and the networks therein, possess valuable leverage for achieving these goals.

## Learning Communities

Learning communities that draw on the participation of peers are a valuable strategy for supporting effective mentoring. For instance, in the group mentoring model, a single mentor works with multiple mentees around a common research project or set of projects, and postdoctoral fellows and/or advanced PhD students support the management of the lab and organize group sessions to discuss the research. These groups serve as hubs for identifying skill development needs, addressing issues in the lab, and providing support to mentees at various stages of their training. Mentoring by career stage is easily built into this model, and it provides opportunities for sustained group conversations about topics beyond project tasks, including individual students' particular milestones, such as the qualifying paper or dissertation proposal, and how to reach them. Mentors who do not have mentees working on their research can still adapt the group mentoring model to create a learning community around a specific topic that is of mutual interest and aligned with the mentee's work.

A different type of learning community is one where mentees and mentors focus not on a research topic but on mentoring and their respective responsibilities. For instance, the Foundation's annual mentoring meeting brings multiple mentoring pairs together for large group

discussions as well as facilitated conversations about particular challenges and ways to respond. Meeting participants have consistently remarked on the value of the sense of openness, comfort, and mutuality at these meetings, along with the benefit of receiving practical guidance.

## Departmental Responsibilities

Departments can play a critical role in supporting effective mentoring by orienting mentees and mentors to their responsibilities and setting clear departmental norms about what is appropriate. When departments know what to expect from mentoring and can use those expectations to structure accountability, they are more able to help mentees develop the skills to advocate for themselves and instill in mentors the importance of approaching mentoring with purpose and intention.

### Information and Resources

The department's work might begin with the recognition that effective mentoring is hard work and that mentees and mentors need skills to do it well, starting with how to be open and to build trust. Concrete steps might include an initial orientation, followed by ongoing informational sessions and/or the development of online resources on foundational topics such as preparing mentoring contracts, resolving conflicts, and building and maintaining trust.

Informational sessions and resources might also provide mentees with a broader perspective on different types of mentoring. For instance, in addition to the traditional advisor-advisee

relationship, sponsorship is a form of mentoring that involves guiding mentees on how to get from point A to B, and episodic mentoring refers to relationships that are useful at one point in time, but are not necessarily ongoing. Another way for departments to support mentoring relationships is by helping individuals to develop the interpersonal skills to decode where another person is coming from, and, when it is not clear, asking. Finally, informational sessions and resources might also direct students to institutional mechanisms (presuming these are in place) for support when they feel that the mentoring relationship is not working out and it may be time to move on.

### **Mentoring Networks**

Departments should intentionally broaden the mentoring networks of each mentee and have processes in place to ensure that these efforts are effective. Such efforts are valuable because they signal to mentees that they can and may seek out other mentors. Importantly, these efforts also help shift institutional cultures toward effective mentoring by enabling and supporting mentees to broker a wide variety of mentoring relationships.

For instance, a department can assign each doctoral mentee to a junior and senior faculty mentor. This way, the responsibility of mentoring is shared across faculty and the junior professor also is exposed to the senior colleague's effective mentoring practices. This arrangement allows a sounding board for both faculty to discuss mentoring practices and learn from one another. The student has access to two faculty mentors at different career stages—the junior faculty may offer a different type of mentoring and guidance

than the senior colleague who is likely many years removed from the mentee's current level of experience. As with the individual mentoring relationship, regularly scheduled meetings with explicit goals related both to the meeting itself and the mentee's long-term development should be included and supervised.

Overall, when departments take part in the collective responsibility of supporting effective mentoring, the work of initiating conversations and soliciting feedback does not fall solely on the mentee. Mentors and mentees know who to reach out to when challenges arise, and more intentional discussions about improving graduate training are more likely.

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One former mentee appreciated how the group mentoring model removed the spotlight from her, allowing her to blend in with everyone else. She found this to be a welcome break from and complement to focused one-on-one mentoring interactions, which typically put her in the spotlight. A further benefit was seeing her mentor interact similarly with all of his students, which engendered a sense of equity. "I don't see the way he gives feedback to me as particular. He treats me as an individual, but I can tell the others will have similar experiences. It made us all feel like we had a shared experience."

In sum, these strategies could help foster a departmental culture in which students receive the mentoring that they need and departmental administrators develop useful graduate training mechanisms, such as thinking through and anticipating problems that may arise in mentoring relationships, reaching out to students before they disengage, and collecting data on faculty accountability around high-quality mentoring (e.g., CVs that list presentations, co-authored publications, or works in progress/research projects with graduate students).

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Some institutions welcome new junior faculty by assigning them to a three-person mentoring committee. The team of mentors act as advocates for the new faculty member, read the research papers of the new hire, give teaching tips, and file a one-page report at the end of each year on the mentee performance, once the mentee has looked over the report and agreed with it.

## Cross-departmental Responsibilities

No one department is likely to have the necessary resources to meet the full range of graduate student needs. But some institutional efforts have achieved good results by intentionally broadening graduate students' exposure to resources outside of their immediate department.

The goals of such efforts are typically to expand graduate student exposure to strong models of and sound advice for tackling different stages of their emerging career, networks outside of their immediate department, and additional career and personal supports that impact PhD completion.

