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Perspectives on Undergraduate
Research & Mentoring

Affectionate Mentorship: Empowering Undergraduates Across Time and Space

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Introduction

Faculty-mentored undergraduate mentorship, recognized for its impact on student success, is widely studied in the field of undergraduate education. Responding to the existing literature, this article highlights that the synergy built from faculty-undergraduate mentorship can extend beyond the circumstances of the first encounter through a particular cultural sensitivity. The three of us form two faculty-undergraduate mentorship examples at Florida International University's (FIU) writing center, and our choices to remain at FIU, a large, minority-serving institution (MSI), rest in deeply personal and experiential reasons which inspire our research and collaboration. Parts of our stories are told here, with sections in our own individual voices, to share what we call *affectionate mentorship*, our history practicing it, and its future potential.

Our partially embodied research could only have truly taken shape in our writing center, a space designed to be welcoming without hierarchies, fostering growth through vulnerability, and deeply influenced by Miami's cultural milieu (Gillespie & Lerner, 2008). The authors—a writing center administrator (Xuan), a doctoral student (Nicholas), and a graduate assistant (Jeann)—collaborated in writing this article to showcase two faculty-undergraduate mentorship examples that began at FIU's writing center. Our cultural backgrounds—Chinese, Cuban, and Colombian—inform our approach to mentorship in affectionate ways because of the ways our respective cultures handle kinship. In retrospect, we recognize that affectionate mentorship—as we have come to call it—can be framed by and relates to our respective fields, different as they are. For example, invitational rhetoric (a term familiar to Xuan's field) proves a useful way of understanding our suggestion of a mentorship with a flattened hierarchy, often where mentor solicits mentee rather than the opposite approach. Likewise, the general lexicon of exile studies (Nicholas's primary field of study) emphasizes hospitality, an illuminating model for mentorship where both parties—like guest and host—share scholarship touched by cultural sensibility, creating an origin point from which students create networks of support. Indeed, this cultural sensitivity also resonates linguistically, seeing as most encounters featured some sort of linguistic analog for cultural habits—for example, those of professional intimacy or personal ancestry. So, despite the fact that affectionate mentorship was born of our practice over the course of several years, this retrospective teaches us that even our disparate fields frame what came to us rather instinctively.

Because of these personal anchors, we blend storytelling with reflection to share our conceptualization of the mentorship era, one in which collaborative writing offered the space to gain vital experience without fear of dismissive higher-ups or not meeting orthodox academic standards.

Our experiences tell us that those initial encounters in culturally-sensitive, non-hierarchical, low-stakes spaces inspired us into various arenas for academic growth and professional development. In other words, our mentoring practice can transcend the first encounter to inspire both mentor and mentee, even if our professional trajectories do not officially intersect again.

Now, we intersect once more to share our piece, one whose significance, incubated in a writing center and applicable beyond it, lies in:

- (1) Foregrounding the definition and enriching contextual components of affectionate mentorship from the point of view of racially and linguistically underrepresented collaborators,
- (2) Showcasing niche faculty-undergraduate mentorship that transgresses “institutional walls” (Ahmed, 2016), disrupting traditional conceptions of scholarship to provide equitable opportunities to first-generation, multilingual co-authors,
- (3) Identifying how faculty and undergraduates can collaborate by navigating limited time, resources, labor, and
- (4) Suggesting how collaboration becomes reciprocal in the short and long term, providing further inquiry for implementing and researching faculty-undergraduate mentorship.

The legacy of these contributions manifests as empowered writers and ultimately, more innovative work.

Theoretical Framework

As we mentioned earlier, our theoretical conception of affectionate mentorship comes in retrospect, given that our practice was organic; nevertheless, we build on scholarship about mentorship and co-mentorship to help define affectionate mentorship. Johnson (2015) defines mentorship as “a personal and reciprocal relationship in which a more experienced (usually older) faculty member acts as a guide, role model, teacher, and sponsor of a less experienced (usually younger) faculty member or student” (p. 23). Johnson’s definition spotlights the dyadic relationship between mentor and mentee in a one-way direction, and Felten and Lambert (2020) discuss the impact of relationships developed during college time on student success in higher education and suggest that all students should “create webs of relationships that will sustain them through, and beyond, college” (p. 6). In addition, when it comes to equalized power dynamics, Weiston-Serdan (2017) emphasizes the tenet of critical mentoring—“centering youth, and partnering with people to pass on knowledge, reimagine structures, and create bridges” (p. 1). Further, Godbee and Novotny (2013) put forward “horizontal feminist co-mentoring,” where guidance can come from any individual, including reciprocal mentoring between faculty and students (p. 192). Along this thread of critical mentorship and co-mentorship, we embody affectionate mentorship by emphasizing the sentimental and personal among us.

