

STEM Case Study: "You're Happy With My Work"

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Focus: How to establish a common understanding between you and your mentee of the boundaries, terms, structure and goals of the mentoring relationships.

- Recognize the expectations of the mentee in the mentoring relationship.
- Clearly communicate expectations for the mentoring relationships.
- Align (re-align) mentee and mentor expectations.

CASE NARRATIVE:

A new student joined my lab nine months ago. As with all of my students, this student and I work from a development plan and update progress quarterly. At the first quarterly update, I gave the student feedback on three things that were going well and three things that could be improved, which is my standard practice. The latter included being more prepared for lab meetings, asking for help to minimize wasting supplies, and how to format data for presentations.

At the second update, the student began by saying, "Things are going well." I said I agreed except, "You seem to be confused at lab meetings, you need to do a better job asking for help, and you're not using our standard format for presenting data."

Our third quarterly update is happening now. To prepare I've talked with two postdocs about how the student is doing. They tell me they're frustrated because the student isn't engaged at lab meetings, makes a lot of mistakes that waste scarce supplies, and data is often disorganized.

As the meeting starts, the student says, "This is a great place for me. I feel I'm making friends and I really fit in. I'm challenged by the work, it's really interesting and everyone keeps telling me how happy they are with my work."

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

What are the main themes raised in this case study?

What kind of conversations regarding expectations might have been more helpful in this relationship?

What kind of conversations would be helpful to understand whether the student will be successful?

Who should be involved in these conversations?