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Collaboration: Faculty Perspective

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Over the past decade and a half, I have worked with many undergraduates as teaching assistants, research assistants on my projects, and advisees who conduct research for honors or other advanced programs. However, in very few cases have I had the special opportunity to genuinely collaborate with a student on research. The materials that follow define collaboration and set it apart from other modes of working with undergraduates, discuss selection processes, goals, challenges, and advantages of collaboration, and provide examples from my work with an outstanding undergraduate student, Joseph Hamm. I conclude this chapter with specific recommendations about teaching ethical behavior, ethical concerns in collaboration with undergraduates, and recognition of the larger mission of collaboration beyond the context of course requirements or the university as a whole.

Collaboration

The word “collaboration” has roots in the Latin *collaborare*, meaning to labor together (Simpson & Weiner, 2002). A collaborative relationship involves two or more people who strive for a common goal, as is common in many approaches to conducting research with undergraduates. Collaboration is distinct from other modes of work with undergraduates, however, in that collaboration implies substantive contributions and creative control from both parties. To clarify this distinction, I have advised many excellent undergraduates who have had unique and productive learning experiences working on my research or in my laboratory, but in these cases I directed the goals, methods, analyses, and interpretations throughout the work. I have also advised many students in honors theses and other activities that require the student to generate a research idea with my guidance. Collaboration, as used in this chapter, suggests a more balanced working relationship in which the student and the faculty member can contribute ideas, adapt methods, and critique each other’s work. This mode of work takes the faculty member and the undergraduate researcher as close as possible to the model that often

exists in graduate programs and in collaborative relationships between faculty peers.

I have been very fortunate to inherit a model for collaboration from my own graduate research advisor, Wayne Viney, whose student-centered approach guides my own perspectives today. When I was his graduate advisee, Wayne Viney allowed me freedom to direct our research, and he gently applied his guidance to keep me on track when my inexperience or developing views of the literature did not permit me to see the entire situation. Beyond all of this, he provided a solid foundation of trust and encouragement even in the midst of false starts and dead ends. I had to walk my own road, but I could walk it with his support and guidance. I attempt to bring this model to my work with undergraduate collaborators.

Student Collaborators

Who are the students with whom I have collaborated in research, and what sets these students apart from other undergraduates with whom I have worked? Undergraduates are a very diverse group, often with little to no research experience outside of class. Even though many of these students will go on to become outstanding psychological researchers, only a few are ready to collaborate with a faculty member. I try to place students into research situations that fit them best and provide the most productive learning experiences.

Some students approach me armed only with the knowledge that they want to get a taste of research. These students may work in my research program to assist with data collection, data entry, and general discussion of ideas. These students will be most successful in a supervised relationship (see Forrest, Stastny, & Bruns, 2008). I hope to involve these students in dissemination of the study, often by having them join me in an oral presentation in which they present the literature review or the methodology of our study before I present the results and discussion and then answer questions. These experiences provide neophyte researchers with an introduction to the activities of research. Some of these students then excitedly enter graduate school

having had exceptional research and presentation experiences for undergraduates. A rare few students, however, are ready to go beyond these activities and to contribute substantially to a project that they can share with a faculty member.

On the continuum of preparedness for research collaboration, there are many undergraduates poised to function as successful graduate students in the future. A few atypical students are already prepared educationally and personally to enter into a collaborative research relationship with a faculty member. Other students may be nurtured and mentored to achieve this level of preparedness through extensive coursework and independent study. In either situation, the standards and expectations for student collaborators are higher than standards for other undergraduate researchers. I envision these collaborations as guided preparation for graduate school, and I attempt to encourage undergraduates to function as much like graduate students as possible. I aspire to provide a guided journey from advanced undergraduate student to graduate advisee. Students may start with substantial direction in reading materials, methodological paradigms, and earlier work in my program and others' programs of research, but students soon have the tools to collaborate with me as a graduate student would. I hope that student collaborators can learn whether they enjoy research and, if so, that their confidence in their abilities can grow from their knowledge of what to expect in graduate school. My unstated goals are to provide each collaborator with, in the words of my Mother, "roots and wings" so that he or she has a strong research foundation and the literary, methodological, analytic, and interpretive tools to reach beyond the achievements of our collaboration. My collaboration with Joseph Hamm provides an outstanding example of these explicit and implicit activities.

