

Spring 2026 Mentorship Workshop

Overview

The Spring 2026 Mentorship Workshop panel brought together faculty mentors, community site mentors, program leadership, and interns from the HerdWork Humanities Internship to surface lessons learned about effective mentorship, student development, and workforce preparation. The discussion highlighted how structured, humane, and relational mentorship practices can significantly enhance intern learning outcomes while also benefiting host organizations and academic programs.

Across the panel, mentors and interns described mentorship as a *bridge*—connecting humanities education to real-world work, translating academic skills into professional competencies, and supporting interns as they navigate unfamiliar workplace cultures. The workshop confirmed that mentorship is not ancillary to internship success; it is foundational.

Key Findings

Mentorship Fills the Cultural Gap Between Classroom and Workplace

Panelists consistently identified a gap between academic environments and contemporary workplaces. Interns often arrive with strong intellectual abilities but limited exposure to professional norms, expectations, and implicit rules. Effective mentors make these norms explicit—covering communication styles, accountability, dress, deadlines, confidentiality, and workplace hierarchy—rather than assuming prior knowledge.

Humanities Skills Are Valuable but Under-Articulated

Interns demonstrated strong competencies in critical thinking, research, close reading, collaboration, and cultural awareness. However, many struggled to name, translate, and advocate for these skills in professional settings. Mentors who intentionally helped interns map coursework to workplace tasks increased intern confidence and self-efficacy.

Growth Happens Through Discomfort and Persistence

A major discovery was that meaningful internship learning often emerges from discomfort rather than passion alone. Mentors emphasized the importance of normalizing challenge, unfinished learning, and “un-glamorous” work tasks as intrinsic to professional growth. Persistence itself emerged as a critical, transferable workforce skill.

Structure + Flexibility Drives Strong Outcomes

The most successful internships combined clear structure (expectations, timelines, deliverables) with flexibility (adapting projects to intern interests and strengths). Early and ongoing communication between faculty mentors and site mentors was identified as a key factor in preventing misalignment and supporting intern success.

Internships Shape Civic Identity and Career Direction

Interns—especially those placed in nonprofit and community organizations—reported profound shifts in worldview. Exposure to complex social systems and collaborative ecosystems deepened their civic awareness and influenced long-term academic and career goals.

Mentorship Is Reciprocal

Organizations benefited from interns' fresh perspectives. Interns functioned as mirrors—helping organizations reflect on mission, communication, and public perception—demonstrating that mentorship adds value in both directions.

Strategic Value for Stakeholders

- **For students:** Increased confidence, professional readiness, and clarity of purpose
- **For faculty:** Stronger alignment between academic learning and career outcomes
- **For community partners:** Meaningful project support and organizational insight
- **For the institution:** Demonstrated impact of humanities education and workforce relevance