

## Potential Mentor/Mentee Conflicts

# Mentor/Mentee Relationship

- ▶ The relationship with your mentor is a crucial aspect of student research
- ▶ The mentor
  - ▶ is the interface between the student and the program
  - ▶ improves the quality of student experience
  - ▶ helps provide opportunities post-program

# Maintaining a Healthy Relationship

- ▶ Set ground rules early on
  - ▶ regular meetings
  - ▶ agendas
  - ▶ responsibilities
- ▶ Ask questions and communicate constantly
- ▶ Do not suffer in silence

# Mentee Responsibilities

- ▶ Clarify any questions regarding expectations:
  - ▶ Scope of the project and your role
  - ▶ Content knowledge and skills
- ▶ Review literature
- ▶ Attend meetings, coordinate with team members
- ▶ Provide timely and relevant drafts, data summaries
- ▶ Ask for feedback

# Mentor Responsibilities

- ▶ Establish expectations:
  - ▶ Scope of project – e.g. timeline, role of mentee
  - ▶ Hours of work, meeting schedule
- ▶ Provide training/guidance:
  - ▶ Engage mentee with other project members
  - ▶ Recent work in literature
- ▶ Check in on progress
- ▶ Read and critique, collaborate as needed

# Common sources of conflict

- ▶ Not meeting responsibilities
  - ▶ Mentor
  - ▶ Mentee
- ▶ Management style not compatible
- ▶ Others
  - ▶ Unequal treatment of mentees

# Dealing with unsatisfactory relationships

- ▶ Communicate constantly
  - ▶ Clarify your thoughts on the situation
  - ▶ Explain your goals
  - ▶ Offer ideas for improvement

# “Principled negotiation”

- ▶ Separate the problem from the person
  - ▶ Problems often a combination of
    - ▶ Issues
    - ▶ Personality and style
- ▶ Focus on interests, rather than on positions
  - ▶ Avoid hard-line positions
  - ▶ Ask “why” and “why not”—Seek common incentive
- ▶ Create options that allow for mutual gains
  - ▶ Carefully think about possible options and alternatives
  - ▶ Present as a logical progression
- ▶ Use objective criteria
  - ▶ Find and discuss common standards



# Preparing for a difficult conversation

- ▶ Is direct conversation best approach?
  - ▶ Consult trusted mentor or student counselor
  - ▶ Is it likely to achieve goals?—do not “vent”
  - ▶ Are there alternatives?
- ▶ If you determine direct conversation is best
  - ▶ Avoid phone or email
  - ▶ Make a private appointment
  - ▶ Practice the conversation

# Having the conversation

- ▶ Be diplomatic
- ▶ Give the benefit of the doubt
- ▶ Avoid judgmental language
- ▶ Understand and acknowledge your role
- ▶ Be an attentive listener
- ▶ Have an open and positive attitude
- ▶ Come prepared to share some ideas for resolution
- ▶ Be brief, organized, and to the point

## Ending the conversation

- ▶ Have an exit strategy-in case the conversation goes badly
- ▶ Have realistic expectations-don't expect to resolve all issues
- ▶ Identify next steps before concluding the conversation

## Consider getting outside help

- ▶ Program or department chair

## Sources

- ▶ *How to Manage Working Relationship with Your Advisor*, Enago Academy (<https://www.enago.com/academy/manage-working-relationship-advisor/>)
- ▶ *The Dignity Project*, University of Minnesota (<http://www.sos.umn.edu/resources-dignity-project>)
- ▶ *Dysfunctional Advisee-Adviser Relationships: Methods for Negotiating Beyond Conflict*, [www.sciencemag.org](http://www.sciencemag.org) (<https://www.sciencemag.org/careers/1998/04/dysfunctional-advisee-adviser-relationships-methods-negotiating-beyond-conflict>)

# End of Presentation

- ▶ Thoughts?
- ▶ Questions?