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Post-pandemic Doctoral Mentoring: A Mentor’s Perspective

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Abstract
Academic mentoring has taken its rightful place alongside teaching for supporting student success. However, mentorship in higher education is complex, contextual, and laborious, as well as under-researched and not consistently recognized. Mentoring by design—focused on developmental learning that can empower and transform participants—embeds perspectives, models or theories, and evidence-supported practices/strategies. Reflection on theory-informed practice can draw lessons for mentoring PhD/EdD learners and improving doctoral environments. In this essay, a faculty mentor’s goal is to describe her philosophical approach to doctoral mentoring relative to work context, perspectives, models, application, outcomes, critical evaluation, and reflective critique. Literature on mentoring in higher education is incorporated from the scholarship of teaching and learning. The paper ends with guidance for post-pandemic doctoral mentoring.

Keywords
assessment, doctoral mentoring, mentoring strategies, post-graduate development, theory/model

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Post-pandemic Doctoral Mentoring: A Mentor’s Perspective

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Academic mentoring has taken its rightful place alongside teaching for supporting student success. However, mentorship in higher education is complex, contextual, and laborious, as well as under-researched and not consistently recognized. Mentoring by design—focused on developmental learning that can empower and transform participants—embeds perspectives, models or theories, and evidence-supported practices/strategies. Reflection on theory-informed practice can draw lessons for mentoring PhD/EdD learners and improving doctoral environments. In this essay, a faculty mentor’s goal is to describe her philosophical approach to doctoral mentoring relative to work context, perspectives, models, application, outcomes, critical evaluation, and reflective critique. Literature on mentoring in higher education is incorporated from the scholarship of teaching and learning. The paper ends with guidance for post-pandemic doctoral mentoring.

OPENING

Arguably academic mentoring has taken its rightful place alongside teaching for supporting student success. However, mentorship in higher education is complex, contextual, and laborious, and it implies the development of pair bonding at an intense level (Mullen, 2013). Mentoring processes in colleges and universities remain under-researched, especially e-mentoring (Tisdell & Shekhawat, 2019), and mentorship is not consistently recognized by institutions (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine [NASEM], 2019). Mentoring by design—focused on developmental learning that can empower and transform participants—embeds perspectives, models or theories, and evidence-supported practices/strategies (Kumar & Coe, 2017; Matthews, 2021; NASEM, 2019; Pollard & Kumar, 2021; Tisdell & Shekhawat, 2019). Reflection on theory-informed practice is paramount in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), where lessons can be drawn for mentoring PhD/EdD learners and improving doctoral environments.

In this essay, I describe my philosophical approach as a faculty mentor relative to work context, perspectives, models, application, outcomes, critical evaluation, and reflective critique. Literature on mentoring in higher education is incorporated from the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). The paper ends with guidance for post-pandemic doctoral mentoring.

As presented, I use a developmental approach to mentoring relationships organized around phases and support based on Kram’s (1983) theory. One key idea is that mentees require both career (instrumental) and psychosocial (relational) support. Another important notion is that mentorships develop in phases: initiation, cultivation, completion, and redefinition. Herein I focus on online mentoring: “E-mentoring is a relationship where technology is employed to enable a more experienced person to act as a guide, role model, teacher, and sponsor of a less experienced person” (Tisdell & Shekhawat, 2019, p. 1). The online mentoring situations I illustrate were partnerships of learning that relied on video-conferencing. Next, I briefly describe my work situation and mentoring record.

ACADEMIC WORKLOAD AND MENTORING COMMITMENT

I am a white, tenured veteran female professor, one of only three tenured doctoral supervisors in my program of educational leadership. My assigned workload is 40% teaching, 40% research, and 20% service. This R1 institution values degree completion; however, high doctoral mentoring loads are not compensated. Confounding dynamics in the pandemic were the addition of doctoral cohorts, faculty transitions (a death resulting in the redistribution of mentees and a new hire), and program review. With the expectation for starting new cohorts (masters and doctoral), mentee distribution is managed by faculty who are already inundated with students.

In addition to an annual 2–2 course load, I teach an advanced course on research and dissertation involving the direct supervision and mentoring of doctoral students. Variable credit hours are generated when mentees register with me as their designated committee chair. Having passed their preliminary exam (a literature review) and been awarded doctoral candidacy status, they move to their prospectus (first three dissertation chapters) and defense of their plan for conducting a study. The research credits earned on a semester basis do not “count” toward a course release. Additionally, I direct mentees at the coursework stage on their goals, tasks, exams, and research. To date, as a doctoral supervisor, I have completed 33 PhD/EdD mentees, typically supervising 12 to 17 mentees each year: 7 graduated in 2022; 2 in 2021, and 9 in 2020. (In 2023, up to six mentees will complete their degree.) Thus far I have directed 80 dissertations (33 as supervisor, 48 as member).