### Information and Resources

Cross-departmental efforts to support effective mentoring might include support circles that provide first-time faculty or students in the first year of graduate school the venue to confront a similar sets of issues together.<sup>3</sup> Campus-wide events or ongoing affinity programming can also bring graduate students and faculty together around areas of shared identity or interest, in addition to presenting potential avenues for developing extended mentoring relationships.<sup>4</sup>

Short-term mentee workshops that are relevant to particular mentee career stages are another potentially valuable cross-department strategy. These might include “boot camps” focusing on topics such as completing the first

3. See: The Council of Graduate Schools. (2008). *The PhD completion project*. Washington, DC: The Council of Graduate Schools.

4. Some cross-department efforts to support mentoring take place in research centers. See: the Poverty Graduate Research Fellow Program at the University of Wisconsin Institute for Research on Poverty (<https://www.irp.wisc.edu/training/graduate-research-fellows-program/>) and Harvard's Inequality PhD Scholars Program (<https://inequality.hks.harvard.edu/>).

year of graduate school, seeking funding for dissertation research, participating in dissertation counseling groups, or strengthening writing skills. For instance, a workshop on how to seek dissertation funding could map out various funding sources and general tips on preparing a proposal. Afterward, when the mentor meets with the mentee, they could talk about the most appropriate funding sources, how to prepare a strong application with the mentee's particular project in mind, and when to start applying for funding.

### **Mentoring Around Critical Career Transitions**

The mentee's search for her or his first full-time position is a crucial milestone. Indeed, the processes of landing the first fulltime position post-PhD and becoming accustomed to the new role, responsibilities, and context are critical transitions where both mentor and mentee need information and guidance.

The first step is for the mentee and mentor to understand the current job market. This is one area where collective responsibility is especially critical. Individual mentors may be very familiar with a narrow piece of the academic job market, but given dramatic shifts in academia over the past 10-15 years, as well as the range of career options outside of the academy, there is likely quite a lot that individual mentors do not know. For instance, it is generally acknowledged that the number of ladder faculty positions at Research I institutions is shrinking. Mentees who aspire to academic positions, then, should consider the research areas that are most likely to have traction in the academy.

Institutions should leverage their capacity to map out and describe the landscape to graduate students and faculty mentors. Just as cross-department workshops might focus on what effective mentoring looks like, other workshops could detail what the academic job market looks like.<sup>5</sup> Importantly, institutions should do the same for the equally complex non-academic job market. For instance, academics may be familiar with the intricacies of how a position at a research university compares to one at a small, liberal arts college, but they may be unclear as to how a program evaluator position at a research firm differs from that of a director of research position at a large youth serving organization.

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**“Departments need to provide students with information about which areas have too many people applying for positions, and areas in which there is real growth. Too little is communicated in graduate school. There are many graduates who come out saying, if only I'd focused more on this, I would have been more competitive. Departments can help by focusing on a common orientation for all graduate students.”**

*-Margaret Burchinal*

5. The National Institutes of Health, for instance, provides this kind of overall guidance.

Mentors should be fully engaged with their mentees and the context in which their careers are developing. With this knowledge, they can initiate conversations with the mentee about what the mentee enjoys doing. Mentors should seek to understand, for instance, if the mentee's first choice is the academy, will she or he enjoy teaching at a small liberal arts college? The mentor can broker introductions to faculty colleagues at such institutions, and the mentee can meet with them, virtually, in person, or on the phone, to find out. The same logic applies for a research university or a teaching university. If the mentee's second choice is a research position outside the academy, there is still a wide array of choices.

Rather than outsource such tasks to university career centers, mentors should know enough about non-academic career options that they can initiate conversations with mentees and feel comfortable mentoring them along these lines. Short of such conversations, mentees might not even think to go to a career center. Indeed, supporting mentors in building their repertoire to give students ideas about what to pursue, to talk about what other students have done is an important cross-department or institutional task.

Finally, mentors need support in helping graduate students anticipate the transition to the first full-time position, including managing expectations about what they will face, both good and bad.

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“Academics see the preparation of students for the job market in two buckets: one for faculty positions and the other for non-academic positions. But they forget that “non-academic” positions encompass this huge set of options. There is probably more that can be done to help people understand what their choices are. In that second bucket, there are questions the mentee should address: Do you enjoy conducting original research? Or translating existing research? That might be the difference between a RAND or the American Institutes for Research versus becoming the research director for a large nonprofit organization. Perhaps they are interested in a role in policymaking that benefits from a research background. These are the kinds of options that good mentoring can help mentees sort through.”

*-Vivian Tseng*



Said one mentoring grantee, “It would have been helpful not only to talk about how to get an academic job, but what comes after. What are the hidden rules? What is your life like? What are you spending your time on? How should you spend your time? How can you think about the strategies and behaviors you are adopting now?” Knowledge of transitions like this should be systematized for dissemination during graduate training. For instance, this could involve information about coaching the mentee about what to ask for in the start-up package for a ladder faculty position, e.g., that the mentee will have no new courses to teach after teaching a certain number of courses. Other types of information could focus on balancing the increased workload that comes with teaching, service responsibilities, and research expectations.

Even after students select and attain that first job, it is not a foregone conclusion that the new institution will have the systems or structures in place to help them navigate through what is most times a period of considerable change. Mentoring around critical career transitions, then, is one key area where cross-departmental efforts to support effective mentoring may make an important and long-lasting positive impact.