To capture our work, we refer in part to two primary theoretical concepts relevant to our fields—invitational rhetoric in feminist studies and hospitality in exile studies—and are informed by a series of mentorship-focused frameworks. This article shares and reviews accounts of our lived experiences, focalizing present collaborative work and its echoes into futurity. Referring to invitational rhetoric, which privileges “equality, immanent value, and self-determination” in an encounter (Foss & Griffin, 1995, p. 1), we recognize and expand the impact of collaborative writing on ourselves as individuals, the writing center as a community, and the academic landscape of undergraduate education. The invitational position is particularly relevant to the future of our practice, and for its adoption by others, as Foss and Griffin provide a comprehensive guideline. The

immanent value and self-determination aspects especially emphasize for us how the act of making collaborative contributions not only impacts each other's research and practice but also renders us affirmed and empowered in future work. Indeed, our invitational collaborations have even inspired other colleagues at our writing center. Foss and Griffin's ideas provide a baseline for affectionate mentorship by setting a tone of equalized power and mutual growth—a relationship that is maintained through continued care. It is in this posture that affectionate mentorship begins to navigate toward something more intimate and transformative—a type of hospitality.

Drawing from invitational rhetoric's privilege of understanding over change, affectionate mentorship seeks first to welcome the student, establish a dialogue, and grow in tandem, as opposed to traditional mentorship. This is where the concept of hospitality in exile studies has proven useful in retrospectively understanding what invitational rhetoric suggests in our practice. Traced throughout a literary tradition ranging from the *Odyssey* to contemporary migrant literature, hospitality takes its form from the privileging of the guest, of the displaced. Its general practice is similar to that of invitational rhetoric's "creation of external conditions of safety, value, and freedom" (Foss & Griffin, 1995, p. 1), because the host always seeks to make the guest feel as if they were at home themselves, or sometimes more at home than they otherwise would be. Hospitality as a concept, literarily or otherwise, helps frame the first encounters we three have experienced because we have always felt that we were never visitors in our writing centers, nor transient members in our practice of mentorship—without a doubt, we would always feel welcome, and knew that we would be welcomed again to work, or otherwise share stories and ideas.

Like other mentorship models, we see our relationships as "relational, developmental, and dynamic" (Thurman & Vandermaas-Peeler, 2022, p. 2), but negotiate our hierarchies differently and employ our heritages continuously. Namely, the ritual of hospitality values inherently the testimony of the guest, which translates into affectionate mentorship as a highly personal and culturally sensitive encounter—the mentor hosts the mentee, their relationship formed largely because of cultural and testimonial exchange, as it would be in more traditional renditions of hospitality's practice. And so, although we did not have concepts of exile and hospitality in mind when we started, we frame our ideas now in these terms that others might see what is at work in our practice. So, if invitational rhetoric helps us envision flattened hierarchies and alternative goals, and hospitality helps us foreground the practice of a culturally-sensitive exchange of ideas and work, then invitational rhetoric is all about our rituals of reception through which we fashion our identities as scholars.

Literature Review

Mentoring Undergraduate Research (UR) at Minority-Serving Institutions (MSI)

Many MSIs, including FIU, are aware that students have been denied opportunities to partake in research before and during college (Louis et al., 2015). Hence, it is instrumental for these MSIs to find ways to offer undergraduate students research opportunities and experience to ensure their continued success.

Mentoring diverse students with their research projects extends the scopes of the projects and strengthens academic support with personal and lived experiences. Ishiyama (2007) conducted a study among three groups of students: first-generation Caucasian students from low income (FGLI) backgrounds; African American FGLI students; and African Americans who were not first-generation college students. Ishiyama found that African American students are inclined to describe good mentors as *personally* supportive. More studies, including Stout et al. (2018), have shown that undergraduate research mentoring has an even greater positive impact in students from minoritized racial and ethnic backgrounds on their success, belonging, and retention.

FIU is a large Carnegie R1 research public university with active research lines; it is also one of the institutions without abundant undergraduate “research capital,” meaning funding or infrastructure (e.g., an undergraduate research office) to support and program undergraduate research, especially in non-STEM or scarcely funded areas. Our institutional situation echoes those in the studies of Fuchs (2023) and Toven-Lindsey et al. (2023), which respectively focus on shared goals and the community building that Felten and Lambert signify (2020). Driven by these funding and infrastructure factors, research shows that at such institutions, non-STEM faculty prioritize UR less than STEM faculty (e.g. Ferguson, 2023), and only 18% of non-STEM (compared to 61% STEM) faculty provided students research opportunities (DeAngelo et al., 2016, p. 327). Our institution, as we perceive it, falls into the same category.

