

Fostering Solidarity to Resist the Savior Narrative in Near Peer Mentoring

Presented by Christopher Burke and Carol Subiño Sullivan, Georgia Tech

In our first semester teaching *Near Peer Mentoring*, on our first day of class, during our first introductions, a student stated that she was taking the class because she wanted to save the mentees by helping them in a way that they could never repay her for. In that moment, (once the feelings of shock and horror had subsided) we knew that we had to spend a considerable amount of energy to change this student's perspective.

With the 5 subsequent cohorts of students we've worked with since then, we have integrated strategies to foster a sense of solidarity with the mentees so that our students position themselves as supports rather than saviors and as co-learners rather than experts. We hope that encouraging this humility as they approach the mentoring work will support them in taking a critical perspective in understanding the wicked problems that contribute to persistent inequity in the US education system, both in this class and beyond.

Below we share a selection of the teaching strategies we use to foster solidarity among near-peer mentors.

Course Organization: We organize the course into three broad sections:

- **Mentoring Training:** Students practice applying concepts and strategies they will use as mentors.
- **Data:** Students use a variety of data sources to characterize persistent patterns of inequity in the US education system
- **Educational Reform Initiatives:** Students critically examine a variety of initiatives to address the inequities in the US education system.

In each section of the course, we incorporate strategies to foster solidarity and engage students in thinking about the complexity of the problems and solutions.

Mentoring Training

- **Storytelling:** We challenge students to tell a *brave story* (Brené Brown) of a time they faced an academic challenge. They tell these stories at their first meeting with the high school mentees. This vulnerability from the mentors from the beginning makes it easier for them to develop a trusting relationship with the mentees.
- **Goal setting:** We emphasize that their mentoring work should begin with engaging their mentees in setting their own goals. We introduce the SMART goals framework for creating those goals and SCRUM boards as a tool for helping to track progress on those goals. The SCRUM process values of Courage, Focus, Commitment, Respect and Openness also support the approach to mentoring we want to encourage.
- **Learning from mistakes:** We introduce students to Dweck's growth mindset and Briceño's learning from mistakes framework and give students the IDeAS tool for engaging their students in reflection about recent failures.

Data:

- **Visual and Wholistic:** Students explore a rich variety of data that exposes inequities in the US education system, including how housing and policy decisions in non-education realms impact education. We emphasize data visualization whenever possible.
- **Mentoring Scenarios:** At each class we present a mentoring scenario and ask students to think about their response in the context of the data we've examined that day.
- **Mentoring journals:** After each meeting with their mentoring teams, students write journal entries where they describe what they did and make at least one connection to something that we've discussed in class. These journals help students humanize the data. They understand the data through these individuals, who are not statistics.

Educational Reform Initiatives:

- **Presentations:** Students select an educational reform initiative and prepare a presentation about what it is, what problem it intends to address and what its impact has been on the people who are most affected. We require students to take critical perspectives as they describe the impacts.
- **Call to action:** Students envision civic participation by creating infographics that address an educational reform initiative that they create with a specific, public audience in mind.
- **Student projects:** Students use their unique talents to design a creative project that addresses the central questions and insights from class. In this way, they end the class as contributors to continued dialogue about the problems and solutions they engaged with in class.

Select Resources for Mentoring Training:

- **SMART Goals:** (SMART = Specific/Strategic, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Timely *There are so many resources about SMART goals. This is the handout we share with our students*):
http://gtf.imodules.com/s/1481/images/gid40/editor_documents/professional_development/relationships_development/goalsetting.pdf?sessionid=112b3ff3-a9df-406c-9400-4a76d18a7c5f&cc=1
- **SCRUM Boards:** Pope-Ruark, Rebecca. 2017. Agile Faculty: Practical Strategies for Managing Research, Service, and Teaching. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press (specifically chapter 6 for the application to mentoring)
- **Growth mindset:** Dweck, Carol S. 2006. Mindset: The New Psychology of Success. Random House.
- **Learning from Mistakes:**
 - Briceño, Eduardo. 2015. Mistakes are not all Created Equal.
<http://blog.mindsetworks.com/entry/mistakes-are-not-all-created-equal>
 - **IDeAS:** Baudier, Josie, Boyd, Diane, and Stromie Traci. 2013. Identify, De-brief, Analyze, and Strategize. FliptheMindset.wordpress.com
- **Storytelling and vulnerability:** Brown, Brené. 2018. Dare to Lead: Brave Work. Tough Conversations. Whole Hearts. Random House