EFFECTIVE MENTORING ACROSS DIFFERENCE

# Confronting Institutional Barriers for Junior Researchers of Color

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Effective mentoring for researchers of color necessarily involves attention to difference. For that to happen and to happen effectively, mentors, mentees, and relevant institutional stakeholders have to acknowledge that individuals' experiences in the academy and in other contexts differ according to race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, and other dimensions.

## Understanding Inclusion and Privilege

To mentor effectively across difference, mentors must know what inclusion means and how it plays out in everyday life. Inclusion means paying respectful attention to privilege and how it might differentially affect opportunity, perspectives, and decision making—both one’s own and that of others. For instance, we may experience the same contexts differently or have access to different contexts, which often resonate at the everyday level, for instance, with professional training and socialization. Acknowledging privilege starts with acknowledging one’s own context and how difference has shaped one’s own norms and trajectory. As one mentor put it, “The question is not, ‘why can’t people do what I do?’ Rather, the question is, ‘Why can I do the things that I do? What makes it possible?’”

For a former postdoctoral mentee, these questions came up when she compared the Research I university where she had been trained with a peer institution where she was newly-based. Because she had been trained in a department where Black faculty and Black graduate students were a sizable presence in both numbers and voice, that context was her frame of reference. At the new institution, there were fewer Black faculty, and the climate felt chilly to researchers of color. She noted that her previous mentors “had worked hard to dismantle” the very kind of inhospitable environment that she was now experiencing.

With her mentor and another postdoctoral fellow, they talked about “the realities of institutions that are more or less supportive of scholars of color,” including how other researchers of color made decisions, how to take care of one’s self, and how not to push through at all costs. With this kind of support, she was able to consider the type of institution where she wanted to be in the long-term—one that would give her the resources to thrive.

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Even as difference plays out in everyday public discourse and current events, critical attention to difference is often lacking in the academy. A past African American mentee reported relying on the support of her mentor as she readied herself for campus visits immediately after the 2016 presidential election, which, regardless of one’s political leanings, could be characterized as having involved divisive rhetoric, particularly with regard to identity and difference. For any job candidate, campus visits are already high-pressure experiences requiring a display of composure, competency, and calm. In this case, she had to manage all this, while also reflecting on what the election meant for her identity as an American and wondering, “Am I still included?”

Issues of context, opportunity, and difference resonated with another former mentee when she began a postdoctoral fellowship affiliated with a university center. She noted that all but one of the senior researcher affiliates were White males, but, perhaps even more important, they had all trained at the same institution. She was younger, a woman, not White, and, additionally, had trained at another institution. Her methodological expertise was also different—she was a qualitative researcher, and her senior colleagues had quantitative backgrounds. At the outset, she was not familiar with the dominant norms about what was considered good scholarship or effective mentoring, let alone how to go about advocating for herself. These norms were not transparent or made explicit to newcomers. Rather, the mentee had to learn this by reading cues. In response, she developed strategies to assert her authority and presence in this context with this audience, and to adjust her mentoring expectations. With the support of her Foundation-sponsored mentoring relationship, she was able to respond to the steep learning curve.

## Understanding What Difference Means for Leadership

Mentors should consider how difference informs conceptions of leadership and how mentees of color will encounter these conceptions in their careers. First, implicit stereotypes can serve to impose assumptions onto particular groups of people. For instance, women, including White women, whose numbers are greater among the senior ranks compared to their non-White peers, may run into gender-based stereotypes about leadership that can exclude them, e.g., having a

brash and driving personality at work. Indeed, as a group, women might internalize the stereotype that they are not leadership material and not think of themselves as leaders.

Second, dimensions of identity—for instance, gender and race—can intersect, and this intersectionality matters. An African American woman was once described in her review files as being demure, which in her case, was framed positively, as she did not fulfill the stereotype of an “angry Black woman” who is seen as too emotionally involved to hear others’ voices. So while “demure” is usually associated with being passive and a follower, the woman’s colleagues framed her as a “demure” African American woman to signal her leadership potential. She was someone who would listen and contribute to the conversation. In this example, what makes a good leader is implicitly framed along racialized and gendered lines.

Third, the increasing number and percentage of researchers of color and women poses new questions about diversity and leadership. As the people in the room look different, should our ideas of what constitutes good leadership and good work also look different from the past? In other words, should differences in student and faculty composition translate into differences in what institutions value and how they function? The Foundation argues that institutions need to and should change. And for that to happen, we need to be explicit about our assumptions and support colleagues, especially junior colleagues, when they are negatively affected by wrong assumptions.

## Understanding and Addressing Institutional Barriers

Interviews with stakeholders across institutions reveal a picture that is consistent with the existing literature on the barriers that researchers of color must negotiate in the academy. Mentors should both be aware of these barriers and be equipped with strategies to support mentees.

### Cultural Taxation

One institutional barrier is cultural taxation, or “the minority tax,” which is the expectation that faculty of color assume additional service obligations related to their race or ethnicity, typically without commensurate credit for the additional service, which may include serving as the “minority” representative on faculty committees and as advisors to ethnic student organizations.

Mentors should know that cultural taxation may start early in one’s education, as early as the undergraduate years. Existing research indicates that some universities and colleges rely on students of color to start and engage in diversity efforts without “investing in institutional based programming” (Jones & Reddick, 2017; Lerma, Hamilton, & Nielsen, 2018). Diversity work is often seen as the responsibility of the “diverse.” This, however, is but a relatively inexpensive stopgap to a systemic problem. Students of color can thus face a dual dilemma: Institutions ask or encourage them to do this diversity service, and, often, they feel the need to give back. This was the case for one mentee, a first-generation college student of color, who worked extensively to create a welcoming environment for students of color,

especially students from a similar background, both undergraduate and graduate. However, these activities were frequently unpaid and resulted in less time for her to devote to her own academic development.

