



HERDWORK HUMANITIES

HERDWORK HUMANITIES MENTORSHIP WORKSHOPS

Combined Key Findings

August 2025 | January 2026 | September 2026

A synthesis of three workshops with interns, internship site mentors, faculty mentors, and HerdWork Humanities program leaders.

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College of Liberal Arts, Marshall University

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Executive Summary

Across the August 2025, January 2026, and September 2026 workshops, participants developed a coherent model of internship mentorship.

Mentorship is a relational, reflective, and developmental partnership that extends beyond supervision. It connects academic learning, community knowledge, workplace practice, personal growth, and future career possibilities. It helps interns understand not only what to do, but why the work matters, how professional judgment develops, and how to recognize and communicate evidence of growth.

Across all three workshops, effective mentorship consistently involved clear expectations; trust and appropriate boundaries; meaningful work tied to organizational needs; individualized support; honest and usable feedback; reflection; increasing responsibility; coordination among mentors; and respect for the intern as a developing colleague.

The series also shows a progression. August 2025 established why mentorship matters. January 2026 clarified what strong mentoring practice looks like. September 2026 focused on how mentors choose and adjust the right mentoring move in response to the intern, task, stakes, and stage of development.

CENTRAL FINDING

Student agency does not arise from freedom alone. It grows when expectations and context are visible, responsibility is meaningful but bounded, questions and mistakes can be discussed, support changes as the intern grows, and the intern is helped to reflect, communicate, and seek support appropriately.

Progression Across the Three Workshops

AUG 2025

Why mentorship matters

Mentorship was framed as apprenticeship to an organization and community, supported by trust, reflection, reciprocal learning, relationship building, and attention to transferable skills.

JAN 2026

What strong mentoring practice looks like

Participants emphasized structure with agency, meaningful and manageable assignments, treatment as developing colleagues, relational feedback, explicit workplace culture, tangible outcomes plus visible process, and early coordination.



SEP 2026

How mentors exercise judgment

The focus shifted to observing before labeling, asking before assuming, selecting among explanation, demonstration, supported practice, coaching, or stepping back, and returning to check whether the approach worked.

Combined Key Findings

1. Mentorship is the developmental layer beyond supervision

Supervision establishes required tasks, standards, deadlines, training, and access. Mentorship adds context and development: why the work matters, what the intern is learning, how to practice and use feedback, and when to assume greater ownership. An internship can be productive without being developmental; mentorship makes the learning visible and transferable.

2. Community and relationships are distinct sources of learning

The internship is an apprenticeship not only to a designated mentor but also to the organization, community, coworkers, volunteers, clients, partners, and other interns. These relationships give academic learning context, expose interns to knowledge that may not emerge in class, and help them participate in a professional community.

3. Clarity, context, and trust are preconditions for agency

Interns cannot reliably take initiative in environments whose mission, culture, norms, boundaries, and decision rules remain invisible. Early conversations should clarify communication, schedules, feedback, confidentiality, decision authority, what requires approval, what to do after a task is complete, and how to raise concerns. Trust is strengthened when both parties understand expectations and treat access to information and personal context responsibly.

4. Support should be individualized and adjusted over time and by situation

Strong mentorship is neither entirely prescriptive nor entirely open-ended. Mentors should ask what kind of supervision and feedback helps the intern work well, then adjust support according to task familiarity, confidence, stakes, clarity, communication preferences, prior experience, and progress. The useful question is not simply whether to give more or less support, but which form of support is needed now.

5. Meaningful work should serve the organization, intern, and community

The strongest assignments address a legitimate organizational need while connecting to the intern's interests, goals, or emerging professional identity. Work should be bounded enough that the intern knows what success looks like and has an appropriate area to own, yet flexible enough to allow judgment, creativity, or personalization. Projects should be completable or meaningfully advanced during the placement, leaving useful value for the organization and recognizable evidence for the intern.

6. Challenge, feedback, mistakes, and revision are central to growth

Purposeful challenge should be paired with context, tools, modeling, practice, feedback, and encouragement. Feedback works best when it is timely, specific, respectful, based on observable work, connected to a standard, and followed by a manageable next step. Manageable mistakes, revision, uncertainty, and false starts should be treated as expected learning processes, not personal failure, while still maintaining accountability. Mentors should also help interns distinguish ordinary professional discomfort from harassment, discrimination, abuse, or unsafe conditions.

7. Reflection turns activity into learning and evidence

Busy work does not automatically become learning. Journaling, notes, conversation, check-ins, and deliberate processing help interns identify what they observed, attempted, revised, contributed, and learned. Reflection should make both the final product and the process visible, including research, decision-making, communication, persistence, adaptation, and judgment. These records support the Experience Portfolio, Showcase, resumes, interviews, applications, and future professional stories.

8. Workplace culture and work systems must be taught explicitly

Experienced staff may regard workplace customs as obvious, but interns may not know expectations about attendance, dress, titles, meetings, devices, questions, remote work, confidentiality, social media, or communication channels. In remote and hybrid settings, file locations, naming conventions, progress visibility, backup contacts, response times, and reporting methods must also be documented. Before interpreting a difficulty as lack of interest or professionalism, mentors should investigate whether the problem is one of clarity, systems, access, or communication.

