CURL Fellowships Mentoring Guide

This document is a guide for CURL Student Fellows and Faculty Mentors. It is intended to help students and faculty navigate the collaborative research experience. The information provided here are "best practice" suggestions for developing a positive research collaboration.

1. **Set goals, expectations, and a timeline**

CURL recommends that Student Fellows and Faculty Mentors hold an initial meeting before the project formally begins to clearly establish:

- **A timeline for the project.** Typically, CURL Fellowships are completed within a year of the award, including time for sharing research outcomes at a CURL conference. This timeline is flexible and can be adapted to suit the needs of the individual student and research project.
- **Goals for the project.** These can be goals specifically related to the project, or goals related to learning outcomes or personal growth. In developing your goals for the project in your initial meeting, and as you adapt your goals throughout the process, consider keeping in mind the S.M.A.R.T. principles of goal setting: specific (simple, sensible, significant), measurable (meaningful, motivating), achievable (agreed, attainable), relevant (reasonable, realistic and resourced, results-based) and time bound (time-based, time-sensitive).
- **Expectations for both the student and faculty mentor.** This is a partnership, and thus both sides should have some say in how they want the roles to be defined. For example, students can share in this meeting what it is they would like to see from their mentors; do they want them to be more hands-on or hands-off on certain aspects of the project? Mentors can similarly share their thoughts surrounding their expectations for the student's role in the project, e.g. how much of it is student-led?

2. **Establish regular meetings**

CURL recommends that Student Fellows and Faculty Mentors meet on a regular basis to discuss updates to the project, timeline changes, elements that are working/not working, etc.

- Structured, reoccurring meetings between students and faculty mentors helps to keep both parties informed about the progression of the project, to ensure there is no miscommunication or confusion regarding expectations, and it can also increase students' motivation towards their project.
- Regular meetings also promote the development and maintenance of quality learning experiences by supporting regular engagement from all participants in the learning (Framework for Experiential Learning, Section 4.2).

3. **Reflect through discussion**

CURL recommends that Student Fellows and Faculty Mentors incorporate intentional reflection on the research process into discussions. Reflection helps to promote students' academic skill development, personal growth, as well as feelings of connection to their academic discipline. Reflection questions to consider include:

- How have you practiced academic skills so far in your project?
- What are some challenges you have faced thus far in your research? What solutions are you pursuing?
- What can your mentor do to help you become better connected to the academic discipline you are interested in? What would you like to learn more about?

4. Make use of available resources

CURL encourages Student Fellows and Faculty Mentors to connect with other students and faculty participating in CURL by participating in conversation opportunities and events such as CURL conferences and workshops. Students and faculty can reach out to CURL anytime for support via curl@uwo.ca.

COVID-19 Considerations: Navigating a Virtual Research Collaboration

For health and safety reasons in-person student-faculty meetings are not permitted at this time. CURL recognizes that the current circumstances may make it difficult to meet synchronously via a video call for numerous reasons (e.g. time-zones, reliable internet connection, etc.). Multiple ways of having these discussions virtually are possible:

- Synchronous: traditional phone call or audio-only call through mediums such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype, etc.
- Asynchronous: creating a VoiceThread where both student and mentor complete the evaluation during an agreed upon date(s) and post their thoughts and respond to each other's thoughts there (this can be done through videos, audio only, or typed text)

Students: If you are facing problems or you feel you need to meet with your mentor more often, let them know! It can be particularly tough in an online environment to gauge how a project is progressing, so by reaching out to your mentor when you need more guidance, the two of you can have a conversation to figure out something that works well for both of you.

Faculty Mentors: If you have not heard from your student(s) in a while, check in with them to see where they are at. Especially in an online environment it can be tough to gauge the status of a project and how students are doing; silence could mean the student is progressing fine and has nothing new to report, or it could mean they are stuck and don't know what their next steps are. Checking in can help both ease the stress of the student, and to keep you in the loop.

Both students and mentors: Be understanding and accommodating wherever possible. Recognize that Internet access or access to a computer can sometimes be an issue for meetings. Be flexible with how you communicate, and be open to changing how you communicate (e.g. using a different platform if a member of the partnership is not comfortable using a certain medium)

Further Reading

CURL Student Fellowship Policy and Instructions

Framework for Experiential Learning
- Section 4.2.2: Faculty mentor responsibilities
- Section 4.2.3: Student responsibilities and commitment to professionalism

Improving the Accessibility of Remote Higher Education: Lessons from the Pandemic and Recommendations (HEQCO, 2020)