

A VOLUME IN IDENTITY & PRACTICE IN HIGHER EDUCATION-STUDENT AFFAIRS



# LIBERATIONSHIPS

*Critical Mentorship in Practice*

KIM MCALONEY  
JENESIS ROSE LONG

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# Liberationships

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A volume in  
*Identity & Practice in Higher Education–Student Affairs*  
Pietro A. Sasso and Shelley Price-Williams, *Series Editors*

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# Liberationships

*Critical Mentorship in Practice*

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## *Foreword*

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**A**cross our globe, throughout our nation, within states, communities and institutions people are seeking meaningful connections, life-giving relationships and personal nourishment. The desire for mutually loving relationships is a universal need and desire. At a more basic level, people have a need to be seen, heard, understood and valued. At the same time, as we grow from infancy to adulthood, implicitly or explicitly we wrestle with recurring questions about our identity, purpose and meaning—questions such as, “Who am I?”; “Why am I?”; “What do I hope to get done?”; and “What does the world most need from me?” Such profound questions, as the ones we are faced with in making meaning of our lives and navigating the journey towards the future that lie before us cannot be adequately addressed in isolation. If we are to grow into our full self, cultivate an authentic way of being, and follow a life course consistent with our most deeply held values, we must have the support and encouragement of others.

Within the sphere of higher education, individuals often rely upon those who they identify as mentors for support and guidance as they make crucial decisions about ways to reconcile life dilemmas, contemplate what paths to pursue and determine how to achieve one’s desires. If we were to speak with most adults and query them about their path to success, most would cite the essential role that a mentor played in their growth and development. Mentoring relationships can be pivotal to those seeking direction and meaning. While mentoring, as most of us have experienced those relationships, can produce great value, traditional mentoring has its flaws. The

construct under which traditional mentoring relationships operate can be quite limiting.

Mentoring is a relationship of choice, which means, most often the relationship is initiated by a person in a position of power or influence who uses their knowledge and status to benefit a younger person. In some cases, the prospective mentor identifies a person with whom they feel an affinity or who reminds them of a younger version of themselves and forge a relationship to help that person follow a career path similar to theirs. In other cases, a less experienced person may seek out the insights or wisdom of a more seasoned person and forge a mentoring relationship as a result of their initiative. Through both scenarios, some mentors will use their influence to mold a person into someone who is a newer form of themselves. This type of mentoring, while appearing magnanimous, can also be manipulative. Though I am sure that the vast majority of mentors sincerely believe that they are acting in the best interest of the mentee. I have no doubt that the preponderance of people who seek and desire mentoring are looking for a person who can support them in being the best possible version of their authentic self. Mentoring, as we know it now, has been meaningful and additive for many. Nonetheless, the diversity of our campuses and the uniqueness of the lives and personal strivings of those who walk the halls of colleges and universities makes it clear that we need to disrupt our current notion of mentoring and uncover possibilities for enhancing the agency of those receiving mentoring.

The current version of mentoring has led to an institutional environment in which those who do not resemble those in positions of power, influence and in control of institutional resources are generally overlooked and excluded. Particularly in institutions that lack demographic diversity, women of color are often disregarded when possibilities for mentorship are considered. This Euro-male influenced model must be interrupted and transformed.

In *Liberationships: Critical Mentorship in Practice*, Kim McAloney and Jenesis Long give us a model that not only disrupts and transforms our notion of mentoring, but also provides us with a model for reconsidering our responsibilities to those with whom we are in close relationship. It is especially significant that this model focuses on mentorship for women of color, given all that we know about the marginality, invisibility, voicelessness and oppression that far too many women of color experience in the Academy. In this book the authors introduce the concept of liberationships, which at its core challenges us to think about the power of having access to relationships or people in our life who free us up to live bravely, freely and in alignment with our spirit and soul. In their model they name dynamics that often go unspoken in traditional mentoring—power, identity difference or resonance,

systemic norms and resistance, and White supremacy. Liberationships free up those involved in the relationship to name whatever is so for them, it allows each person, through their authentic voice to express their needs, desires, hopes and fears. Liberationships create space to name the ties that are binding one and provides connections to sever those unproductive constraints. Liberationships offer a mutuality and ethic of common caring that is not always visible in traditional mentoring interactions. McAloney and Long name, explain and provide a road map for what can be and should be in relationships committed to reciprocally nurturing the best in each other.