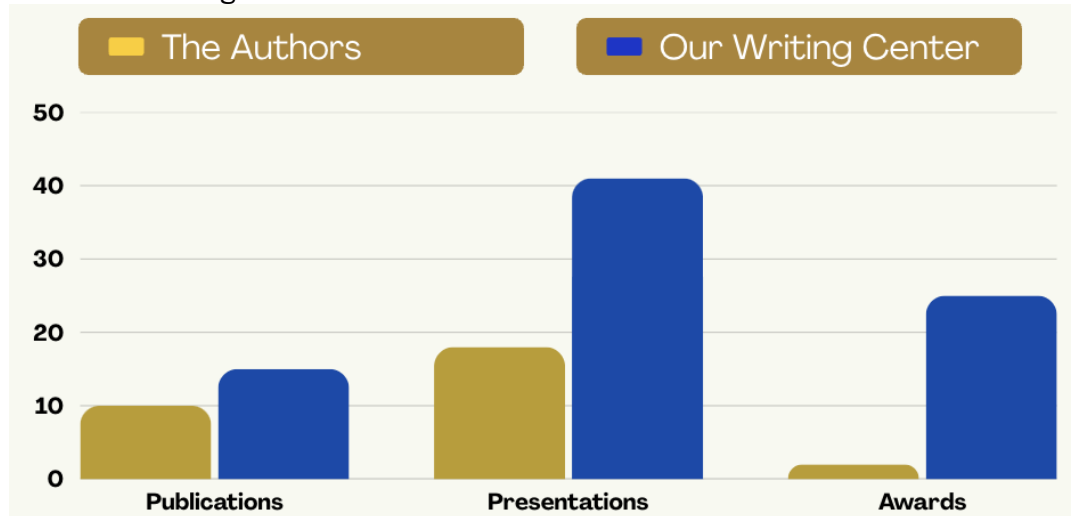
For disciplines with limited funding, the focus of institutional priorities on job preparation rather than UR inhibits faculty members’ ability to support undergraduate researchers (DeAngelo et al., 2016). White and Mi (2023) conducted a study about UR barriers encountered by Black, Indigenous, and Students of Color (BIPOC) at Penn State University. Comprising 27% of the undergraduate student population, these BIPOC students shared that one of the challenges was finding research mentors for support beyond coursework at their large R1 research public university.

Undergraduate Research at the Writing Center of a Minority-Serving Institution

Our writing center, with its mission and scope, has become a hub for promoting UR through an ecosystem of Writing Center Administrator (WCA)-tutor and tutor-tutor mentorship. Peer tutors review students’ academic papers across disciplines as part of their routine, engage in research conversations, and provide writing resources along the way. Moreover, the culture of bringing praxis and applying theories into research is built through WCA-tutor mentorship, hence tutors feel comfortable sharing and developing their research ideas through conferencing with their peers and WCAs.

Our writing center mentoring practices empower tutors with access to not only research opportunities but also research experiences that are welcoming, inclusive, meaningful, and impactful. Parallel to research labs and lab meetings, our writing center has conference rooms and staff meetings. During their 15-minute breaks and no-show sessions, tutors can chat about anything they feel like sharing, which gives us space and time to progress our research collaborations. With the WCAs’ support, tutors can also write during their working hours, giving them financial assurance while developing their academic and professional skills. As Larracey et al. (2023) write, “Part of UR’s work is to demonstrate to students that they can and do make important contributions to our collective disciplinary knowledge despite histories of exclusion” (p. 11). One way to acknowledge the importance of student contributions is to recognize students’ financial, cognitive, and emotional labor involved in UR, which also helps minoritized students who may typically lack the material resources and research capital to engage in long-term projects. Our writing center encourages UR by securing as many concerns as possible (financial, emotional, demographic, etc.), creating a space that, as we say, is the genesis of so much undergraduate scholarship (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. *The Number of Publications, Conference Presentations, and Awards from 2018 to 2024, obtained from our writing center's collective Curriculum Vitae*



Note. The peer-reviewed publications and conference presentations are external to FIU, but the academic and professional awards are both within and beyond FIU in the writing center field. The scholarship here refers to that of peer tutors who were undergraduate students.

Methodology

Because our research emerges from our lived experiences as rooted in our writing center at FIU, we chose storytelling as the most comprehensive way of conveying our practice, and one that mirrors the organic nature of our collaboration and indeed the heart of our cultural exchanges throughout our time working together. To this end, our literature review covers mentorship and writing center theory and practice as key fields relevant to our stories, but also as a means of fitting our work between both through a methodology that is common in both fields as well.

