MENTORING STATEMENT

Mentorship is a strong component of any graduate training program. When I was admitted to the doctoral program in counseling psychology at the University of Florida, I was assigned to work with Dr. Bonnie Moradi, who has served not only as my official advisor these past few years, but she has also been an incredible mentor to me. Her unwavering support and guidance through my training thus far has been instrumental in my personal and professional growth and development. Furthermore, during my time at UF, I have also felt incredibly fortunate to have a number of students further along in my program reach out to me. These students took the initiative in getting to know me and have helped me seek out professional opportunities. Furthermore, these other students have helped to guide me through the program, providing support and encouragement in the moments where I have struggled or have been unsure. It is through my experiences with these extraordinary individuals that my own belief in and commitment to mentoring has been fueled.

In a society that rewards and celebrates individualism, I believe it is easy to lose sight of the importance and profound impact of mentoring. In my own experiences of being both mentored and being in a mentor role, I have come to believe that at the heart of successful mentoring is connection. Not only can mentors provide guidance and support during periods of transition as well as through more stable times, they can also influence the ways in which people are able to grow and develop. Mentors can offer those with whom they work the opportunity to be seen, to risk but also trust, and to know that who they are is worth investing in. As Maya Angelou once said, “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” It is this understanding of the nature of mentoring that guides my own efforts in reaching out and connecting with others.

When the opportunity to serve as a peer mentor to incoming first year students arose at the beginning of my second year in my training program, I eagerly jumped on the opportunity. I was matched with Engin Ege, a student whose advisor in the program was different than my own. I contacted Engin to meet to discuss her transition to graduate school and to answer any questions she might have in those first few weeks. During that first meeting, Engin also identified a desire to serve in leadership roles at both local and national levels. As a result, as I have become aware of opportunities, I have communicated those opportunities to her and encouraged her to apply. For example, in May of this last year, the American Psychological Association of Graduate Students (APAGS) was accepting applications for training grants for psychology student organizations. Recognizing that this presented an opportunity for professional development, particularly related to both leadership and grant-writing, I asked Engin if she would be interested in collaborating with me to apply for the training grant for the Department of Psychology’s Diversity Affirmation and Awareness Committee (DAAC). Working together, our efforts culminated in being awarded the grant. Furthermore, after serving as the DAAC committee chair this past year, I encouraged Engin to run for election and she was subsequently unanimously elected. There is nothing more rewarding for me than
seeing Engin succeed in her work here at UF. Since starting at UF, Engin has been actively involved at every level of our training program, seeking out opportunities for herself in research, teaching, and clinical work. Earlier this summer, Engin’s advisor left our program to join the faculty at another university, and Engin was left to make choices for herself about the remainder of her time at UF. I have tried to serve as a source of support for Engin during this time, checking in with her at various points along the way to ensure that she was taking the steps that she needed to logistically to find a new advisor, but also giving her space to process her own reactions to her advisor’s departure. And though Engin has struggled – and rightly so – with the loss of her advisor after only her second year in a doctoral program, she has been able to find support for herself, and to establish relationships with other faculty in order to seek out continued mentorship and advising support. Through my experiences in serving as a peer mentor to Engin, I have discovered just how much I find being in that role as rewarding and fulfilling for me. As a result, I have tried to also be mindful of other students with whom I am not officially paired, seeking out opportunities to make connections with them as well.

Beyond peer mentoring relationships with other students in my graduate training program, I am also committed to furthering mentoring at an institutional and national level. Earlier this semester, I was asked to work with Pride Student Union (PSU) at UF to lead a training workshop on peer mentoring, particularly related to ethics concerning peer mentoring roles and relationships. It was an exciting opportunity for me to apply my own training and personal experiences to leading such a workshop, as well as an excellent opportunity to build professional relationships with student organizations on campus. At a national level, I am currently beginning my second year as a committee member on the APAGS Committee for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns (CLGBTC). The APAGS-CLGBTC offers a mentoring program for LGBT graduate students, pairing interested graduate students with faculty from other institutions. As a result, this mentoring program fosters networking, support, and mentorship relationships for LGBT psychology graduate students across the nation. Therefore, in my role as the Mentoring Program Ambassador, I facilitate monthly discussions between mentees and mentors, and also host quarterly large-group conference calls, where mentees and mentors are encouraged to connect with other mentor pairings in order to further their networking support.

Taken together, my experiences as a peer mentor have been richly rewarding for me. I consider it an honor to share in the experiences of other students in my program - to offer guidance and support when needed, and at all other times, the opportunity to grow in confidence in themselves. Finally, beyond my experiences with mentoring at a personal level, I have also had the opportunity to foster mentoring relationships among others across the nation, an opportunity that I feel extremely honored to be a part of and to help facilitate.