I formally met Joseph Hamm two years ago when he approached me to serve as his mentor in the Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program, an outstanding undergraduate research program that connects dedicated students and faculty mentors to better prepare students for graduate school and other future endeavors. I had advised McNair scholars before and had participated as an advisor to advanced individual projects. Joe rose beyond my expectations to emerge as a genuine collaborator. Our early meetings shaped this relationship. Through many early meetings, Joe rose to meet and exceed my demanding and increasing standards. As I consistently raised my standards, Joe continued to surpass them. His project began as an extension of a project in my research program, but he took on increasingly larger responsibilities and emerged as a

solid collaborator, not on his undergraduate paper or on my research program, but in our work (see Hamm, 2008).

Joe's project provides an excellent model for the processes I describe above. When he arrived at our initial meetings, he was interested in topics in jury decision making. His openness and the rigid timeline required by the McNair program inspired me to be fairly directive about where his research should go if these options fit his interests. I clearly informed him that I expected him to function independently. He rose to the occasion. After our initial meetings we signed, as required by the McNair program, a contract describing our working relationship, and we defined it in a collaborative manner. Particularly due to the short timeline (i.e., we signed our agreement in the fall, and his final project was to be presented at the national McNair convention the following summer), I provided definitive structure for him, including a general topic, methodology, and some key names to investigate in the literature, but the next steps were his. He conducted an excellent literature review, and he prepared outstanding work for every meeting. I continued to ease my guidance, and he functioned increasingly independently. He collected the data, entered the data, and ran the analysis. His writing was and is superb, and he dealt very well with my *brutal editing pencil of doom* that often challenges students. He found opportunities in my comments, and his already exemplary writing made this process easier.

Through this process, the student shares, as Joe did, responsibility for the creative endeavors. The student has the responsibility to contribute, even when contributions are difficult to generate, and in this approach it is the responsibility of the faculty member to provide a safe environment for the student to struggle with a safety net and appropriate reassurance. If I had provided Joe with my answers to our methodological questions, as I often do with students who assist with my research, he would have missed the learning opportunities that come with walking a challenging road. Years ago, as I struggled in a context outside of academia, one very important anonymous mentor asked me (personal communication, September, 1997), "what would you learn if your advisor wrote your thesis for you?" Joe rose smoothly to these occasions and appeared to thrive on the experiential learning opportunities; I hope he will look upon them positively in his future work.

Challenges

Significant responsibilities and challenges exist for the faculty member in these processes. Our

willingness to collaborate means that I choose to not make research decisions by fiat. I must consult with my collaborator, respect his or her judgment and ideas, and be willing to take the risks involved. Joe made these processes straightforward and fun. In my already-busy schedule I must find substantial time weekly or semi-weekly to meet with my collaborator, even if my institution provides limited encouragement for collaboration with undergraduates. Balance with my other teaching, research, and service responsibilities remains elusive, and time spent in research collaboration reduces time available for other activities. Without the substantial reinforcement available at institutions such as the University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire (Lind, 2008), the rewards I reap from our collaboration must transcend my annual evaluation for teaching and research.

Beyond academic concerns, I must seek balance across other areas of my life. For example, Joe's second research semester with McNair happened just before my wedding. There was a lot happening. In the summer, I was briefly out of town when Joe conducted his initial analyses, and my absence led to the most tangible challenge of our collaboration. The McNair program statistician guided Joe to select a single analytical approach for all of his dependent variables, even if this required him to convert continuous dependent variables into categories. When I returned, I helped Joe successfully navigate our more appropriate analytic procedures, but this challenge would not have emerged had I not taken time for balance in my own life.

For all student collaborators through all of the academic and other challenges in collaborative work, my most important goal is to provide the best fit for research with each student. In my work with Joe, he functioned increasingly as an independent graduate collaborator; other advisees may need more structure, help, and specific direction at each step.

Advantages

The tangible advantages of working with undergraduates vary with the culture of the institution. As noted previously, at universities where student-faculty collaboration is explicitly encouraged, many concrete rewards are available in terms of intra-university grants, emphasis on collaboration with undergraduates in professional evaluations, and potential accolades (see Lind, 2008). At other institutions, tangible rewards remain limited, and the important yet harder to quantify sense of personal fulfillment is the most substantial reinforcement.