9. Mentors should observe and ask before interpreting

An observable fact, such as a late submission or a quiet intern, is not the same as an interpretation about motivation or capability. Prior workplaces may have taught interns that questions are unwelcome, mistakes are punished, or initiative means overstepping. A stronger first move is to name what was observed, ask what the intern understood or experienced, clarify expectations, and agree on the next action.

10. Mentorship is networked and coordinated, but the intern must remain visible

The designated mentor is one part of a wider learning network. Site mentors, faculty mentors, program leaders, coworkers, and community members may each see a different part of the experience. Early contact and a structured mid-semester connection can compare observations about strengths, work, communication, hours, academic connections, final materials, and support needs. Coordination should be transparent, limited to information needed for support, and inclusive of the intern when appropriate.

11. Mentors help interns name humanities skills and translate experience into a professional story

Interns often possess relevant abilities before they know how to name them. Mentors can connect site work to research, close reading, writing, interpretation, language study, data collection, creative practice, group work, contextual thinking, empathy, cultural awareness, collaboration, and self-awareness. Rather than saying "I used communication," interns should learn to explain the need, action, adaptation, perspectives considered, result, and learning. Presenting their experience helps consolidate this translation.

12. Mentorship is reciprocal and can shape belonging, identity, and direction

Interns are developing colleagues, not simply recipients of tasks or wisdom. Inclusion, appropriate access, trust, shadowing, introductions, and recognition help interns build confidence and belonging. Interns also contribute academic knowledge, questions, creativity, technology skills, and fresh perspectives. Strong mentorship can affect not only what interns can do, but how they understand themselves, their communities, their possible careers, and their responsibility to others.

Combined Practice Framework

The workshops point to a consistent set of practices across the internship timeline. The goal is not to remove every difficulty or produce complete independence. It is to help the intern develop better judgment about what to own, what to ask, how to communicate, how to use feedback, and when additional support is appropriate.

At the beginning

- Provide orientation to the organization's mission, structure, culture, community context, current priorities, and workplace customs.
- Create an early mentoring agreement covering schedule, communication, feedback, confidentiality, boundaries, decision authority, file systems, response expectations, backup contacts, and what the intern should do when a task is complete.
- Ask about supervision and feedback preferences, prior workplace experiences, interests, goals, and the level of structure that helps the intern work well.
- Use a written work plan to define intended outcomes, priorities, milestones, check-back points, and a meaningful but bounded area of ownership.
- Establish a dependable reflection method, such as a journal, notes system, weekly memo, or recurring check-in questions.

Throughout the experience

- Maintain a predictable check-in rhythm and discuss wins, challenges, learning, next steps, and support needs, not only task completion.
- Pair high expectations with explanation, modeling, practice, coaching, resources, usable feedback, and opportunities to revise or try again.
- Use questions that make difficulty discussable, such as "What is not going as expected?" "Where are you stuck?" or "What are you worried might happen if you move forward?"
- Introduce the intern to the wider learning network and include appropriate shadowing, meetings, presentations, and professional relationship building.

- Help the intern name evidence of humanities skills, growth, and contribution while the experience is happening.

At the midpoint

- Hold a structured connection among the site mentor, faculty mentor, and intern, using a clear agenda and transparent expectations about what information will be shared and why.
- Compare observations about strengths, current work, communication, workload, hours, academic connections, final materials, and support needs.
- Assign next steps, clarify who is responsible for each action, and establish a check-back point.

Near the conclusion

- Review accomplishments, challenges, mistakes, revisions, changes in perspective, and evidence of growth.
- Identify how the intern contributed to the organization or community and how the organization or community shaped the intern's learning.
- Help the intern translate the experience into the Experience Portfolio, Showcase, resume, interview stories, applications, and professional conversations.
- Discuss relationships the intern should maintain and create an opportunity to present or share learning.

Adaptive Mentoring Cycle

PRACTICAL CYCLE

Observe -> Ask before assuming -> Choose a move -> Agree on the next step -> Check back and adjust -> Reflect and name the evidence

Possible mentoring moves: Explain | Demonstrate | Practice | Coach | Step Back

Conclusion

Together, the three workshops define strong mentorship as the intentional creation of conditions for growth: meaningful work, trusted relationships, clear expectations, thoughtful challenge, adaptive support, reflection, and coordination. The mentor's role is not to provide every answer or remove every difficulty. It is to help the intern understand an unfamiliar professional environment, contribute meaningfully, learn from mistakes and revision, make decisions within clear boundaries, articulate the value of humanities learning, and assume greater ownership of professional development.

FINAL DEVELOPMENTAL TEST

Is the intern more able to act, reflect, communicate, use feedback, and seek support than at the beginning?

Source and Scope Note

This combined synthesis was prepared from:

- August 26, 2025 Mentoring & Humanities in the Workplace Workshop summary and accompanying notes;
- January 13, 2026 Mentorship Workshop summary of findings; and
- September 1, 2026 Mentorship Workshop transcript, participant chat, presentation and facilitator notes, attendance documentation, and summary of findings.

The August 2025 workshop occurred during HerdWork Humanities' first cohort and primarily articulated a mentoring philosophy and intended practices. Across all three workshops, the findings reflect participant experiences, perspectives, and practical recommendations rather than formal program-evaluation results.

PROGRAM CONTACT

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