At the faculty level, all members have service obligations to the institution, both to facilitate governance and to support students. Faculty of color receive the same requests for service that their White colleagues of similar rank are asked to do, e.g., non-diversity requests, such as being asked to serve as director of graduate studies. But, on top of that, faculty of color also face the diversity requests. Yet when it comes time for tenure review, especially at Research I universities, it is the research that matters.

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**Service requests do not stop with tenure: Tenured faculty are fewer in numbers than their untenured colleagues, so senior faculty of color often receive even more requests. Reliance on the same set of senior scholars of color to serve as reviewers, then, can become another form of cultural taxation. For example, upon starting a new position at a doctoral-granting university, one tenured mentor of color reported being assigned to 10 students—most of them doctoral level, all students of color—although she had no prior experience mentoring doctoral students.**

A White female mentor described the dilemma facing faculty of color, pre-tenure: “At an institution that places high value on research, they are put in a difficult position because what you get evaluated on at the end is your research.” The burden typically falls on the scholar of color to learn to say no, rather than on the institution to not ask so much of faculty of color, to assign credit to scholars of color when they take on these requests, or to keep reasonable expectations about how much service these faculty can do while also maintaining a productive research agenda.

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Two mentees spoke of the important need for spaces that counter their isolation:

“I enjoy connecting with other students of color. Even though we are in different disciplines, we have similar experiences and it is comforting to know I am not alone.”

“I’ve had feelings of isolation for a while during my PhD program and the meeting was very beneficial in helping me identify and validate what I was feeling. I now feel a sense of relief, as well as empowerment.”

Mentors can support mentees bearing the burden of cultural taxation. In a mentoring relationship supported by the Foundation, for example, a mentor helped the graduate student consider and decide on the types of service responsibilities she wanted to take on, differentiating these from those she felt obligated to do and those she was appointed to undertake. The mentor also went further, negotiating with the institution on behalf of the mentee. In doing so, she was able to ensure that the student received appropriate credit for the activity, whether financial compensation or recognition through nomination for service awards. Finally, the mentor advocated on the student’s behalf when the student really did not want to undertake the work. Through efforts of this kind, the mentor exercises the power she has as a well-regarded faculty member already familiar with negotiating with the institution; and equally important, the mentee learns that she does not have to do it all, and indeed, shouldn’t do it all, and she has practice saying no, albeit in this case, with strong faculty support. The hope is that in the future, when her service responsibilities increase in number and time commitment, the junior researcher can adapt what she has learned.

### **Cultural Insensitivity and Isolation**

Another barrier that researchers of color must face is cultural insensitivity on the part of institutions toward their unique challenges and strengths. As with any profession, the academy has a set of assumptions that informs its norms. Graduate training functions to socialize students into these norms, which they will later encounter in the institutions they join if they choose to be faculty members. However, for researchers of color, these assumptions might conflict with their own perspectives. There can be a misalignment

between academic culture and their own cultures. When this misalignment is not even acknowledged, cultural insensitivity can result and dampen the aspirations and outcomes of researchers of color. The mentoring relationship is a powerful place of intervention when such a misalignment occurs, and an important role for mentors is to recognize both sets of norms, counsel the mentee, and advocate on her or his behalf.

Many researchers of color have to manage the fact that they come from communities that are likely very different from what their colleagues know, as faculty tend to have grown up in native born, White, middle- or upper-middle-class homes. This can lead to isolation, especially if they are in an academic unit with few researchers of color (Levison & Alegría, 2016).

Isolation can also come when researchers of color are teaching, as they might be teaching students who are as yet unfamiliar with having people of color as instructors or in any position of authority. There have been reports of students viewing faculty and teaching assistants of color as less qualified to teach them and responding with micro aggressions or even public challenges (Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2015). This discontent might be especially pronounced in our present day higher education system, where families are paying high tuitions, particularly in private settings, and both parents and students are pressing to see evidence of educational value.

In response, some researchers of color decide to straddle two worlds, the community and the academy, rather than leave their family or community behind. But balancing both worlds can be tricky. For instance, the academy often requires its members to relocate, sometimes far distances, for superior study and job opportunities and to advance professionally. But researchers of color may not feel comfortable moving far from one's parents, siblings, and extended family for graduate school or a job, no matter how attractive the offer. A researcher of color may not feel comfortable even articulating this contradiction in expectations. When a researcher chooses to stay local, it is frequently and inaccurately assumed in academic circles that the person cannot be a high-quality candidate or else she or he would have had the opportunity to move out of state.

### **Questions of Legitimacy**

Beyond the barriers of cultural taxation and insensitivity, there are ways that difference impacts perceptions of one's research inquiry. For instance, a mentee can be working with the mentor on a project that draws on similar topical research interests—for instance, the populations of interest are people of color. For the mentor, the populations studied might be abstract or of intellectual interest because she or he does not come from those populations. However, for the mentee, the inquiry may resonate more personally. One mentee had grown up in the same neighborhood as the study participants, sharing their racial/ethnic and class background, and even had family members incarcerated at the same institution. This familiarity brought to the fore difficult experiences during the research

interviews; while in-depth interviewing of this type always involves emotional work, talking with a member of one's own hometown about suicidal thoughts or family incarceration is likely to be especially draining and to raise questions about identity and the appropriate boundaries between respondent and researcher.