HTS 2813 Near Peer Mentoring: An experience in urban education

Fall 2019 | Tuesdays and Thursdays 9:30-10:45am | Hefner 001 & BEST Academy

Course Description

“If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up in mine, then let us work together.”
~Lilla Watson,

Mentors improve the chances that a child facing social and economic disadvantages will beat the odds and succeed. In this course you will engage in near-peer mentoring with high school students as they prepare for college. You will expand your understanding through exposure to experiences with education that are likely different in some ways from your own.

You will also study the issues that contribute to the persistent inequality in the US education system as well as the solutions that have been proposed to address them.

Course Materials

Resources will be posted on the course Canvas page. There will be something to review before class most weeks.

Course Learning Goals

After this class you should be able to:

1. Use data and case studies to explain the impact of persistent patterns of inequality in the US education system on educational opportunities, experiences, and outcomes, especially for young people of color and those coming from low-income communities.
2. Critically evaluate the effectiveness of educational reform initiatives, including mentoring as a general strategy and your specific experience in this course.
3. Apply mentoring techniques to the near peer mentoring relationship.
4. Compare, contrast and identify ways that personal circumstances and experiences shape the educational outcomes and opportunities for you and your mentees and use these insights to inform your perspectives on patterns of inequality in the educational system and educational reform initiatives.

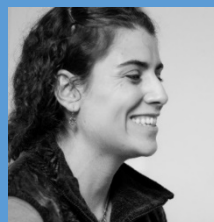
Grading

- Reading Responses: **15%**
- Mentoring/Mentoring Journal: **30%**
- Educational Reform Initiatives Presentation: **20%**
- Midterm Essay: **15%**
- Creative Project/Presentation: **20%**

Grading policies:

- *We will work with you—just let us know what is happening.*
- *Revisions accepted on any assignment without penalty*
- *Missing 1 mentoring session without notice carries a 1 letter grade penalty. Missing 2 sessions results in failing the class.*
- *Late work will be accepted for ½ credit up to 7 days after the due date.*

Your Course Instructors



Dr. Carol Subiño Sullivan
csubino@gatech.edu
Office hours: CULC 457C
Tuesdays 1-3pm
and by appointment

Learn, Transform, Empower:
Why I Teach



Mr. Christopher Burke
chris.burke@gatech.edu
Office hours: French 14
Mondays 10am-12pm
and by appointment

Equity Avenger Maximizing
Everyone's Human Potential

Course Schedule

Week 1: August 20/22
Intro, Mentoring training

Week 2: August 27/29
Mentoring Training, First mentoring meeting

Week 3: September 3/5
Mentoring Training

Week 4: September 10/12
Unequal Educational Outcomes

Week 5: September 17/19
School Segregation and Identity

Week 6: September 24/26
STEM Pipeline and Careers

Week 7: October 1/3
Atlanta's Educational Landscape

Week 8: October 8/10
Solutions-Guest speaker TBD

Week 9: October 15/17
*Fall break on Tues
Mentoring on Thurs*

Week 10: October 22/24
Educational Reform Initiatives presentations

Week 11: October 29/31
Educational Reform Initiatives presentations

Week 12: November 5/7
Educational Reform Initiatives presentations

Week 13: November 12/14
Educational Reform Initiatives presentations and Campus Visit

Week 14: November 21/22
Educational Reform Initiatives presentations and last week of mentoring

Week 15: November 26/28
Educational Reform Initiatives presentations and Thanksgiving

Week 16: December 3:
Creative Project Presentations

Assignments

Reading Responses (due weekly on Mondays by 11:59pm via Canvas): Select a quote from the material posted in Canvas for each Tuesday class meeting. Annotate the quote with 2-3 questions or comments. Bring your work to class to support your participation. Your attendance at each class meeting is important to our learning community.