My intent is to guide doctoral students in becoming scholars—practitioners capable of leading in challenging times and navigating rapid changes in education. As documented in pandemic studies of mentoring (Mullen, 2022; Geesa et al., 2022; Lasater et al., 2021), COVID-19 dramatically affected mentoring—faculty were responsible for transitioning online and there was little guidance from research and institutions for supporting students and the disruption to their trajectory. Support was needed for mentees who were experiencing challenges to their career, health, and well-being while abiding by institutional mandates to halt or change dissertation plans. With my guidance, mentees not only navigated changes in policies but also reimagined their data collection plans. While mentoring students I keep in mind seven goals: (1) inspire, cultivate mentoring, and create conditions of learning; (2) prepare mentees for leadership positions and higher education teaching; (3) develop dissertation research, knowledge, and skills; (4) personalize the program with individualized supports;
(5) advocate for students from different backgrounds; (6) foster co-curricular and postgraduate development; and (7) promote mentees’ growth and satisfaction.

Culturally responsive and sensitive mentoring is reflected in my relationships with students from diverse backgrounds. Support of diversity is highlighted by NASEM (2019) and mentorship serves as one solution to underrepresentation of certain segments of society. Thirty percent of my program’s population is from marginalized groups, primarily African American.

My mentoring accolades include a university award for excellence in technology-assisted teaching and learning, supported with grants. I earned quality-assurance credentials in online pedagogy, having completed four semesters of professional development in adapting graduate curriculum for remote delivery. My goal was to better utilize teleconferencing in my mentoring sessions (see Tisdell & Shekhawat, 2019). Effectiveness and success in mentoring have attracted another six awards from universities and professional associations. “Mastery” in teaching and mentoring was recognized, and another award honored mentorship of the next generation.

MENTORING PERSPECTIVE AND MODELS
Concentrating efforts in curricular and post-graduate development, I passionately develop mentees and alumni, respectively, through applied scholastic activity within communities. My productivity directly benefits scholars and practitioners in that I include many students and alumni in publications, presentations, and leadership and service roles. Moreover, my philosophical approach to graduate mentoring in educational leadership is tailored to each person and their goals. I view the mentor and mentee as partners who are mutually responsible for the success of learning, as well as the relationship itself. As recognized in studies of mentoring that include mentee perspectives (Mullen, 2022; Bristol et al., 2014; Seery et al., 2021), arguments for positioning students as partners in mentoring relate to the need to engage them in co-constructing learning, negotiating ideas, sharing responsibility, expressing emotions, managing challenges, reflecting on practice, and contributing knowledge. Such relationships exist to empower students through collaborative, relational learning.

The startling onset of COVID-19 called for an educational “first-responder role” so mentees could stay on track with their program. Given the unprecedented nature of this crisis, I needed to reimagine how to effectively support each mentee. The enormous hurdles demanded vigorous online mentoring to support retention, quality academic work, and psychosocial and career benefits.

COVID-19 DYADIC ONLINE MENTORING INTERVENTION
Accordingly, in spring 2020, I created the COVID-19 Dyadic Online Mentoring Intervention (C-19 DOMI). Strategies from the distance mentoring literature that dissertation candidates had perceived as important were built into my process: accessibility, care, feedback, integration into the profession, personalized guidance, and role modeling (Kumar & Coe, 2017; Pollard & Kumar, 2021). The visual depiction (Figure 1) is followed by a narrative of this cyclical model’s five elements: phases and support, delivery steps, online strategies, reflective assessment, and mentor improvements.

PHASES AND SUPPORT
For years prior to implementing my pedagogical model (C-19 DOMI), I dedicated myself to intentionally mentoring in phases supportive of mentee development and goals.

Initiation phase
Students take courses while adapting to the higher education culture (Matthews, 2021; Tinto, 1994). Doctoral mentees in my cohort program are matched with or choose a mentor. Getting to know my online mentees involves relationship building one-on-one and in groups. Because they are part-time graduate students employed as school practitioners, these contacts often occur outside business hours. Given their busyness and the long driving distance to the university, fully remote mentoring has continued.