History: How We've Experienced Affectionate Mentorship

Through Hospitality

Xuan's Story

Holding the first administrative position in my career, I learned to administer the writing center and mentor my students and tutors. Like those rituals of hospitality that Nicholas studies, I lead by creating a sense of cultural belonging: in the first session of each semester, I invite my students and tutors with an open-door policy, hang posters in multiple languages and post-it notes of students' uplifting messages on my office door; and I ask each student to share the story behind their names.

In any collaborative journey between myself and student tutors, we exchange our particularly positional stories, including those that are academic or professional as well as personal and critical. These stories are oftentimes counterstories—unheard, unread or unrecognized by academia as of yet. Nonetheless, these narratives build mutual trust and offer a way to position ourselves within the academy (Cedillo & Bratta, 2019). The stories fortify humanistic bridges between individuals, equalizing the faculty-student and mentor-mentee relationships through their vulnerability and the act of finding analogs between our (cultural) experiences. The result is a sense of welcome wherever these narrative exchanges occur, one that encourages my students' self-reflection and reveals their agency and potential in educational contexts. This approach echoes with Shapiro's Critical Language

Awareness (CLA) and inclusive pedagogy, exemplifying two prongs—being progressive and pragmatic (2022).

Jeann and Nicholas were undergraduate students in the humanities with no labs or cohort-based programs. I am a faculty administrator with no contractual research expectation or support. My collaborative pool consists of students I have taught and mentored. Sharing stories counters the fact that we genuinely lack research capital, meaning “the economic, social, and cultural capital that influence students’ paths to engaging in undergraduate research” (Cooper et al., 2021, p. 4). This practice of sharing stories and projects has become our personal abundance in research capital. Our lived stories, though still widely perceived as “unorthodox”—for instance, Jeann’s own experience in translanguaging and Nicholas’s artistic vision for academic writing—are not only inspirational among our community but also, as we have found, communicable in academia. Often, shared stories show our vulnerability and are emotionally laden. Because of those fragile moments, we became closer and took turns hosting one another, either in offices or on Zoom; our configuration transgresses the space and power dynamics about who “hosts” the space and knowledge, and hence, who “mentors” whom. As Cedillo and Bratta (2019) put it, storytelling helps us build knowledge together and facilitate co-mentorship for our collaborative projects. Affectionate mentorship for me begins with these exchanges that foster an atmosphere of galvanizing belonging.

Nicholas’s Story

Traditionally, hospitality takes the form of an offering—typically food—but in the academy, I think this takes the form of an idea—intellectual sustenance, as it were. At the time when I first met Xuan in the Spring of 2020, I didn’t have the faintest idea for a research topic; indeed, I hadn’t really done research before. Xuan’s offering to me was the idea of creative writing in academic spaces, something she herself had been thinking about. Ultimately, this was a gesture of hospitality for me, because the host is in essence offering an idea, entrusting me with its execution not just in her class but beyond it. Ideas take the place of food in this case to show how our mentorship begins with this incredible level of trust.

The temporal context of the COVID-19 pandemic was a key factor in our evolving relationship between writing center pedagogy instructor and student into something much more transformative as the semester progressed. Of the many legacies the pandemic imparted, one for me was a heightened sensibility to reception and belonging. Xuan’s office isn’t a place overtly designed for collaboration like a drafting room would be, but it was a place that I often identify with the genesis of our ideas, largely because it is culturally receptive (see Jeann’s section). The proverbial “open door policy” doesn’t quite cover what Xuan’s got going on; the stickers, decorations, and post-it notes all denote past and forthcoming collaborative work, across cultures and hierarchies, and make her students want to contribute. It is the ritual of hospitality, her constant invitation and contagious curiosity, that turns her office into grounds for brainstorming, although this has since shifted to my own office (due largely to her influence).

Affectionate mentorship requires some sort of haven for reception, a place where mentors and mentees feel welcomed to brainstorm and tell stories, the product of which is an increased confidence not just in the self but in the collaborator. Affection comes into play because of our cultural sensitivity, but also in the recurrent visitation—in this case of Xuan’s office. Each time I visited, my research evolved, within her class, during the pandemic, and upon our return.

With life in academia often feeling like one is adrift, affectionate mentorship has allowed me to envision moorings between my mentors and my own students now.

Jeann's Story

My connection to the writing center sparked when I entered the tutoring room that had uplifting messages for students and a large whiteboard with the schedule of the conversation circles and workshops. Xuan's office door also caught my attention, which was decorated with student messages and drawings.

