 Graduate Students Put Their Heads Together on Mentorship

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Some friends go to yoga classes together, others play Scrabble. Graduate students Tess Veuthey and Samuel Thompson wrote a column for Nature together.

Nature published the pair's work in its "Career Column" in September. Their well-written article offers practical advice for other PhD students and postdocs on how to structure meetings with a faculty mentor.

"Our experience writing this piece was rooted in our friendship. We met doing queer advocacy at UCSF, and we talk a lot about the training systems that surround us," said Veuthey, who is currently working on the PhD component of a dual MD/PhD degree in the Neuroscience program.

While discussing an article on mentorship written by a PI, Tess proposed writing a piece from the student perspective. She wanted a writing partner for support and accountability, and Samuel, a PhD candidate in the Biophysics program, was excited to collaborate.

"Navigating mentoring relationships is a skillset that all grad students have to learn, but we
rarely formalize our knowledge and acknowledge just how much work goes into it. Writing something together helped us maintain momentum and filter ideas and validated the feeling that it was worth doing," said Tess. Samuel chimed in, "Being friends means that we trust each other to be transparent, critical, and supportive. The mutual trust allowed us to say 'I absolutely hate that sentence' and 'Just humor me, and let's see where this idea goes.'

"If anything, it was fun time to spend together," said Tess with nods of agreement from Samuel.

Tess and Samuel both credit their PIs, Karunesh Ganguly [2] and Tanja Kortemme [3], for their positive experiences with being mentored.

Extra credit goes to Tess and Samuel, for giving the rest of us their insiders' perspective on what students can do to get the most out of the mentor-mentee relationship, and for providing the inspiring glimpse at their collaborative friendship with each other.

Read Tess and Samuel's advice in Nature [1].

Photos of Tess and Samuel here and in homepage carousel by Susan Merrell.

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[1] https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-06619-3