SHORT COURSE: BEING A SUCCESSFUL ACADEMIC MENTOR

Institution: NWU | OPTENTIA — North-West University

Campus: Vanderbijlpark Campus

Type of Offering: Short Course

Duration: 8 weeks (Hybrid: Contact & Online)

Language: English

Recognition: Certificate of Successful Completion, issued by North-West University

Cover Description

Mentoring is a skill — not a talent you either have or don't. This short course equips experienced academics with the knowledge, tools, and confidence to become truly effective mentors: guiding others, building capability, and contributing to a thriving culture of mentorship in higher education.

About This Short Course

No short course specifically designed for academic mentors in a developing country context could be found — and yet the need for skilled, trained academic mentors has never been greater. While some aspects of mentoring may come naturally to certain individuals, no one is born knowing how to be a successful mentor. Effective, impactful mentorship is a skill — one that requires intentional development, structured guidance, and continued reflection.

This short course was designed to fill that gap. Through training, academic mentors gain a clearer and more grounded understanding of their role: supporting, encouraging, and listening to their mentees — without taking on responsibility that belongs to the mentee. Training helps to level the playing field by giving all mentors, whether experienced or just starting out, equal access to foundational knowledge and practical tools.

Good mentor training answers the fundamental questions about mentorship that, when left unanswered, leave mentors feeling underprepared and mentees underserved. It clarifies the programme's objectives, roles, expectations, and best practices — ensuring that the mentoring relationship gets off to a strong start and continues to deliver value.

Skilled academic mentors make a real difference. They contribute to mentees' professional and career development by introducing them to the intricacies of academic life — from doctoral study and NRF ratings to publication skills, grant applications, and building professional networks. They act as role models, promote cultural awareness, and help mentees navigate the transitions and challenges that define an academic career.

Purpose of the Course

The purposes of this short course are as follows:

- To develop the knowledge, skills, and capabilities of academic mentors to help mentees understand the academic work environment and what is expected of them.
- To equip mentors to create an environment conducive to capability development and the optimal functioning of their mentees.
- To deepen understanding of the content, processes, and dynamics of effective mentorship relationships.
- To support mentors in developing their own model of change management applicable to mentoring and coaching.
- To enable mentors to apply their knowledge and skills to conduct mentorship conversations that lead to better — not worse — outcomes.

In addition, formal training provides participants with a clear understanding of the mentoring relationship, including how to manage expectations, build trust, and engage in productive communication.

This course is primarily aimed at academic workers with doctoral qualifications who have completed a development programme for mentors at higher education institutions.

Who Should Attend

This short course is aimed at academic workers with a master's or PhD qualification who are engaged in, or preparing for, a formal academic mentoring relationship. It is particularly suited to experienced academics who want to strengthen their mentoring practice, as well as those entering a mentoring role for the first time.

The course is equally valuable for those who have prior mentoring experience and those who are just beginning — because good training benefits everyone, regardless of where they are on the mentoring journey.

Admission Requirements

Preferred Qualification: A PhD qualification in any discipline is preferred.

Minimum Qualification: Candidates with a master's degree will also be considered.

Learning Assumed to Be in Place: Knowledge and experience in academic work within a higher education environment.

Skills You Will Develop

Through this short course, participants will develop the following key competencies as academic mentors:

- Understanding the Academic Work Environment — Evaluating the contextual factors that impact professionals in HEIs and their effect on academic functioning.

- Applying a Capabilities Model — Using a framework of demands, resources, and conversion factors to promote mentee agency, achievement, health, and well-being.
- Mentorship Conversation Skills — Planning and conducting effective mentorship sessions based on a personal model of mentorship and interpersonal competence.
- Change Management and Facilitation — Applying a model of change management to support mentees through professional transitions, challenges, and growth.
- Supporting Academic Career Development — Guiding mentees across the full range of academic transitions, from doctoral study to promotion, publication, grant applications, networking, and work/life balance.
- Communication Across Diverse Audiences — Using mentorship to support mentees' spoken communication skills for diverse contexts and international relations.

Course Structure

The short course is structured across four thematic areas, delivered over 8 weeks in a hybrid format combining contact sessions and online learning.

Module 1: The Academic Work Environment

Introduces participants to the higher education landscape and the contextual factors that shape the experience of academics in HEIs. Participants develop an integrated understanding of the demands and complexities of academic work — including teaching and learning, research, community engagement, and institutional navigation. This foundational module equips mentors to understand and articulate the environment in which their mentees are operating, and to develop and evaluate a model explaining these contexts and their effects.

Module 2: Capabilities and Functioning of Academics in Higher Education

Explores a capabilities model that considers demands, resources, and conversion factors affecting the agency, achievements, health, and well-being of academics. Participants critically examine a model linking contextual variables, conversion factors, capabilities, and functioning — building the knowledge needed to identify and respond to their mentees' developmental needs, and to create the conditions for their mentees' optimal functioning and growth.

Module 3: Mentorship Conversations — Interpersonal Competence and Change Management

Develops the practical knowledge and skills needed to plan and conduct effective mentorship sessions. Participants learn a model of interpersonal competence for engaging with mentees and practise conducting mentorship conversations according to established guidelines. This module also introduces a model of change management applicable to mentoring and coaching, covering: conversations that inspire, mentoring with compassion, awakening the desire to change, survive and thrive, the power of personal vision, cultivating a resonant relationship, and creating a culture of mentorship.

Module 4: Supporting Academic Transitions and Career Development

Equips participants to support their mentees through the full range of transitions encountered in academic life. Topics include: supporting mentees considering doctoral study; helping early career researchers manage current responsibilities and prepare for career advancement; guiding those seeking promotion or greater research visibility; supporting mentees across cultural transitions; developing publication skills, grant writing skills, and professional networking; and promoting work/life balance and well-being. The module also addresses supporting spoken communication skills for diverse contexts and international relations.

Assessment

Formative Assessment: Multiple-choice tests completed throughout the course to reinforce learning and develop practical mentoring judgment.

Summative Assessment: A mentorship plan and programme completed one month after the course. This proposal will be evaluated against specified criteria by two independent mentors.

Certification: A Certificate of Successful Completion is awarded by North-West University upon satisfactory completion of all requirements.

Contact Details

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