In my mentoring sessions, career, psychosocial, and academic supports are activated. Understanding and trust are forged, with communications ongoing, and expectations, procedures, and program steps explained. Goal-setting and dialogue concern the dissertation process. Research topics are “digested” relative to each mentee’s invested interest. Values like reciprocity, transparency, attachment/partnership, responsibility, care, and fellowship are conveyed. Sensitivity to vulnerabilities has import for mentees, perhaps especially ethnic groups and females (Zhou, 2022). Paying attention to these values and vulnerabilities has deepened relationships.

Cultivation phase
My mentees generally complete the program within 3 years. During cultivation, they come to identify as scholar–practitioner and develop research ability (Matthews, 2021). Many also engage in post-graduate development, reaching new milestones. These maturities resonate with Tinto’s (1994) model of doctoral progress: transition, development, and research.

In this most demanding phase of mentoring, processes intensify. Occurring with greater regularity, meetings and interactions focus on problem-solving in areas of greatest interest/need, such as designing the methodological components of a dissertation.
Decision-making involves understanding the research literature, methods, and course content relative to one’s own study, thus intellectual processes need to be modeled in relatable ways. Besides working individually with mentees, I offer interactive tutorials demonstrating such skills as data management and analysis.

The intensification of mentoring in this phase becomes evident as challenges move from course content—with the literature review and research methods posing difficulty—to exam preparation and independent research. Empathy is a pathway for connecting and expressing compassion with my mentees navigating both school leadership and family duties. Students place stock in my mentor being empathetic in our sense of care, duty, and responsibility (Zhou, 2022). One of my mentees who had experienced personal loss submitted this note to the SoTL center on my campus: “My mentor shows empathy and understanding. When my sister passed unexpectedly, she reached out with the kindest words and helped me climb back up and resume my studies.”

Empowerment is another dynamic in my mentoring—feeling valued, welcomed, and accepted, these adult learners can work independently. To build their confidence, competence, and sense of belonging, I socialize them into cohort cultures and professional networks. For our mentoring sessions, they are encouraged to bring dilemmas, agendas, and questions. Throughout these experiences, I clarify expectations, answer/ask questions, set goals, analyze writing, utilize resources, engage in respectful communication, monitor issues, model reflective feedback, raise ethical dilemmas, describe research ethics and procedures, and celebrate milestones. Mentees who are programmatically ahead are tapped to share experiences. Some lecture in my classes on how they learned, areas of struggle and breakthrough, committee feedback, impressions, and plans. Their listeners (other students) express curiosity, including about committee questions and recommendations. Vital to academic progress and persistence is a sense of belonging (Matthews, 2021), especially in online and hybrid doctoral programs, so I ensure peer modeling and interactive learning on timely topics within networks.

Consistent with graduate mentors’ recommendations (e.g., Wagner et al., 2016), I promptly provide feedback, maintain a constructive attitude, and build a climate of recognition that keeps mentees motivated. They transform into critical thinkers, peer leaders, and creative problem-solvers. A mentee of mine acknowledged mentoring approaches in this message: “My mentor provided me with university teaching experience and a committee with STEM and disability experts. During her ‘mentoring days’ through Zoom, I enjoyed hours of personal attention, especially with my methods and pandemic adjustments to protocols.”

Separation phase

In Kram’s (1983) model, separation from mentoring relationships naturally result from a goal-oriented endpoint like graduation, when the need for assistance and communications fades. But in my experience, graduates also have specific needs, so I support their career moves, provide psychosocial encouragement, and extend growth opportunities.

Redefinition phase

While the mentor–mentee relationship is no longer needed, a partnership emerges with its own distinct goals and rewards. Complex work is undertaken as colleagues that demonstrates scholarly rigor; awareness of one’s audience, and contribution to theory and practice. Researcher identity deepens as alumni gain experience of collaborative scholarship and entry into extramural networks. These newly minted doctors are provided with (more) national and international opportunities to learn, often alongside me. They meet people on the conference circuit; present as pairs and groups; and enter the publishing world. I guide our collaborative presentations and publications, write proposals and manuscripts, and pave our contributions with professional associations and publishers. During long teleconferencing sessions, my collaborating mentees and I address review feedback on a work from a publisher that ignites brainstorming and a co-constructed response. Dissertation research is presented in this phase, afterward serving as the basis of a journal article, book chapter, or book. One collaborator commented, “Although Dr. Mullen could have invited esteemed colleagues to publish, she coached me through the stages, and the expected rigor and quality. Two of our articles were published, then I was put in the lead for our 2021 article.”

