

2023 Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) Graduate Symposium
Panel Discussion Key Takeaways

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Within the FAIM (Faculty Advancing Inclusive Mentoring) framework, inclusive mentorship is defined as a co-constructed and reciprocal relationship between a mentor and mentee who take a strengths-based and identity-informed approach to work together to support their mutual growth, development, and success (NASEM, 2017 and S. Windchief, 2019).

During the panel discussion, panelists responded to questions from the audience and covered topics such as imposter syndrome, how to incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion into mentorship, finding communities, dealing with failures, the importance of sharing personal difficulties, handling burnouts, and understanding the expectations mentors and mentees have for one another. Panelists also shared their own mentorship experiences. Below are key takeaways from the discussion.

What is Imposter Syndrome and where does it stem from?

- How does it fit in to this topic of mentorship?
- Imposter Syndrome is common, especially at high-achieving institutions like Cornell University. Feelings of Imposter Syndrome can include feeling like you got lucky with your achievements, not attributing your success to your own skills and dedication, overachieving, self-doubting, and also can be coupled with symptoms of anxiety and depression.
- Imposter Syndrome can stem from a multitude of dynamics, including but not limited to family dynamics, social anxiety, self-esteem, and societal norms or stereotypes. Imposter syndrome affects the individual due to ingrained internal beliefs that have stemmed from cultural and societal messaging.
- Imposter Syndrome can more greatly affect individuals of historically underrepresented identities in academia and those who may be at the intersection of multiple underrepresented identities.

How do you handle moments of self-doubt or imposter syndrome, either from the student's or the mentor's point of view?

- For mentees, successfully handling moments of self-doubt and Imposter Syndrome can include:
 - Understanding that external factors in your life have influenced your internal beliefs. To better understand this, reflect on what core beliefs you may hold about yourself and why. It can be helpful to critically evaluate the answer to these questions to begin to shift away from ingrained internal beliefs that cause self-doubt.

- Discussing your thoughts and feelings with a trusted mentor. Imposter Syndrome is very common in academic settings and your mentor may have helpful advice for combating these difficult feelings.
- For mentors, successfully aiding a mentee through self-doubt and Imposter Syndrome can include:
 - Understanding that drive and motivation can manifest in different ways for different people.
 - Ensuring that you understand the best ways in which your mentees work successfully.
 - Not making assumptions based on initial or superficial interactions; taking the time to fully understand your mentee's working style and perspective.

How do you incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) into mentorship?

- Uplifting diversity, striving for equity, and ensuring the inclusion of all individuals is extremely important in creating a positive and encouraging environment for learning and growth.
- Specifically in mentorship relationships, leaning into DEI can help educate both the mentor and mentee, and ensure that any external influence on a mentee's feelings of Imposter Syndrome is being mitigated.
- Mentees can incorporate DEI into their mentorship relationships by:
 - Listening to and learning from the experiences of their mentor.
 - Openly expressing their perspectives and thoughts on relevant topics to their mentors and colleagues. Open discussion allows for an exchange of ideas and helps to lift each others' voices up.
 - Critically examining the ways in which they support individuals of underrepresented identities in academia.
 - Aide in developing a sense of belonging among other students and the academic community. Develop this sense of belonging by respecting and including others, keeping an open mind, and sharing experiences with one another.
- Mentors can incorporate DEI into their mentorship relationships by:
 - Fostering a sense of academic and social belonging among mentees by encouraging open discussion, supporting mentees in productive ways, and providing constructive and supportive criticism.
 - Evaluating the ways in which you provide support. Ensuring that the way you provide support is the best possible way for each individual mentee.
 - Treat mentees as colleagues and collaborates. Lift each mentee's voice and ensure the mentee feels respected and heard.
 - Aide in developing a sense of belonging in your lab, department and the greater Cornell community.

General Tips for Mentees:

- Work to minimize feelings of Imposter Syndrome by:
 - Discuss how you feel with others; often other people may be able to relate, have experienced similar feelings, and may be able to offer suggestions and advice.

- Expand your network by getting involved on campus. A community can help mitigate the feelings of Imposter Syndrome and aid in creating a sense of belonging.
 - Seek out free community events.
 - Attend conferences to find people with similar interests.
 - Branch out to other fields, departments, and institutions.
- Communicate with mentors when you are having personal struggles.
 - Your mentor wants to know and may have additional resources.
- Understand that there is never a limit on the number of mentors you can have.
 - It is important to recognize the different strengths within each mentor.
 - Sometimes mentors and mentees are not a good fit for each other. That is okay! Understand that not every mentor is a good fit for a productive mentorship relationship.
- Realize that failing is a part of academia and life. Expect to fail at times.
 - Receiving constructive criticism can help you determine ways to work more productively and effectively. Analyzing constructive criticism without self-doubt can help you determine ways to grow. Avoid letting criticism influence your self-esteem.

General Tips for Mentors:

- Foster a sense of belonging among mentees by creating a collaborative and welcoming environment.
- Create collaborative environments among mentees.
 - Avoid fostering a competitive environment. Help mentees recognize their achievement and success by providing feedback, words of affirmation, and constructive criticism.
- Recognize and communicate when a mentee is struggling.
 - It can be hard for mentees to acknowledge that they are struggling. Create a welcoming and safe environment to encourage mentees to communicate and reach out when it is apparent a mentee is struggling and needs assistance.

Resources from Panel Discussion

<https://www.facebook.com/CornellFiGLI/>

Institute of Medicine, National Academy of Sciences, and National Academy of Engineering. 1997. *Adviser, Teacher, Role Model, Friend: On Being a Mentor to Students in Science and Engineering*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/5789>.

Additional Resources

Cuncic, A. 2023. *How to stop feeling like an outsider when you have social anxiety*. Verywell Mind. <https://www.verywellmind.com/imposter-syndrome-and-social-anxiety-disorder-4156469>