*Liberationships: Critical Mentorship in Practice* makes the case that developing liberationships and advancing one's growth begins with committing to doing the necessary internal work to become aware, including accessing the humility and vulnerability to accept that we have much to learn and that the needed learning can be facilitated through an intentionally liberating relationship. The authors demonstrate throughout that in mentoring relationships consciousness must precede action, that we must be conscious of the realities of others, if we are to engage with them with integrity. As this book demonstrates, awareness, reflection and action are strongly linked. When we fully engage, we are able to demonstrate our ability to listen and hear, understand and respond, sense and feel, and act on what we know. McAloney and Long leave no doubt that, if we embrace liberationships, remarkable personal transformation can take place (and ultimately, institutional and social transformation).

As you read this book, allow yourself to welcome and embrace the powerful call to rethink mentoring, as it has been presented to most of us. Consider the possibilities for what liberationships can offer you and those to whose success and well-being you are committed. In Chapter 7 the authors provide a compendium of powerful emotionally and intellectually stimulating questions and activities. The model and activities presented in this book demonstrate that creating nourishing, life-enriching relationships requires time, attention, care and thoughtfulness. The path to liberationship must include reframing our thinking, changing our behavior, and enhancing our awareness. Chapter 8 provides explicit guidance on how to create institutional programs to promote and support the success of minoritized community members. This guidance will support institutional leaders who carry a commitment to providing culturally appropriate and responsive mentoring to students and other community members who have been historically underserved and ill-served by traditional mentoring relationships.

This book is significant and groundbreaking, its contribution to higher education and specifically to the well-being of women of color cannot be under-estimated. This publication not only disrupts the traditional

construct of mentoring, but also challenges hierarchy and the notions of White supremacy on which it is constructed. As I read this manuscript, I was reminded of the admonition Frantz Fanon (1963) issued to Black people in the United States and Africa in *Wretched of the Earth*:

So, comrades, let us not pay tribute to Europe by creating states, institutions and societies which draw inspiration from her.

Humanity is waiting for something from us other than such an imitation, which would be almost an obscene caricature.

If we want to turn Africa into a new Europe, and America into a new Europe, then let us leave the destiny of our countries to Europeans. They will know how to do it better than the most gifted among us.

But if we want humanity to advance a step further, if we want to bring it up to a different level than that which Europe has shown it, then we must invent and we must make discoveries. (p. 315)

This innovative, culturally-grounded work done by McAloney and Long point to a new way, a way that following the European-influenced, male-centered model of mentoring would never take us. By embracing and enacting their model we can, indeed, “advance humanity a step further.”

—Larry D. Roper, PhD  
Emeritus Professor of Language, Culture, and Society  
Oregon State University

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**T**his book has been brought to life through the support, encouragement, and love of so many incredible people in our community.

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From Jenesis: to my friends and family, thank you for holding me through all of the change I navigated during 2024, the final year of work on this book. I could not have made it through without the love and care of my sister Krystle, my brother-in-law Sully, my best friends Kim and Michelle, and their families. To Jade Johnson, thank you for being my ideal reader,

and for reminding me that things can continue to get better if I am brave enough to go after what I really want. To my little loves, Damien, Kaiya, and Jade, thank you for the regular reminders of how special it is to be alive and experiencing this world together. Please always remember, this world is ours to create.

From Kim: To my friends and family, thank you for holding space, always supporting, and believing in me. What a journey! Chad, Ella, and Diana, your joy, light, and smiles are precious. Thank you for lighting up this auntie's life! To Adam and Damien, living in your humanity (laughter and joy, curiosity, creativity, spaciousness and support of others) is home and the best place to be. Thank you for supporting my ever stretching dreams, for doing life together, and for doing the work. I love you infinity!

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# 1

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## *How Did We Get Here?*

**W**e, the authors, acknowledge that our journey to writing this book has been deeply shaped by not only our academic and professional lives, but also our personal lives. Given that, in this chapter, we will share about our exploration of mentorship through various experiences, and highlight many of the most influential experiences we've had during our liberationship that have brought us to the place where we are able to write this book. Liberationships are mutually beneficial relationships that empower all parties to reach their personally defined goals while addressing systemic barriers. Because of this interwoven dynamic of our liberationship, we are choosing to write this book in scholarly personal narrative (Nash & Viray, 2013), so we will add personal anecdotes and our lessons learned throughout it. We invite you to read this book through a holistic lens and consider its lessons through your multiple identities as an academic, professional, and multi-faceted human.

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**Kim McAloney, PhD**

My first mentorship experiences were in the Christian church. I was mentored on what it meant to be a woman; namely, how to be a good, godly wife and mother. I also learned to engage with and support others in the community largely by sharing what I have and to use my organization and planning skills to help others learn, grow, and engage in experiences. While this was foundational to my life, something was missing.