While our relationship began as a typical instructor-student relationship, the aftermath of completing the tutor training course was the beginning of a new relationship as academic pen-pals. When in Xuan's class, I constantly felt her encouragement to challenge myself through our one-on-one meetings. As a result, I felt ready to embark on new academic opportunities, such as the Humanities Edge Undergraduate Research Conference at FIU. At first, I did not think that my paper was 'conference-worthy,' but after hearing from Xuan that my topic was widely researched by many scholars, I decided to submit the proposal. I was later notified that my proposal was accepted, and soon after, I presented it at my first conference. Thus, this experience inspired me to extend my research interests into graduate school.

The topic of my first research paper has laid the foundation for a commonality between Xuan and me: our experiences with languages, specifically translanguaging. Xuan and I come from linguistic backgrounds that are different from one another, but we have many shared experiences that multilingual users can relate to, such as finding a common ground between one's native language and the language required to be used in academic and professional spaces. With her, I was able to use my voice to discuss my Latin American identity.

Through my meetings with Xuan, my research in translanguaging practices led us to bond over the exchanges we had to negotiate between our native tongues (Chinese and Spanish) and English. Echoing the concept of hospitality, our exchanges acknowledged the opportunities that English had given us while wanting to represent different aspects of our cultures. As a result, Xuan and I co-presented at a national writing center conference in 2023, and I became a class facilitator for two semesters (Fall 2023 and Spring 2024). As a facilitator in *The Processes of Writing*, a class where I was a former student, I utilized my experience as a tutor to now act as a host for the future tutors of the class. Many students expressed that they did not feel confident in their research papers, but I encouraged them to submit their papers for conferences, just like Xuan did for me. This peer-like environment allowed students to see beyond their own capabilities and created meaningful relationships where students and faculty can uplift one another.

Although our paths are not as aligned as they used to be, Xuan, Nicholas, and I found ways to collaborate with one another and share some of our personal interests through casual meetings in her office and at lunch. I now emulate her welcoming attitude as a tutor and challenge others to pursue their linguistic agencies and academic interests. In this way, affectionate mentorship perpetuates itself.

With Cultural Sensitivity

Cultural sensitivity is at the forefront of affectionate mentorship, informed as it is by the authors' context at FIU. Testimony is our way of showing cultural sensitivity at work.

Xuan's Story

A commonality between our cultures lies in valuing family and respecting seniors. My early life trajectory has so many interactions with my mother's parents – *Helaoshi* (贺老师, Teacher He) and *Hulaoshi* (胡老师, Teacher Hu). My grandpa was a high school math teacher, and my grandma an elementary school Chinese teacher. As my first teachers, they taught me the importance of education. Hosting me almost daily in their simple but enriching home, interacting with the

surrounding neighbors, my grandparents offered me food, and more importantly, knowledge and virtues. They instilled my self-recognition as a scholar-in-the-making, seeing my qualities and potential as well as emphasizing academic principles and learning routines. Highly valued by my mother's side because of the woman I could become and simultaneously devalued by my father's side because I was a girl, I developed a cultural sensitivity to gender roles within Chinese society at a young age. That same sensitivity drives my mission in life to the university to serve these minoritized students.

As a former transnational student and now a multilingual writing instructor in the U.S., I further developed my sensitivity across cultures and contextualized it in the local Hispanic-dominant culture. Hearing Nicholas address my grandma as Hulaoshi, who was still alive then, meant a lot to me because he valued my grandma's knowledge and respected her career choice and impact on me. In my office, the space to co-host, I learned the story between Nicholas and his *abuela* (grandma); how he respects seniors by inheriting many values from them. Because of COVID-19 and its online modality, I was fortunate to meet Nicholas's *abuela* on Zoom during our faculty-student conferences. In this familial sense, Nicholas and I agree that we both carry similar visions and qualities across generations, and that commonality makes our affectionate mentorship stronger through our shared identification.

My cultural sensitivity also fuels my love for other languages and my quest to know more cultural values through learning those languages. I feel that my status as a linguistic guest or even a cultural exile helps me understand more about the hospitality of the host country or context. Hence, I have learned French, German, and continued with Japanese. In addition, I was immersed in a Spanish-speaking environment through verbal and non-verbal interactions every day. This tapestry of linguistic experience enhances my cultural awareness. When I saw Jeann's laptop set in Japanese, I was impressed and inspired by his devotion to learning a third language, and found myself identifying with him too. These highly personal, linguistic, and culturally sensitive dialogues have successfully created a reciprocally hospitable, intellectual exchange.

Moreover, as a first-generation immigrant giving birth to and raising my children in the U.S., I instinctively emulate a role as my students' parent and put my students in a role as my children. As much as I wish my children, who are seen as minorities, would enjoy school as a site of cultural belonging, I make sure that I implement that wish in my students and hope they feel the same way in my classroom. My history anchors my pedagogy and mentorship in inclusivity, welcome, and collaboration. Affectionate mentorship is how I employ my socio-cultural experience toward connecting with students.

