



Graduate Students' Experiences with Missing Mentorship

What is this Research About?

Graduate students can face various challenges academically, personally, and professionally during their studies. Previous research has shown that these challenges can impact the mental health of graduate students and can lead to feelings of isolation and higher rates of anxiety and depression. Mentorship is one way to support graduate students and can increase graduate student success. In this study, the researchers examined graduate students' experiences with problematic mentorship.

What did the Researchers Do?

In this study, 54 masters and PhD students from different disciplines participated in focus groups about their experiences with mentoring and mentorship. Transcripts of the interviews were analyzed to identify themes in the discussions.

What did the Researchers Find?

The major theme identified from the focus group discussions was "falling through the cracks," which involved feelings of isolation, uncertainty around expectations for graduate work, and students feeling that they were not making progress. Many focus group participants reported that their expectations of support were not met and that they had difficulty finding supportive mentors. The study participants described how poor mentorship negatively impacted their mental health, motivation, and ability to work. International students described additional barriers to accessing mentorship and the difficulties they faced navigating university systems. Focus group participants also described how university structures may undermine mentoring. For example, students may not have ways to provide feedback about mentors or report problematic mentors and universities or departments may not have initiatives to facilitate mentorship.

SoTL

Snapshot

A synopsis of a scholarship of teaching and learning journal article

➔ How to Implement this Research in Your Classroom

Advisors/mentors can:

- Recognize the combination of challenges that graduate students face
- Learn about campus and community supports and share these with graduate students
- Clearly discuss expectations for student-mentor or student-advisor relationships
- Help students find additional mentors for areas outside their expertise
- Participate in training or workshops to support their mentorship activities

Departments/universities can:

- Provide training opportunities for graduate students on topics such as time-management, leadership development, and conflict management
- Create opportunities for informal mentorship and engagement between students and faculty
- Reward and support the mentorship work of faculty
- Provide ways for students to report problematic supervisors without career repercussions

➔ Citation

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➔ Keywords

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