Fast forward through life experiences supporting my shifting narrative and experience with organized religion, my first collegiate experience was at a community college where I knew just a few students. I attended both on campus and correspondence courses, as we called them then. I had engagement with some of my faculty, but felt largely disconnected from campus and the institution. I took some time off school given life experiences and was encouraged to pick it up again when we moved for my partner's transfer from community college to university. Taking his advice, I set up a meeting with the education academic advisor at what would be our new local community college. After her and my conversation, the advisor walked me over to the TRIO Student Support Services office where I not only applied for the program, but was offered a work study position as an office assistant given my past work experience. Through the TRIO Student Support Services program not only did I receive academic counseling, but support from my student community. As a group, we felt not represented by the current student government and decided to write one another in on the student government ballot during elections. This community organizing led me to be elected as a student representative. Little did I know that that experience would drastically shape my career and life.

It was in this student representative leadership role that I met a mentor who changed so much for me. This mentor, the student government advisor, was Tammi Paul. She was an amazing, thoughtful, caring, and supportive advisor. She listened to where we wanted to go as a team, and individually, and then supported us in the journey to achieving those goals. One day, Tammi, knowing I was interested in working in education, asked me if I had considered working in higher education as I seemed to really enjoy student government work. I'd wanted to work in education, though I was thinking of working with preschoolers at this time. Tammi connected me with Dr. Larry Roper at Oregon State University (OSU). At that time, Larry was the vice provost for student affairs at OSU and was teaching Black Identity Development through the ethnic studies, one of my two majors in my transfer to the university the next term which I decided to enroll in.

Larry's class was engaging. I talked about things in that class I'd never discussed before: My identity as a Black bi-/multiracial person. I met a few other students who were biracial. These conversations were affirming in ways that took me years to be able to name. At the end of the class, Larry asked me what I wanted to do in my career. I shared my interest in considering student affairs and working in higher education. Directly following our meeting, he connected me to an internship program at Oregon State University which was the university I was dual enrolled in along with my community college, and to the NAPSA Undergraduate Fellows Program (NUFP) a semi-structured mentorship program for minoritized students through the student affairs administrator organization NASPA to explore this professional pathway. As OSU's NUFP had a campus community, I also was able to connect with Dr. Mamta Accapadi, OSU's dean of students at that time. When making my full transition from finishing at community college and transferring to OSU, I also connected with OSU's TRIO Student Support Services program and the state-funded Educational Opportunities Program (EOP) that began out of a Black student walk about 40 years before I arrived. It was here, within EOP, that I met Dr. Janet Nishihara, the program's director.

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### *A Different Kind of Leadership*

Larry Roper, Mamta Accapadi, and Janet Nishihara. I was struck by each of them: the way they engaged and treated people. Each of them are very different people and yet these core feelings and actions I saw and experienced from each of them were different than any I had experienced before. They were genuine, authentic, and themselves; not a single story I got from the church where I was consistently shown how to be a White, middle-class values wife and mom. These core characteristics of building community, holding people's humanity, and engaging in authentic and transparent leadership were there in each of them, but all three engage with these characteristics in their own way. They care about justice and its birth from a place of love. Each believes in other people's humanity and works to create a more just world in ways I had not experienced anywhere else. It was in this space at the cross-section of learning more about myself as a racialized being, in relationship with these beautiful humans and leaders who engage in the world that made me feel like I could not only bring my full self, but also that I had something to contribute, and who, from this core, expressed leadership in different ways, began connecting pieces for me. I was able to take the core components I held dear from Christianity around justice, love, and community and was able to bring my full new understandings of

myself and my communities to help me embrace my whole self and begin to dream about how I can lead authentically.

As I wrapped up my undergraduate experience, I was able to engage in a formal mentorship relationship with Larry through the NUFPP program. I volunteered as a teaching assistant for an ethnic studies course that Mamta taught. I had an unofficial mentorship with Janet as when I joined EOP, she assigned me a different academic counselor than herself so we could talk about the overlapping interest we both had in ethnic studies and student affairs. Janet encouraged and mentored me through submitting my first conference proposal to the NASPA Multicultural Institute which was accepted and co-presented with her.