Nicholas's Story

As project proposals approached, I booked an office hour meeting with Xuan to express my frustration at not having any concrete ideas for the proposal and, as office hour appointments sometimes go, the conversation moved toward a shared connection to our grandmothers, both of whom raised us, and from whom we were both separated by circumstance and time. That link established, we started discussing how our relationships to our foremothers were unique, often with references to cultural tradition—how Cuban and Chinese contexts influenced grandparental relationships. As it turns out, they have much in common.

In line with our theme that collaboration forms our nascent identities as scholars, I believe it is not a stretch to say that these grandparental relationships are a prototype of sorts for affectionate mentorship. Those of us who were raised by our grandparents, regardless of heritage, likely know what it means to have a mentor who inspires us long after the more frequent visits common in childhood. These initial encounters build trust often in the forms of hospitality—I am thinking here

specifically of the proverbial “grandma’s house.” Grandparents in Asian traditions as well as Hispanic ones are often the bastions and custodians of regional culture, bequeathing to grandchildren a form of cultural sensitivity that should naturally evolve through contact with others—we are constantly seeking analogs and commonalities in other cultures, and in each encounter, we grow more curious. The third aspect of affectionate mentorship calls for collaboration, and I can think of no better form of this in the prototypical, grandparental relationship than that of play, both as an educational practice and as a method for embodying and forming future identities. In this sense, I think affectionate mentorship has a level of playfulness in the engagement of an idea and the collaboration of its execution.

In the same way that Xuan and I are foundationally formed by those first mentors, we are in turn formed by each other, though in a more reciprocal way than perhaps the grandparental configuration. Trust for us was built largely because of this cultural sensitivity, and our ability to bond over our love of our grandparents, sharing as we do the same genesis of our scholarship—it is because of our grandparents that we do what we do. Seeing ourselves represented in others fosters a great deal of good faith. Xuan’s hospitality, and indeed her invitation to work on three collaborative presentations shortly after meeting her, shows how it is that first contact lays out the foundation for affectionate mentorship, but this is only the beginning.

As a graduate student at FIU, I was one of the only members in my cohort who had conference presentations under my belt at the start, as well as the industrious imperative to continue my scholarship alongside my studies and my teaching. This spirit, though the consequence of my grandmother’s teachings, would not have manifested how it did without Xuan’s mentorship—to a great degree, she persists in the drafting of every proposal and presentation. It is her belief in undergraduate scholarship as well as the confidence she inspires that allows me to call this affectionate mentorship—the lingering influence Xuan has is the banishment of self-doubt and the desire to do more. Her legacy is my belief in my own work, especially in an academy that remains resistant to unorthodox, often deeply personal scholarship for reasons ranging from the scholar’s demographics to research methods. Having a confidant in academia is truly a special thing, but when it takes the form of affectionate mentorship, it is at once an anchor and a muse.

Although cultural sensitivity seems like something born of common sense, I firmly believe it is also a posture we adopt by heightening our sensibility for analogs, as well as our propensity for storytelling. Affectionate mentorship cannot exist without storytelling, which is why this paper adopts such a structure. Whether it is a Cuban-Chinese configuration or otherwise, the key to affectionate mentorship is cross-cultural hospitality, and a convergence of narrative—from this, continuous mentorship can naturally flow.

Jeann’s Story

Moving back to the United States from Colombia was naturally a major cultural shift for me. Despite living in Miami, a city that is densely populated by Hispanics, I realized many of the values that young adults have stem from the mainstream American experience, for example, the “leave the nest” mentality during college. In Latin American cultures, however, it is uncommon to leave the city for college. It is likely because of this heritage that FIU attracts so many local, brilliant students. They prefer to stay in areas that are close to home, just as I did.

While it was hard to adapt to college life at first, I found that some non-Latin American cultures shared similar values and traditions as mine, such as the importance of communal living, as seen in Chinese culture. Sharing such values laid the foundation for what Xuan and I’s pen-pal relationship would be. We bonded over our interests in languages, specifically Japanese. Xuan uses language learning apps with her children to maintain such interest within her family and because she wants to

travel to Japan someday. For me, I am deeply interested in understanding the linguistic processes that occur in the language, and I would like to use it when I participate in projects with Japanese companies.

Shortly after graduating, I realized that I needed to maintain my language practice to retain the information I learned in class. Since I had taken all the Japanese courses offered at FIU, I decided to use the resources offered by the writing center to host a Japanese Conversation Circle. Xuan encouraged me to host these workshops to cultivate my skills and inspire peers to learn Japanese, a language and culture that has boomed in popularity. I was able to curate different activities, skits, manga, and YouTube videos that allowed students to speak about topics they were interested in. Soon thereafter, I had the opportunity to work on this project with Nicholas and Xuan.