Identity can also complicate the cultural norm of what counts as "rigorous research." It is commonly assumed in the academy that research about one's own group, or anything that feels personal, is not rigorous, because it's really "me-search," not research (Burton & Stack, 2014). However, it is precisely the infusion of new voices and perspectives outside the mainstream that has promise to push existing research conceptually and methodologically (Levison & Alegría, 2016). In mental health, for instance, measures appear to work differently for different racial and ethnic groups, suggestive of the need "to integrate the contextual and cultural life circumstances of minorities into conceptualizing research problems and putting the concepts into practice," a call to which the field has been slow to respond (Alegría, 2009). Another example concerns research on migration: regardless of the economic success immigrants may have in the United States, they also tend to feel socially excluded by virtue of being immigrants, and somehow, not seen as wholly American; being non-White can worsen this perception and experience of exclusion (Louie, 2012; Alegría, 2017). But if research were to take into account these contextual experiences, it could help lead to new measures of social positioning that are related to but also distinct from socioeconomic status.

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Below are some reflections from past mentors, all of whom were then at the early stages of their faculty careers:

"It gave me more confidence as a mentor. I was a fairly newly minted professor and I was faking it to some extent. Without the training and perspective I received through the meetings, I would have been much more deferential to the senior scholars on my mentee's committee."

"I benefitted from the opportunity to talk to other mentors. The only other conversations I'd ever had about mentoring were conversations with more senior faculty. They all seemed to have it figured out. Hearing others who were struggling was helpful. It was actually a stress reliever, and, quite frankly, an affirmation that I was not uniquely "bad." Hearing perspectives on how directive to be, how lenient—it was so reassuring to talk to other mentors. To this day, we have not had conversations quite like that. It gave me permission to not have it figured out."

"It was helpful to get to know a group of other mentors who were taking it seriously and making it a centerpoint of their careers; even outside of the meeting, we talk about mentoring issues."



Effective mentoring, again, can provide important support here. One of our early mentees, now an associate professor at a Research I university, recalled how she had been close to leaving graduate school because of these cultural differences between herself and her first advisor. An expert in Latino health disparities from a social psychological perspective, the former mentee credits her personal background with fueling this interest. She had grown up in a border community near Mexico and witnessed the barriers that her family and community had to overcome just to access decent health care. However, none of this might have even been possible were it not for the mentoring award. Unproductive dialogues with her former advisor, who did not see value in the mentee studying a subject so close to home, left her doubting her own abilities and adrift, wondering if the academy was even for her. She credits meeting her next mentor, who was then being recruited to her university, and recognizing him as someone who acknowledged difference. In the mentor's case, it was sexual identity that shaped his own experiences with institutional norms that denied his experience. He drew on it to try to understand racial and ethnic differences in the mentee's experiences with the academy and how to best support her in her daily interactions, professional choices, and research decisions.

# Understanding Mentor and Mentee Responsibilities

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Responsibility for initiating conversations about difference, especially racial/ethnic difference, typically falls to the mentee, who may feel unequipped to do so, partly due to the power differential. But mentors have reported that they, too, often feel inadequately equipped to engage in or facilitate these conversations. Both feelings are understandable. Race is a fraught topic in American life; we realize that many people may feel uncomfortable talking about race out of fear of being called racists, especially Whites, as they constitute the dominant racial group in the U.S. Indeed, additional work is necessary to facilitate these conversations and support effective mentoring across racial differences.

**M**entees typically do not know to bring up race and issues related to race. Certainly, talking about race with someone in a position of authority presents challenges. In tackling this with mentees, a longtime Foundation consultant has shared questions for mentees to consider. For instance, mentees might think through how their backgrounds are related to what they notice about others and themselves. The answers could serve as the body of information that mentees would want to share with the mentors. Then there is the question of how to even initiate this kind of conversation.

One way could be over a specific incident or need for action. Another could be a general discussion about the broad challenges of being a scholar of color. Yet another way into the conversation could be framing the comments as advice that the mentee would give to faculty mentoring researchers of color.

Of course, the burden for initiating and thinking through these conversations should not fall to the mentee. The mentee is not obliged—and often not well-positioned—to teach or counsel the mentor about how to mentor across difference. When this does happen, it becomes yet another form of the minority tax, or another burden to what researchers of color are already shouldering. Thus, all of the questions and conversation starters noted above are important for mentors to consider as they seek to initiate these conversations and support junior researchers of color. We do not mean to suggest that these conversations will be easy. These conversations will probably involve

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Two mentors spoke of learning to mentor across difference:

“It made me more cognizant of thinking, ‘Oh, maybe that advice was not good given your position in the academy. What do you think? Is that advice that’s going to work for you or not? I’d do X, but would it backfire for you?’ It’s a skill I’ve worked into all of my mentoring relationships... It has loosened up some of the culture of the department—pointing out that what works for one person won’t work for another. That has contributed to a cultural change.”