As I transitioned into my master's program in OSU's college student services administration (CSSA) program, Larry became my major advisor and committee chair. Mamta became my assistantship supervisor and Janet and I worked together through a summer bridge extended orientation program for first year, first generation, low income, and rural college students. With this transition from undergraduate to graduate student and then, again, to professional, my relationship with Mamta and Janet shifted. As I transitioned roles from graduate student to professional, Mamta, who remained my supervisor, and Janet, who I continued working and teaching with, began sharing with me differently at each of these transition points. As this sharing shifted, so did our mentorship relationships. While they didn't dramatically shift, my connection then with Larry and Mamta was different than with Janet. With my class-of-origin being working class and poor, I held their positions as vice provost for student affairs and dean of students, respectively, with a bit of distance. While they created the space for us to continue to shift and deepen our mentorship relationships, I was confined by my limited thinking and epistemological frame within racial capitalism. They were each in such high positions of the university and here I am just a grad student and new professional. With Janet, however, though she was the director of EOP, I felt more open to her as the director position felt like a smaller structural barrier to overcome, allowing for a deeper connection; and we, together, formed a liberationship. Even with my own limiting views of our mentorship at the time, each of these experiences with Larry, Mamta, and Janet helped shape how I come to know, how I show up, and how I understand mentorship and the liberatory possibilities through education today.

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### ***Epistemological and Pedagogical Foundations***

My professional journey has led me to work with the dean of students office, in academic support programs, and in coordinating higher education

and student affairs graduate programs. Each of these roles have continued to shape who I am and how I engage with students, colleagues, and society. It was the dean of students office under Mamta's recommendation that first introduced me to both *Sentipensante* pedagogy (Rendón, 2008) and hooks' (1998) engaged pedagogy. These pedagogies shape how I see my role as an educator which includes mentorship and supervision. I have had the opportunity and support to experiment with and solidify what these pedagogies mean and could mean for my professional practice. I have served as a mentor for about a dozen undergraduate students through the NUFP, which is how I was able to first meet, connect, and build this liberationship with Jenesis.

Throughout my professional roles, I have been able to serve students through academic counseling. Academic counseling is holistic advising recognizing that a student's academics are impacted by their other identities and roles (as possible siblings, children, roommates, students of color, employees, etc.). This work of holding, viewing, and working with people holistically have helped me in my formation of what mentorship could fully be and have allowed me to push the bounds of what it meant to be an academic counselor/advisor, supervisor, mentor, and instructor. Working in the academic support program helped me continue to hone these pedagogies through my engagement with students and colleagues both in and out of the unit.

Over the course of my decade plus in the profession, I have had the opportunity to serve as an internships supervisor for several dozen undergraduate and graduate students including Jenesis. I had the opportunity to build an internship program within the dean of students office that supported both NUFP and other undergraduates exploring careers in student affairs as well as higher education and student affairs graduate students. One of my early professional roles was to support graduate students enrolled in a higher education master's program, first, providing direct student support, and then as a program administrator, advisor, graduate committee member, and instructor. I was able to use engaged pedagogy and *sentipensante* pedagogy within and outside of the classroom. I was able to use these pedagogies to consider approaches to leading an academic program, a co-curricular program, and looking not only at particular moments (such as a term, semester, or year), but with a longer view as well extending multiple years.

My doctoral degree is in language, equity, and educational policy. It was within the coursework here that created the opportunity for us to examine our unique mentorships, or liberationships as we have come to name them, through developing the liberatory mentorship for women of color model (McAloney & Long, 2019). The doctoral program deepened my

understanding of educational inequity within colleges and universities as well as within education as a whole in the United States.

It is during this experience that I had to consider what I would have to do in order to make it as an academic.

It was here that I was able to continue considering what resistance within the academy looked like for me.

It was here that I began my journey to my natural hair and learn to be more comfortable in my own skin and physical appearance largely and within the academy.

It was because of these liberationships that I could fully bring myself to work.

It is here that confirmed that this work of liberationships is necessary for my survival and ability to thrive.

---

### **Jenesis Rose Long, EdM**

My first experience with mentorship taught me that I needed to be different. I was advised to dress differently even though it would make my curvier body uncomfortable, to put more effort into doing my hair so my natural curls didn't look so frizzy, and to do my makeup so the darker pigmentation around my eyes didn't make me look so tired. I was told how to talk, what I should be interested in, and often felt out of place. The core lesson I learned from those years of mentorship was that I was "wrong" and I needed to look different, talk differently, and be different. I left those years of experiences assuming that I would encounter a similar treatment whenever I was being mentored by someone in the future, so I resigned myself to being malleable in order to fit in. I truly believed that in order to achieve my academic or professional goals, I would have to become a different person that someone else shaped, until I met Kim.