Furthermore, the three of us grew our bond over something that we had not discussed directly, but our values reflected our commonalities. My grandmother has also played an important role in my upbringing, especially by supporting me with my academic development. Just as Nick and Xuan had unconditional support from their grandmothers, mine was the one who laid the foundation for my academic and professional achievements. When meeting with them for this project, I noticed how they had bonded over the relationship with their grandmothers which further encouraged me to continue writing this piece. In finding our analogs, we grow.

Discussion

Our Affectionate Mentorship

Although the mentees collaborating on this piece have known Xuan for some years now, we hadn't quite gotten to the point where we could collaborate on a manuscript. In a way, this piece is the culmination of our experience as well as proof of our framework. We meet periodically, which keeps us accountable, provides a space for collaborative writing, and cultivates the discipline necessary to conduct our own independent work. In almost every meeting, we're still sharing stories, finding new analogs, and new ways to navigate higher education at our various stages. Our hope is that it might inspire others to consider approaching mentorship as a more cultural and lasting phenomenon, as opposed to a one-and-done deal or a strictly professional engagement. The more we work together, the more we crystalize our identities as scholars from traditionally underrepresented groups in the American academy.

Invitational rhetoric has operated in the background of every visit to Xuan's office, other spaces at FIU, and online, for in the act of invitational participation, we are also working toward a type of self-determination. With the rituals of hospitality that have organically emerged from our talks, culturally infused as they are, we have managed to capture an enthusiasm that can be difficult to harness in our current context—we hope our reader can sense the affection running through our piece, and hope that it inspires them to employ it themselves.

Future practitioners can build on our framework by employing affectionate mentorship within their own cultural contexts, as different configurations will yield diverse results. Leading with affectionate mentorship may likewise transform the spaces within which it is practiced (see the following section), cultivating the space as a hospitable one where these types of engagements, built on trust and belief, flourish and evolve. The effect of such belief has already been shared; for instance, Farshi et al. (2021) shows how far believing in mentees' agency and capacity can go.

Our Writing Center

While we were writing this manuscript, Nicholas continually referred to our writing center as the genesis of his professional practice and ethics. His reasoning comes from the sense that there is

something unique to our center, as we mentioned in an earlier section, that manifests as what Elizabeth Boquet might call “creative placemaking” (2015). The idea here is that the writing center is a place that, by nature, facilitates and encourages creativity—after all, it is the singular place on campus where all disciplines converge to discuss and refine ideas. Because of this configuration, the work the three of us conduct is allowed to flourish. Our writing center remains a place to which we return for rejuvenation and brainstorming, within writing center scholarship and beyond. Affectionate mentorship at once emerges from the pre-existing hospitality and cultural sensitivity of our writing center (and indeed FIU itself) and perpetuates practices of reception and cultural enmeshment; as our stories show in miniature, so are their phenomena in multitude. On-campus communities, such as writing centers, with climates of active listening and invitational rhetoric (Gillespie & Lerner, 2008), create foundations that develop cultural sensitivity among their members.

Our writing center offers a space for the academic and social development of tutors by fostering participation in opportunities for first-hand experience in academia. Many of our undergraduate tutors are encouraged (by administrators and peers) to present in international, national, and local writing center conferences (see Figure 1), nurturing a collegial practice of continued and mutual affirmation. With this support, tutors feel empowered to pursue their academic and professional goals. Therefore, they use the experience gained in the center as a steppingstone to begin graduate school and pursue writing activities with confidence.

As mentioned in previous sections, the writing center builds the “sense of community” by creating workshops that are tailored to many different types of students, from writers and poets to speakers of other languages. They present tutor-led initiatives that range from creative writing workshops (such as Dungeons & Dragons writing, screenwriting, and poetry) to conversation circles (currently in Chinese, English, Japanese, and Spanish). Additionally, because of the influence the center has on graduate and undergraduate writers, it has been able to expand funding to offer more graduate assistantships for its tutors. These thriving extracurricular events and student tutors’ success reflect reciprocal relationships among writing center tutors, tutees, and the university, further supporting the need and pivotal role of the sense of community for the student body.

Practical Concerns

To be transparent about our experience, we want to emphasize the invitational nature of our mentorship and the space from which it emerges. One does not want to force things; this is a framework to jump-start whatever cultural linkage there might already be. Student collaborators have the agency to decide to join in these types of configurations; faculty initiate and scaffold the support system, laying a foundation for students’ success. That said, because the articulation of our cultural experience is so critical to our practice, we stress that affectionate mentorship is not culturally exclusive, but culturally guided—we firmly believe that any culture can find its analog in any other culture, but that this can only be achieved if people share their stories in the university, rather than keep things strictly business, strictly work-focused.