“One mentee was feeling a lot of pressure, feeling she had a lot to prove herself to people. So part of that dynamic was my saying, ‘I can understand part of that as a first generation college student, but there is also another part that I can’t speak to, so we need to have a broader conversation and have you connect to others around different strategies they’ve used.’ I didn’t have the answers or experiences to help her cope with some of this. So my role was to develop enough social capital so I could broker this for her, connect her with more senior people in the field.”

awkward silences, mistakes, hurt feelings, and feelings of emotional exposure. These are part of the process. That these conversations can still be done well was evidenced in the reflections of past White mentors, who shared what they learned in our program and what they then took with them in order to mentor more effectively across difference. A key place to start, they reported, is naming the difference, recognizing how it might matter, and trying to find common ground in other areas: “There were some bridges that we could lean on to start: I’m a white woman and a lesbian, with my own experience of marginalization. She was mixed raced, and heterosexual. So while my experiences of marginalization didn’t apply, they did provide a basis for leaning into her experiences, and we kind of bonded around both having experiences that were not quite what the rest of the field expected. A shared sense of not-quite belonging. I was aware that she was experiencing a form of marginalization, but I never presumed to know what I did not know.”

An outward facing strategy that mentors may undertake to support mentees of color in their role as teaching assistants in the mentors’ courses is to block for them. This involves recognizing at the outset that the mentees’ status as a legitimate authority in the classroom and evaluator of assignments might be questioned by students. To preemptively address this, the faculty member should establish, as a matter of fact, the credentials and expertise of the teaching assistants of color. This can be noted both on the syllabus and in remarks to the class, and repeated as needed. Another useful strategy is to have the doctoral student/teaching assistant deliver a guest lecture to the class—this can serve to introduce the individual to the students on a wider stage.

# Understanding Collective Responsibility

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There is a tendency in the academy to sidestep discussions of difference in favor of those about research, as if the two cannot co-exist. Researchers of color, then, are often advised to put their heads down and do the research that will get them through the doctoral program, into the first job, and onto promotion (whether inside or outside the academy). Mentors often channel the energy of the relationship solely on the research project, whether it is collaborative or exclusively the mentee's. Indeed, research mentoring is critical at any stage of a research career, but especially for doctoral students learning how to consume rigorous research, how to teach it and how to do it. At the same time, there are limits to this approach. Because difference impacts how researchers of color are seen and how they view and experience the world, including the contexts in which research training occurs, mentees require broader, more intentional support to address thissues surrounding difference.

**N**o one mentor can do it all. But mentors can tap into resources to learn how to mentor better, or put the mentee in touch with individuals or groups who can address needs that the mentor cannot fill, or, at least, keep updated on what is happening in those interactions. Effective mentoring involves brokering connections, and this is especially crucial as it concerns mentoring across difference. Brokering may involve connecting the mentee to resources that the mentor might not be able to provide, or connecting the mentor to resources that she or he might not already have. For example, institutions that have teaching centers can incorporate resources on effective strategies to help teaching assistants and instructors of color counter the perception among students that they are not qualified to teach them, as well as to help senior colleagues acknowledge and address this issue.

One Foundation-sponsored mentor-mentee pair attended two university workshops about race, identity, and inclusion, which drew on lectures and small-group activities on how to minimize micro aggressions in research and training, as well as effective strategies for setting appropriate expectations and how to respond to micro aggressions when they happen. Together, the mentoring pair brought the learnings back in the form of small-group mentoring sessions in the faculty-led lab that met twice monthly around identifying and addressing issues related to marginalization and good mentoring practices. Later in the semester, the mentee shared her upsetting interaction with another faculty member, who had used gender stereotypes in disparaging her contributions to a co-authored manuscript.

The mentee and mentor had an open discussion about what additional needs the mentee might have and the pros and cons of the mentor directly confronting the faculty member about the situation at hand. They decided not to identify the mentee, as this might put her at risk. The mentor also sought advice from trusted colleagues about how to counsel the mentee to respond both afterwards and in the moment, should it happen again. She sought advice for herself about how to handle this with the faculty colleague without identifying the mentee, and how to indirectly mentor the faculty member about gender in the academy and more inclusive communication. In the process, the mentor started to feel more equipped to give advice to other students of color, who were not working with her but were coming to her for counsel about how to handle similar situations.

In another case, the mentoring pair met with a fellow faculty member, an expert on mentoring across difference. Although they were all at the same institution, they had not encountered one another until Foundation staff brokered an introduction. They agreed to meet on a bi-annual basis, and at the first meeting, the faculty member helped the mentee and mentor see that finding common ground in their past experiences and current worldviews would be integral to building a solid mentoring relationship despite their differences. The pair agreed to meet monthly on their own to further these conversations, using them to recognize and discuss where they differed from one another, especially how to negotiate those differences. These meetings gave the mentee the space to share how her status as a Black woman from a low-income family impacted

her experience in graduate school and the concerns she had about belonging in academia. She believed that the meetings also gave the mentor an opportunity to assuage some of those concerns.

With all this said, even the best mentoring relationships are limited by the environments in which they operate. As one mentor shared after his mentee, a doctoral student of color, left the graduate program: “I am reminded that, no matter how well intentioned and intentional I am, there are some very capable people who simply don’t have the structural supports to be able to be successful, and that is a very hard reality.” There are, in fact, institutional constraints and barriers that institutions need to address. Collective responsibility goes all the way up to the institution itself, and harnessing the power of effective mentoring will be a matter of fostering institutional change.