Mentoring and Mentoring Journal (weekly on Thursdays, journal entries are due Sundays by 11:59am via Canvas): You will meet with high school students from BEST Academy each week on Thursdays at BEST Academy. Your mentoring work will focus on helping them prepare for college. After each meeting, you should write up your notes about what occurred, plan for the following meetings, and reflect on how course content informs your mentoring.

Midterm Essay (due Oct 11 by 11:59pm via Canvas): Write a 1000 word essay characterizing the persistent inequality in the US education system using the material and data presented in class. Identify how this inequality has implications for your mentoring work and what aspect of the inequality you are most interested in learning more about through the Educational Reform Initiatives Presentations.

Educational Reform Initiatives Presentation (due in class weeks 10-15): You will sign up to give a 10-15 minute presentation in class on an educational reform initiative that has been attempted in the US educational system. Following your presentation you will lead the class in a 10 minute discussion. You should submit your draft presentation and schedule a meeting with Carol or Chris at least one week before your presentation.

Creative Project and Presentation (Proposal is due on Oct 26 by 11:59pm via Canvas, Presentation is due on Dec 3 in class): In lieu of a final exam, you will complete a final project addressing one of the big questions that this course has raised about the persistent inequality in the US education system. You may either write a 4-5 page analysis paper or you may develop an alternative project through a format that draws on your own interests training and strengths (e.g. a laser cut sculpture, a board game, a children's book, etc).

More details about each assignment will be provided in a separate document.



Participation: Your contributions to discussions and peer feedback are central to your own success and that of your colleagues. Because of this, you are expected to be in class, ready to participate and contribute to discussions.

Attendance: If you must miss class for an institute approved absence, a religious observance, illness or other extenuating circumstance, please notify us as soon as possible so that we can make arrangements for you to make up the work.

Academic Integrity: Students are expected to act according to the highest ethical standards in order to cultivate a community based on trust, academic integrity, and honor. While collaboration is encouraged, all work must ultimately be your own. <http://www.policylibrary.gatech.edu/student-affairs/academic-honor-code>

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: If you are a student with learning needs that require special accommodation, contact the Office of Disability Services at (404)894-2563 or <http://disabilityservices.gatech.edu/>.

Student-Faculty Expectations Agreement: At Georgia Tech we believe that it is important to strive for an atmosphere of mutual respect, acknowledgement, and responsibility between faculty members and the student body. See <http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/rules/22/> for an articulation of some basic expectation that you can have of us and that we have of you.

How do we foster Solidarity in near peer mentors?

*Presented by Christopher Burke and
Carol Subiño Sullivan, Georgia Tech*

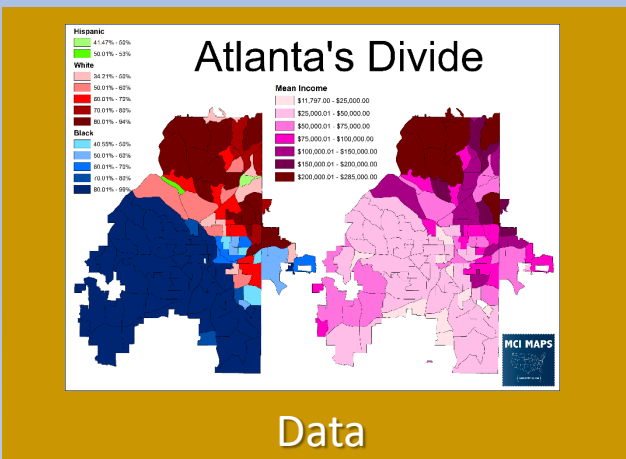
*If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up in mine, then let us work together
--Lilla Watson*



Bursting the savior complex



Mentoring Training



Data

Solution: Gain Support and Involvement

- Involvement is not exclusive to the parents.
- Community Involvement is essential.
- Takes a village to raise a child.
- Use cultural values and create own resources to help students succeed.



XYZ Charter → **F**

Know the facts - charter schools are not the simple solution!

Educational Reform initiatives

"I know this class and the experiences I have had within it will follow me and impact me for the rest of my life. I want to sincerely thank you for your part in my life. "