MENTEE MILESTONES

From 2022 into 2023, numerous instances of fruitful scholarly collaboration with my graduated mentees transpired. We have published journal articles on emergency remote teaching; leadership impact in Title I schools, pedagogical strategies for students with disabilities, peer group mentoring, the charter school movement, and more. One of my mentee collaborators even co-presented my keynote address at an international conference in January 2023. All such opportunities foster growth and visibility. Mentees’ testimonials are evidence of excellence in academic mentoring in and beyond the degree program, as demonstrated by conference presentations, publications, and promotions that enrich the field. Mentee milestones (Table 1) have been credited by NASEM’s (2019) consensus study as “deliverables” that act on the promise of mentoring commitments.

Delivery Steps

The C-19 DOMI’s six steps—invitation, commitment, preparation, process, exercise, and methods—are each briefly described.

Invitation (Step 1)

All 19 of my doctoral candidate mentees agreed to partake in the working sessions. A graduate assistant initiated communications to avoid compulsory participation.

Commitment (Step 2)

Scheduling online synchronous one-to-one sessions (plus emails/text messaging/phone calls) depended on preferences. Creatively adapting technology facilitated progress and met immediate goals. New goals were set in concert with successful defenses. Career transitions and preparations were discussed. Scholarly publication and conference presentation interested most mentees. While Zoom sessions were set for 1 hour, some lasted much longer. The tasks were consuming, yet research dissemination also resulted. A few mentees were promoted at work.
Preparation (Step 3)
Academic preparation was expected, but they varied in their readiness for our sessions. When they were not prepared, I responded on the spot. I replied to their documents using tracking features and commented via Zoom and email, locating materials for reference and brainstorming.

Process (Step 4)
Schedules were updated as mentees confirmed their availability. Teleconferencing consultations allowed for real-time exchanges on video. Software features were used to document/archive key information, clarify meaning, promote understanding, and mobilize progress. We took advantage of software tools for showing files and working on drafts. I forwarded marked-up copies for reflective follow-through and recorded meetings. Mentees appreciated a one-page snapshot of their proposal and the conversational approach to writing in files.

Exercise (Step 5)
Mentees also completed the C-19 DOMI reflection exercise to gauge perceptions of, and feedback on, the intervention and reliance on technology in a crisis. The activity, completed after an exam, addressed experiences, challenges, and goals. (A third party removed identifiers from responses.)

Methods (Step 6)
Processes were presented for championing student growth, success, and research, preferably on social justice issues.

ONLINE STRATEGIES
As previously noted, important strategies of mentoring should consider context, such as program and discipline (Kumar & Coe, 2017; Lasater et al., 2021; NASEM, 2019; Pollard & Kumar, 2021). Accordingly, the individualized attention I gave recognized the demands on mentees as leaders also responsible for child and/or elder care.

Ten mentoring strategies developed and enhanced the C-19 DOMI’s dyads. As documented in Mullen (2022), my online mentees reported certain strategies as particularly encouraging and effective: “mentor feedback,” “availability,” “attention,” “individualized sessions,” “scheduled appointments,” “progressive challenges,” “technological efficiency,” “Zoom interaction,” “diagnostic writing assignments,” and “scholarly development.”

Reflective Assessment
Mentees completed a reflection exercise to assess C-19 DOMI’s effectiveness. Eighteen questions were categorically organized: Program Status; Learning Preference and Experience; Conversational Support and Feedback; Obstacles and Context; Progress and Context; and Commentary (Mullen, 2022). Items were partially derived from the University of California’s (2017) Graduate Student Well-Being Survey. Perceptions were that the C-19 DOMI had supported learning, progress, and success, and that the e-mentoring was student-centered and culturally responsive.

The C-19 DOMI is among the few mentoring models that have been assessed from the mentee’s perspective. It can be adapted for use in other settings, and the steps, strategies, and questions are detailed in an empirical article (i.e., Mullen, 2022). Another assessment of mentoring is the Global Measure of Mentorship Practices, which NASEM (2019) recommended subsequent to use for measuring psychosocial and career support specific to postsecondary mentees’ experiences.

Directives for instructors to shift courses completely online and alter their research methodologies in the pandemic were not necessarily forthcoming for faculty mentors and their work. Even though accountabilities for mentoring encompass university campus leaders (Johnson, 2016), mentors may find themselves working alone with mentees and faculty committees, being self-reliant while making the most of online technologies and their instructional capacity. Because there was no need to wait for institutional support, I created a research-informed solution (C-19 DOMI) for leveraging dyadic mentoring, sponsoring mentees, and navigating institutional disruption.