A few years after this initial mentorship experience, I transferred to Oregon State University (OSU) to complete my honors Bachelor of Science degree in psychology. As a transfer student, I had just two short years to explore and establish my career goals post-grad. To do this, I pursued student jobs on campus within one of the areas I was interested in, student affairs. I applied to be an academic coach within the Academic Success Center and unfortunately was unable to interview for the position because the funding was cut for their additional staff. When the center's director informed me of that change, she also referred me to meet with Kim McAloney to see about joining the NASPA Undergraduate Fellows Program (NUFP)

that is designed to help students from underrepresented backgrounds explore the field of student affairs (NUFP, 2021). When I first met Kim, she explained the program's purpose and structure, and after spending time getting to know me and my interests, she invited me to join. I knew immediately that I wanted to sign up because it would be a great opportunity for me to decide if pursuing a career in student affairs was the right fit for me or not. She then had me review the biographies of the different student affairs professionals that I could ask to serve as my mentor for the program, one of whom was her. Given that our initial conversation flowed so easily and we had many similar identities that influenced how we experienced higher education and careers, I asked if she'd be open to serving as my NUFP mentor. Kim agreed and we applied for the program together after a few more meetings where we clarified my goals. Our application was accepted, and thus began our mentorship relationship.

Participating in the NUFP program with Kim as my mentor allowed me to learn about the field of student affairs, connect with other professionals that Kim had connections with, meet other students with similar identities and interests, and attend a regional NASPA conference. Furthermore, my participation in the NUFP program led to an internship in the Dean of Student Life Office at OSU, a job as an office assistant in the psychology advising office, and was the topic of my undergraduate honors thesis. For my thesis, I wanted to document the impact that mentors had on NUFP students to support improvement of mentorship programs and relationships of underrepresented undergraduate students, since I had received so much personal and professional value.

My original goal of exploring and establishing my career goals was accomplished, and I decided to pursue further studies in higher education administration programs. I applied for the college student services administration (CSSA) program at OSU, along with two other graduate programs for student affairs professionals. While I was accepted to all three, OSU provided the greatest financial incentive for me to achieve professional experience alongside my academic program through the graduate teaching assistantship position I was offered in the University Exploratory Student Program. In this role I served as an academic advisor to exploratory students, as well as a teaching assistant for a career decision-making course, which aligned well with my career goals at the time of becoming an academic advisor.

As I wrapped up my undergraduate degree, I recall reflecting on how my mentorship relationship with Kim was beginning to grow and shift. After 2 years of a formal, structured mentorship relationship, our relationship was now shifting to a new dynamic as I began graduate school. I noticed this because we were starting to engage with each other in new ways, such as

broadening our scope of conversation to include things like hair products, relationships, and personal finances. Beyond noticing these differences and feeling grateful for the new ways we were engaging with each other, we also named that this shift was happening. We discussed how my being a graduate student meant I would no longer be an active NUFPP fellow, and discussed how we wanted to stay connected to one another through my transition into graduate school.

Part of the CSSA degree requirements is to complete internships that expose you to different areas of the field of student affairs so you gain multiple perspectives of the profession. Through my connection with Kim, I completed an internship in the Educational Opportunities Program (EOP) where I met with multiple academic counselors to learn more about what it means to be an academic counselor so that I could compare it to my experience as an academic advisor, and see how EOP meets their mission of supports the academic, personal, and professional development of students who have traditionally been denied equal access to higher education ([Educational Opportunities Program, 2021](#)). Through this internship opportunity, I again saw the value of being mentored by someone you have shared identities with when navigating higher education. This internship, that Kim helped to facilitate, helped me to see that my beliefs about best practices for supporting students aligned more closely with academic counseling than academic advising. The CSSA master's degree program I was in also required students to coordinate a committee of advisors to serve as the reviewers of their portfolio of work and to support their professional development journey. Given my history with Kim, I asked her to serve on my portfolio committee, and she generously agreed. Along with working on developing my academic path and career goals, Kim also helped me see ways that the lessons I was learning and experiences I was gaining could be shared with a larger audience outside of OSU by presenting at conferences. While it took me a while to feel comfortable presenting at conferences, ultimately, it was with Kim's support that I first shared my work with professional associations outside of my university.

Having space within our liberationship to gain self-knowledge of my interests, skills, and goals was critical to guiding me towards my first professional job out of my masters degree as an academic counselor for a grant-funded program that supported first-generation and Pell-eligible college students in a program called "MAAPS" at OSU. As a new student affairs professional, I had much to learn about myself and the world of work. As I navigated questions about my finances, relationships at work and at home, as well as my career path, Kim was there to hold space for me to reflect on my experiences. Unfortunately, the grant funding ended for the program