Mentoring Statement

My first experience with a mentor occurred during my sophomore year of college. I took *Introduction to Primatology* and was immediately captivated by the professor. She was an engaging lecturer and sincerely cared about her students. I decided during that first week of class this was the woman I wanted to mentor me. It is fourteen years later and she continues to be an invaluable resource as I finish my doctorate and apply for teaching positions at small liberal arts colleges. Her advice and guidance has helped shape the scientist, educator, and mentor I have become today.

As a mentor I strive to build capacity, confidence, and compassion in my mentees. My role as a mentor is to provide an environment where mentees feel respected and recognize their personal responsibility in their professional and academic development. As a linguistic and interpersonal learner mentoring allows me to connect and share my insight with mentees; serving as a guide rather than a director as they travel along their career path. As one of my UF undergraduate mentee’s stated, “… her mentoring style is encouraging without being pushy; Carrie opened me up to new ideas and opportunities without ever making me feel pressured into doing something or trying to sway my decision.”

While conducting my research in Nigeria I had the opportunity to mentor an undergraduate at the University of Ibadan and a graduate student at the University of Lagos. These students often did not have access to career advice or current journal articles to use in their research. I viewed this as an opportunity for me to help fellow up and coming scientists. My undergraduate mentee noted, “Carrie is a good listener, welcoming and has exceptionally unique mentoring quality’s which has, overtime, impacted positively in my professional career. For example I joined an organization called International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) as a volunteer just as Carrie had advised and today I am working as paid staff in this organization.” The graduate mentee commented, “… she has been of tremendous help; she shared ideas to help me with my collection of mona monkey vocalizations- even forwarded me two data collection formats- and she sent me articles that my university did not have access to so I could be up to date on the literature.” I continue to be involved with both of these individuals and provide assistance through editing proposal drafts and suggestions related to research methods.

Beyond serving as a research mentor I also advise undergraduates that work for me as tutors at the University of Florida Teaching Center. In this mentoring role I develop their professional behavior in the workplace and offer career guidance for life after college. One tutor stated, “Carrie always goes the extra mile. I’ve occasionally occupied the gray space between one and another measure of professional behavior, and Carrie always kindly offers how I might handle a similar situation in the future. Indeed, I never feel like any of my interactions with Carrie are punitive. Rather, the focus, when there is a problem, is on generating solutions, discerning what can be learned, and fostering the kind of mentor-mentee relationship that sustains itself. The result is Carrie’s open-door policy, the best kind since I’m really inclined to talk to her when I have a work-related concern or need academic advice.” Another tutor commented, “When I was applying to graduate programs Carrie was helpful in giving me insight about how to pick academic programs and schools and how graduate life differs from undergraduate life.”

As an instructor I want to excite my students and encourage them to find their passion. My lessons often include personal stories related to the content, self-deprecating humor, and unplanned puns. Research has found that humor in educational settings serves a variety of positive functions and this is mirrored by one of my students comments that, “Carrie had a great sense of humor that always kept a smile on every student’s face . . . a great balance of intelligence and humor were mixed in her lectures, so that when a
student would try to recollect a particular topic taught in class, it would be easy for them to recall that information by remembering her witty comments. One of the key ways I build a connection with my students is by learning all of their names on the first day of class. This extra effort does not go unnoticed as one student stated, “Carrie called on everyone by their first name, and made each student feel like they actually belonged in the class”. Another student commented that, “…the blatant professor/student division I have come to expect in the university system was nonexistent. She was highly approachable and genuinely interested in the students”. Beyond set office hours I have an open door policy and encourage students to see me whenever they wish. A student stated, “Carrie’s willingness to have conversations with her students makes it easy for students to approach her. Whether it is during class, after class, or outside of class, she is always happy and willing to talk and elaborate on things that they may not understand”.

One of the most rewarding activities I have participated in has been my role as a supplemental instructor for at risk athletes. These students are often academically challenged or lack motivation in a classroom setting. In order to reach these students I often have to “think outside the box”, encourage them to believe that they are more than just “jocks” and help them understand that admitting you don’t know something is a key step in the learning process. One of the athletes said, “I made Carrie’s life miserable. I was late to tutoring; instead of checking in with her each class, I made her find me in a large lecture class; I had a bad attitude. Carrie never flinched. She was not judgmental instead, she was cool. She was patient with my immaturity, and forgiving of my childishness. I was impressed by how generous she was with her time and how sensitive she was with me and the other student athletes. She never got frustrated or flustered; she always had a smile on her face. More importantly, I was motivated by the passion she had for teaching. It struck me that she loved teaching as much as all the athletes liked their respective sports. After a while, her tutoring sessions became a ‘safe’ place for me. I could talk with her about things that were not always related to the class.” Witnessing these students take pride in their academic work and seeing their face light up when they get a good grade is amazing.

This year I began formally mentoring with the University Minority Mentoring Program and mentor two incoming freshman in the biology department. In this position I consider myself more of a “big sister” and offer both academic and personal support. I meet up with them individually each month but we often text or email about little things. Our conversations often revolve around the pressure they feel to succeed in their course work and how life away from home is exciting but terrifying. To reduce their stress levels I inform them of the different on-campus resources available but mostly I just sit and listen and provide advice when needed. Often what they need is a sounding board and I am happy to fill that role.

As an experienced graduate student and educator I often serve as a resource to my peers. Multiple students in the Masters of Development Practice program asked me for help in finding contacts for their summer practicum. I was able to connect one student with an organization in Uganda and another with contacts in South Africa. First time teaching assistants often seek my advice on how to deal with problem students, how to improve their teaching and techniques for proper time management in regards to grading. Providing my peers with solutions that will make their graduate experience easier is very important to me.

Mentoring is one of the most important contributions individuals can make to the lives of others. I have found that each mentee and mentoring situation provides new challenges and opportunities for my own learning and growth as a mentor. I aspire to leave a legacy of mentoring where my mentee’s will become mentors and continue a tradition of service. I hope that in fourteen years I will still be in touch with my mentees and offering them praise for their personal and professional achievements.