MOVING IT FORWARD

# Fostering Sustained Change at the Institutional Level

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While the institutional barriers that hinder the success of mentoring relationships for junior scholars of color are considerable, they are not insurmountable. There are effective institutional strategies to reduce the social and academic obstacles facing researchers of color, including cultural taxation, isolation, and insensitivity. Here, we focus on elements of two such strategies—systemic community-building efforts and diversity work—that may ensure individual mentoring relationships do not end up shouldering burdens they cannot bear, and so that effective mentoring relationships can become routine structures rather than matters of chance.



The adoption of these strategies may derive from an institutional mission that prioritizes diversity and informs its implementation with institutional data that can be used for both monitoring and accountability (National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education, 2016). While steps to developing such a mission lie outside the scope of this report, we focus here on the practical strategies and modest investments that can bring it to life.

## Building on What is Already There

Efforts to build community are elemental to reducing the social isolation experienced by faculty of color. An institution where faculty of color feel they belong is likely to foster the development and retention of strong mentoring relationships, including those across difference.

For these efforts to take hold, the setting should be hospitable for the research community of color already there. Providing individuals the space to gather along affinity lines is a good starting place.<sup>6</sup> Institutional support for these efforts can be as basic as paying for a group of faculty to have dinner on a regular basis. However, as with any informal undertakings, there is a greater chance of cancelation if the person committed to running them is too busy, or of ending altogether if that person leaves the institution. Partial administrative support, then, can be invaluable in ensuring that the gatherings both occur and outlive any one person's role; this support can be directed toward simple logistics, like online polls for dates, times, or locations. Internal grants of \$5-10,000 can further seed these endeavors, which could

eventually become self-sustaining programs. Another effective, no-cost strategy is intentionally connecting faculty of color to individuals who can help them navigate the institutional bureaucracy as they seek support for gatherings.

Providing modest financial supports for researchers of color to connect with scholars in their field through travel to conferences, or to individual meetings is another potential strategy in this regard. The university could also potentially provide resources to invite external guest speakers for colloquiums that intersect with the research interests of junior faculty of color. For junior faculty, the optimal timing for these strategies would be prior to the third year review, giving them the opportunity to think about external reviewers who they wish to review their work, thoughtfully evaluate their contribution to the field, or even identify future letter writers of support for their work. Finally, the institution could establish mechanisms to make the work of its current junior researchers of color known within the university, which can also lead to informal mentoring opportunities.

Across the board, making the university setting inviting to prospective faculty of color is an important component in community building. One former university leader of equity and inclusion pointed out that these setting elements not only make faculty of color want to stay but also want to join the institution. Indeed, institutional climate, or the degree to which the environment is inviting to people of color, is typically an unspoken criteria that applicants of color use in their decision making.

6. For instance, faculty of color could meet together or separately by race/ethnicity or according to intersectional identities, e.g., race/ethnicity and gender.

## Building Out through Recruitment

Recruiting researchers of color through the search and hiring processes requires substantial systemic effort and deep institutional commitment. Our recommendations are not intended to replace that need, but rather to reveal some modest strategies that have proven to be effective and can perhaps be easily implemented in the short-term. For instance, the search committee should include members who value diversity and have received training on implicit bias, the latter of which assumes that the institution already has such training or individuals who specialize in this field. The job announcement should ask candidates about their experiences with teaching and mentoring students of color, and how diversity and inclusion is reflected in their research and/or service. Faculty presenting at conferences should bring job announcements with them and make a point to circulate them, including at individual meetings. Reaching out to online networks to advertise the position and help attract a deep pool of applicants is also a relatively simple but valuable effort for faculty, staff, or students to make. A more ambitious strategy requiring more resources would be to hire faculty recruiters that work with search committees on diversifying the applicant pool. These recruiters would help “attract a more diverse pool of applicants, supply data on the pool of new PhDs in their field, and build networks of potential applicants” (McMurtrie, 2016).<sup>7</sup>

Everyone needs to be part of the conversation and the change, otherwise the results will be, at best, partial.

These modest efforts would put institutions on the path to addressing many of the barriers and obstacles to effective mentoring and career development laid out in this report. When an institution’s community is welcoming and open to begin with, efforts to build and strengthen an environment that is fertile for mentoring are that much more likely to succeed.

## Shifting Standards of Evaluation

Shifting the standards for how research is currently evaluated within the institution is an ambitious and long-term goal. While we do not offer specific recommendations for that process, we do recognize that institutions should grapple with a broader range of what constitutes high-quality research. For instance, research with hard-to-reach populations and communities can take longer than other work—these communities are typically less resourced, could be skeptical of participating in research, and require a great deal of trust-building on the part of the researcher. The result of time-intensive work, for instance, is that fewer studies may appear on one’s curriculum vita.

7. See also: “Checklist for MCS Search Committee Chairs for Effective, Inclusive Searches,” ([https://www.cmu.edu/mcs/people/faculty/resources/faculty\\_search/preparing/checklist\\_for\\_search\\_committee\\_chairs.pdf](https://www.cmu.edu/mcs/people/faculty/resources/faculty_search/preparing/checklist_for_search_committee_chairs.pdf)), and “Top 10 Evidence-based Practices for Inclusive Faculty Hiring,” (<https://faculty.umd.edu/appointment/documents/bestpractices.pdf>).