A related complexity is that doctoral candidacy is a time when students are expected to work independently on their dissertations, vetting ideas with mentors and peers. An emer-

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**Table 1. Mentee Milestones—Research, Career, and Program (2020–March 2023)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Milestones Reached by Mentees (N = 19)</th>
<th>Productivity Counts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RESEARCH MILESTONES</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publications with mentor (n = 16)</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal articles (peer-reviewed)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books (peer-reviewed)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book chapters (peer-reviewed)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference proceedings</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference presentations with mentor (n = 9)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International 2023 virtual (n = 1)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National 2023 (n = 1)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International 2022 virtual (n = 1)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National 2022 virtual and in-person (n = 8)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National 2021 (n = 6)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional 2022 virtual (n = 8)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional 2021 virtual (n = 1)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National 201 virtual (n = 4)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International 2020 virtual (n = 3)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National 2020 virtual (n = 6)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International 2020 virtual (n = 1)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposals under review for presentation (n = 1)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National in-person 2023</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship grants (funded) (n = 5)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissertations under award consideration (n = 3)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CAREER MILESTONES</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National program coordinator 2020–2022 (n = 1)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjunct instructor, not at alma mater (n = 1)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divisional chief of staff (n = 1)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant superintendent (n = 1)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Education specialist (n = 1)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central office administrator (n = 2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal of a school (n = 6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PROGRAM MILESTONES</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approved IRB application (n = 19)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entered candidacy (research and dissertation hours) after exam; proposals defended (n = 18)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation after prospectus/final defense (n = 18)</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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gency-response mentoring intervention (like the C-19 DOMI) could summon handholding. A help-centric style may not always be welcomed, even when candidates need guidance. Another complicating factor is that research universities’ weighty expectations can render mentoring an afterthought. Mentoring consumes energy and demands problem-solving, and the effort may not be remunerated. Yet responsive candidates benefit and quality e-mentoring can serve as a lifeline.

MENTOR IMPROVEMENTS

I continue to use the same online mentoring strategies and monitor individual mentee progress to identify disruptions to productivity (emotional overwhelm, etc.). Breaking down tasks into smaller units and providing specific feedback are key. Notably, the structures I create for co-curricular and post-graduate development, well-being, success, and impact as leaders extend beyond degree programs. The success of these efforts is evident in the milestones reached and a high mentee completion rate, demonstrating measurably positive outcomes (Table 1 herein; Mullen, 2022).

Tracking mentee outcomes even more closely and reporting these is an overall improvement. Revising the C-19 DOMI’s structure, processes, and assessment is ongoing, with finely tuned elements in play. For instance, the new category Peer Mentoring and Modeling of the reflection exercise contains such added items as: What value might peer mentoring and doctoral groups have to your outlook, development, and progress? I also acknowledge that not every mentoring relationship is healthy and successful, which can lead to a new match for some mentees.

I have reached out to stalled mentees to revisit their academic plans so they can commit and become invigorated. Besides more regular contact and constant encouragement, I have held honest conversations about my expectations and theirs, prompting reflection on writing habits. We brainstorm possible solutions, focusing on productivity (emotional overwhelm, etc.). Breaking down tasks can profoundly impact mentees. Mentoring relationships cannot be limits to experiencing dynamic campus cultures in online doctoral worlds, including the cohort culture. Networks, interactions, events, friendships, and inclusivity on physical campuses can profoundly impact mentees. Mentoring relationships cannot substitute for an entire ecosystem.

Other recent improvements involve sharing the C-19 DOMI with colleagues and at conferences. In my academic program, we consider the mentoring norms implicit in our work, inviting leaders’ tips on managing heavy student loads in a culture of diminishing faculty numbers.

CRITICAL EVALUATION

Guidance for post-pandemic doctoral mentorship is sorely needed, notably the assessment of mentoring practice that includes participants’ perception, which constitutes a knowledge gap (NASEM, 2019). Also, assessments from institutions and programs could benefit from better alignment with mentoring theories and lived experiences (NASEM, 2019). Pre-pandemic, attrition as high as 50% plagued US doctoral programs, largely owing to inadequate mentoring (Jameson & Torres, 2019). A University of California (2017) study reported that students in candidacy (n = 144) found their mentors less supportive over time. With doctoral candidates embarking on dissertation research while employed, COVID-19 amplified their vulnerability to fading support. But productively bridging threats in dissertation environments has been managed and thus is possible (Mullen, 2022; Geesa et al., 2022; Lasater et al., 2021).