To speak plainly, research needs its institutional infrastructure. If a school was interested in supporting this type of project (at an even larger scale), research capital is critical: faculty fellows hired by offices of undergraduate research or some similar offices can connect with student researchers; hubs principled in peer mentoring would be wonderful places to execute such practices, irrespective of discipline. Obtaining financial support for both faculty and students would help sustain their collaborative work, and avoid the financial anxiety that would dissolve most projects beyond coursework.

For centers that lack support from other sources, it is best to keep these practices small—indeed, intimacy may be key. Starting with a few faculty-student collaborations is enough to get ideas rolling

for the future. It may begin as a small collaboration, which in turn may yield a publication, and it may even produce large-scale projects that support undergraduate students university-wide, such as a research journal, as we have seen at FIU with writing center leadership. We find that smaller-scale projects have an inspirational effect on other students so long as faculty keep initiating and students feel welcome.

Perhaps most practically, it is important to address how time may be one of the biggest limitations for all parties, especially with regard to collaborators' institutional status and means for long-term mentorship. Since these projects begin as a low-stakes affectionate collaboration, it is important to set expectations that match the workload of both faculty and students. Therefore, these collaborations may take longer than expected due to the balance of workload and other academic pursuits, not the writing and collaboration itself. Despite the perhaps lengthy timeline, it is important to remain flexible and consider other approaches if traditional meetings become an obstacle. If the heart remains in the work, the time will be worth it.

Through affectionate mentorship, we blur the boundaries of professionalism with personal accounts that matter and factor education and emotional energy. The connections bring our cultural and linguistic abundance to our collaborations, as assets to existing scholarship; they are also culturally significant to us while granting research capital for undergraduate work (Larracey et al., 2023). As we continue to collaborate, affectionate mentorship helps us grow toward our individual goals of “making and becoming” in academia. We are not only each other's role models and mentors (Johnson, 2015), but we also build our friendship and pen-ship. In this collegial sense, our affectionate mentorship energizes, enriches, and fortifies us.

Moving forward, we envision our mentorship transforming more into pen-ship—a critical friendship enacted in writing to each other and for each other in spirit across institutions—as both Nicholas and Jeann pursue PhDs elsewhere. Our visions feel achievable, thanks to the confidence and experience built from the exchange of our stories and collaborative projects (echoing Cedillo & Bratta, 2019). Our past experiences were critical on two fronts: learning to collaborate with another scholar early in our careers, and gaining the confidence to continue doing the work on our own. The former has shown us the developmental potential of writing with other scholars, while the latter forms the very foundation of our academic outreach and expansion.

Regardless of physical distance, we remain connected through our practice of affectionate mentorship, especially as we cross cultural contexts to other institutions, because we enjoy holding each other accountable. The dynamic changes as more professional agency increases on all parties, with a clear line of making new generations of scholars: Xuan, at her mid-career, has been mentoring dozens of undergraduate students; Nicholas publishes, teaches, and mentors; Jeann is soon completing his master's degree and tutors graduate writers; more importantly, Nicholas and Jeann will collaborate with other emerging scholars, like the three of us have done.

Conclusion

Undergraduate mentorship, especially in the humanities, can be fleeting, with research projects being restricted to a semester, at most a year. The idea behind our affectionate mentorship is that the initial energy can be maintained beyond the semester of encounter—but that first contact is a critical point in the cultivation of that professional relationship. In line with the long tradition of feminist or invitational rhetoric, hospitality and cultural sensitivity join to empower undergraduates on level terms that we might inspire one another during our work as well as in the thereafter, as captured in our stories.

Based on our histories, we call for institutions to consider forming and supporting communities of practice for all students, especially those who do not have research opportunities in extended academic spaces, such as labs. We also recommend university curriculum decision makers consider affording co-curricular and extracurricular opportunities for undergraduates to access and advance research through built-in faculty-student mentorship. Last but not least, we call for faculty mentors to embrace the concept of affectionate mentorship as a process of identity formation, assess students' long-term growth, and enjoy mentorship as a co-learning and reciprocal experience.

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Contribution Note

All authors made an equal contribution to the first draft. Dr. Xuan Jiang wrote the literature review and conclusion. Nicholas R. Cabezas fashioned the theoretical framework and drafted the introduction and discussion. Jeann Hernandez worked continuously with a graduate writing tutor, Manuel Delgadillo, to polish our drafts as they were written. Dr. Xuan Jiang, Nicholas R. Cabezas, and Jeann Hernandez wrote their lived stories separately and integrated the texts into this coherent manuscript.

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