## Recognizing Diversity Work

While institutions should prioritize reducing cultural taxation for researchers of color, as long as diversity work exists, it should be rewarded fairly. Department chair or area heads might consider that additional work by faculty and students of color be used to determine course release, perhaps after a certain amount of service has been completed. Diversity service can also be recognized through mentoring awards for all faculty and through a scholarship award for graduate students. At one institution, these awards are presented at the annual diversity colloquia, and an external speaker is brought for further learning and engagement about diversity service, why it is necessary, and why everyone needs to do it. Another critical shift in both mindset and practice is that diversity training is for everyone, not just those considered “diverse.” Rather, diversity includes and involves everyone in the community. Everyone needs to be part of the conversation and the change, otherwise the results will be, at best, partial.

# Conclusion

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Junior researchers of color face unique and longstanding structural challenges in their professional development. And while barriers to advancement can be confronted through strong mentoring relationships that address issues of difference from inside and outside of the mentor-mentee relationship, the potential power of effective mentoring will only be realized when the environments in which these relationships exist begin to change.

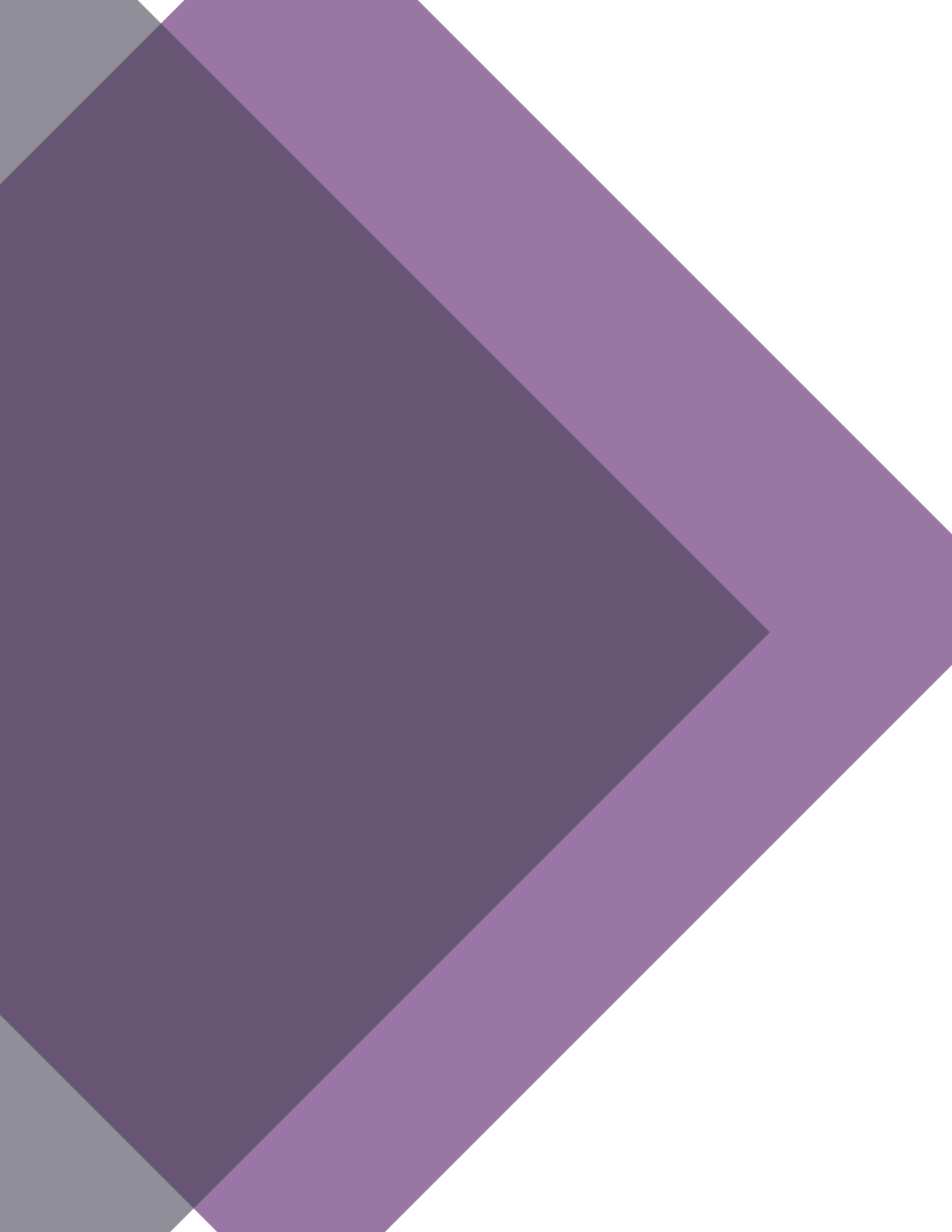
**A**s we've written, institutions must assume a more proactive role in acknowledging difference, building communities capable of breaking down barriers and paving avenues for inclusion, and sustaining the necessary systemic change over time.

Diversifying the academy and positioning junior researchers of color for success through effective mentoring is a matter of both individual and collective responsibility. It is fundamental for both mentors and mentees to understand their roles in the relationship: mentees must identify what they hope to achieve through the relationship, and mentors must help guide the way, forge connections, advocate, learn to have difficult conversations, and address issues related to privilege and identity. Beyond this, though, collective responsibility is necessary to leverage the power of the institutions—to create the conditions under which mentoring relationships can thrive. Investments and efforts large and small can begin to fulfill such responsibility and have lasting benefit for the range of communities that exist within the academy. We hope this guide offers some useful directions for pursuing this work and these goals.

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