A well-supported list of recommendations for guiding post-pandemic mentoring includes theory-informed, research-based models of mentorship. Models have been applied and assessed, including Mullen’s (2022) C-19 DOMI and Tisdell and Shekhawat’s (2019) Discuss, Archive, Reflect, and Prepare (or DARP), both of which worked locally for the creators. The idea is to assess mentees’ views of each strategy used, not just evaluate the strategies more globally (NASEM, 2019).

Jones (2018) identified success, interest, and caring strategies based on a study of motivation in classes with university students. While mentorship and motivation are distinct theories, the motivation to learn and capacity to regulate one’s learning is also a root idea of mentorship (Mullen, 2013). These three instructional strategies, then, are broad enough to apply to doctoral mentoring practices named in studies of academic mentorship (e.g., Mullen, 2022; Kumar & Coe, 2017; Lasater et al., 2021; Matthews, 2021; NASEM, 2019; Pollard & Kumar, 2021). Jones’s (2018) success strategies include explicit expectations, appropriate difficulty, supporting success, focus on effort, and specific feedback, whereas interest strategies are curiosity, arousal, attention, and individual interest. Caring strategies include helping students fit in, respecting and accommodating them, being approachable and relatable, and caring about achievement.

REFLECTIVE CRITIQUE

With regard to reflections on post-pandemic mentoring, an indication is that quality remote mentoring can be just as effective as in person (see Pollard & Kumar, 2021). However, there may be limits to experiencing dynamic campus cultures in online doctoral worlds, including the cohort culture. Networks, interactions, events, friendships, and inclusivity on physical campuses can profoundly impact mentees. Mentoring relationships cannot substitute for an entire ecosystem.

Although institutions depend on online mentorship, labor can be invisible (Mullen, 2022). In the pandemic, many faculty mentors may not have benefitted from much support, recognition, or compensation, yet positive mentoring influences student recruitment, progress, persistence, and completion (Matthews, 2021), as well as strengthens and diversifies professions. Despite the best intentions, not all mentees will have gained from their mentor. An experience of institutional life that is unfulfilling could have an effect on their persistence and retention (Mullen, 2022).

Further action that can potentially fully compensate faculty doctoral mentoring as a professional endeavor warrants incentives on a broader scale. Additionally, championing culturally responsive mentoring and successful matches provide direction (NASEM, 2019). Policy guidelines that recognize the hidden work of mentoring and support diversity and inclusion could be impactful. Institutions can enlist faculty to shape sound mentoring policy, affirm expertise, and recognize mentoring (Mullen, 2022).
More research on the e-mentoring of doctoral students in current times is encouraged, extending beyond programs to post-graduate development. How faculty guide mentees and alumni, and grapple with challenges to success and well-being, is compelling. Mentoring models like Kram’s (1983) and Tinto’s (1994)—and my C-19 DOMI (Mullen, 2022)—in light of NASEM’s (2019) assessments have all been shown to facilitate mentee learning. However, it may be reasserting that assessment of mentoring deserves attention, and that an essential task of post-pandemic review is to produce deeper insight into experiences (NASEM, 2019). In concert with C-19 DOMI’s breakthroughs, as explained by NASEM, mentees’ milestones serve to measure mentoring successes and, to this end, obstacles to these relationships must be overcome.

Post-pandemic mentoring also needs to be considered in the context of organizational change. Formal recognition of faculty mentoring with associated incentives seems timely with the increase in workloads and the importance of mentoring support and inclusive cultures (Mullen, 2022). The C-19 DOMI requires constant energy to maintain, given that it is an informal program developed by a single faculty mentor. Similar barriers NASEM (2019) illuminated are (1) mentors’ view that their mentoring relationships do not need improvement; (2) mentoring norms that are not aligned with research, evidence, or inclusive practices; (3) mentees’ sole responsibility for the quality and outcomes of mentoring; and (4) lack of mentoring commitments at various institutional levels.

CONCLUSION
Finally, remote mentoring has the potential to foster graduate student success and positive outcomes. Organizational support of doctoral mentoring should promote not only the persistence and completion of diverse groups but also their contributions. In this sense, institutional excellence parallels excellence in mentorship. Creating a support structure that enables faculty mentors to mentor in hard times and respond to trends and needs is a direction for institutions. Post-pandemic mentoring could also benefit from the SoTL and assessments that give direction to this work.

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