At the University of Northern Colorado I have limited opportunities to work with graduate students, and collaboration with undergraduates brings me as close as possible to these experiences, even if my time, administrative encouragement, and the student's time at my institution remain limited. My own research program benefits from the fresh perspectives and energy of undergraduate collaborators, and I learn from being open to the breadth of ideas that adept undergraduate students can bring to my research. Beyond ideological contributions, undergraduate collaborators share responsibility for much of the extensive work required for a high-quality research project. The efforts of undergraduate collaborators can allow faculty members more time to attend to other teaching, research, and service responsibilities. More concretely, undergraduate researchers may have access to funding for research and travel that would otherwise be unavailable to faculty members. Additionally, such collaborations can bring products that may even please administrators, including presentations of high quality research in the peer-reviewed section of regional conventions (e.g., Hamm, Stewart, & Woody, 2007), national conference presentations (e.g., Woody & Thomas, 2002), and potential publications (Semple & Woody, 2007).

Ethics

Faculty members too often expect students to learn ethics "by osmosis" (Handelsman, 1986, p. 371). Undergraduates may receive limited education in ethics of research, and faculty members have responsibilities to address ethical questions explicitly throughout the collaboration (Woody, 2006). Faculty members must address general ethical principles and openly walk undergraduate collaborators through specific decisions and questions that arise in the collaborative research design. For example, although a faculty member may thoroughly understand appropriate uses of deception in research, he or she should explicitly discuss how and why a particular method of deception was chosen and why other options are not appropriate. Faculty members should not assume that undergraduate collaborators are familiar with the role and function of a university Internal Review Board, ethical methods of handling research animals, or the legal and administrative steps required to maintain participants' confidentiality and anonymity while handling data. Explicit consideration of these and other ethical issues will better prepare undergraduate collaborators for future research opportunities as graduate students.

Beyond these concerns about teaching ethics in research, faculty mentors must remain aware of the potential for unethical behavior in collaborative relationships and of long term consequences of unethical treatment of students (Woody, 2004b). Faculty members may benefit from overworking and under-rewarding student collaborators, and in this way faculty members can be reinforced for mistreating undergraduate students in some of the same ways that faculty members can benefit from mistreating graduate students (see Woody, 2004a). In general, we must remain aware of the broad welfare of our students, and we must treat them as individuals with integrity. These concerns drive many specific behaviors and general themes (see Woody, 2006) addressed by the Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (American Psychological Association, 2002). We must be competent in the research area as well as unbiased and fair when we decide with whom we will work and how we will work with each collaborator. We must avoid inappropriate and dual relationships, respect collaborators' confidentiality, and provide them with the opportunity for informed consent regarding the activities of research so that students have appropriate expectations about time commitments, responsibilities, and our standards. We must appropriately discuss publication and presentation credit very early in the collaboration (American Psychological Association, 2002), and, obviously, we must not appropriate their work for our own benefit. Beyond these formally codified requirements, we must remain aware of their workloads at the university and the ways that university work fits into their larger schedules that may include coursework, familial responsibilities, financial limitations, outside employment, and other activities (Woody, 2004a). Respect for the student as a human being with integrity guides all of these requirements and must inform specific ethical questions not explicitly addressed above.

The collaborative learning relationship forms the heart of the academic process of learning. The student has chosen to endure financial hardship and academic rigor far beyond the typical undergraduate program for the sake of collaborating with a faculty member. This is the model by which Aristotle learned from Plato (Russell, 1945/1967), by which Peter Abelard studied with and surpassed William de Champeaux (Abelard, 1922/1972), and by which G. Stanley Hall studied with William James to earn what some consider the first American Ph.D. in psychology in 1878 (Ross, 1972). As faculty and students compile chapters for this volume, we contribute our experiences to broadening the ways that students can grow. Our responsibilities lie with

the student. The student should have the roots to anchor him or her firmly to the foundations of research in psychological science, and the student should have the wings to fly far beyond our collaboration. We succeed when our students extend our work and our discipline beyond our own contributions (Woody, 2006).

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