Annotated Excerpts from Successful Mentoring Plans

Applications for the Scholars Program require different types of supporting materials than traditional research grants. We've found that applicants sometimes have difficulty developing strong mentoring plans, and that their institutions are uncertain of how to write convincing institutional support letters. In the following annotated excerpts, we demonstrate how past applicants and their institutions have convincingly detailed their mentoring plans and institutional support. These excerpts are intended as examples, and applicants are encouraged to depart from them in order to make the best possible case for their particular needs and situations.

We hope you find this resource useful.

Proposals included:

Stefanie DeLuca, Johns Hopkins University  
Moving Matters: Residential Mobility, Neighborhoods and Family in the Lives of Poor Adolescents

Phillip Hammack, University of California, Santa Cruz  
Subverting the Consequences of Stigma and Subordination: Toward Empowering Settings for Sexual Minority Youth
Moving Matters: Residential Mobility, Neighborhoods and Family in the Lives of Poor Adolescents

Stefanie DeLuca
Johns Hopkins University

CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Mentors and Support

I have selected Kathryn Edin, John Bolland and J. Michael Oakes to be my mentors if I receive funding for this project. All of my mentors have been very successful in translating their research into work that matters for policy and the community, and raising funding support for their work. All three are experts in research that deals with the hardships that poor families face and how environments matter for their life outcomes.

Kathy Edin, on faculty at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, is a nationally recognized expert in the use of qualitative and mixed methods research for studying low income families. Her book, Making Ends Meet (1997) is a staple in field methods courses, and has demonstrated the power of qualitative methods for understanding how social policies and contexts of disadvantage affect the choices of poor women. Promises I Can Keep has admirably done the very same thing, as Kathy knows how to make sense of the seemingly irrational behavior of families struggling with few resources. It is precisely this skill that I hope to develop through my mentorship with Kathy. I have had some limited experience with Kathy previously, as I helped to collect qualitative data for the Baltimore MTO study that she had organized. Through this experience I got to know her and we developed a casual at-a-distance mentorship, which I would like to strengthen through this proposed research. Kathy has years of experience studying the challenges of family life and she knows how to get useful answers to complicated questions, and turn theoretical paradoxes into empirical questions.

Kathy has had extensive experience in the field, designing surveys, conducting interviews and getting the most out of combining mixed methods research approaches. As I develop my residential mobility...
interview instruments, I will seek guidance from Kathy about how to ask questions that make sense out of the chaos of people’s lives without losing any of the richness of the data. I haven’t conducted my own interview study before, and know that Kathy can provide guidance for locating participants, ensuring high follow up rates and learning how to integrate the information from the interviews with survey data on family neighborhoods. Her extensive ethnographic experience can help me consider the “street level” measures of neighborhoods because she has spent extended periods of fieldwork time in over a half dozen urban areas, including several areas in the South.

I plan to visit Kathy at Harvard University at least twice a year, as well as meet with her at professional meetings, to work on my measures and the pilot interview protocol. As I start to gather my data from the interviews, Kathy can also advise me in creating an appropriate codebook and I can exchange drafts of analyses with her via email. I already know that Kathy will personally read some of these interviews to get a handle on how she can best help me. As I eventually try to publish the findings from these new data collection efforts, I will seek Kathy’s advice for translating them into high quality academic publications as well as useful policy briefs.

John Bolland is on the faculty at the School of Public Health at the University of Alabama. John has had over 15 years of experience collecting data in low income neighborhoods in Alabama, where he has been examining the risk behaviors and contexts of very poor adolescents. John has raised over 46 million dollars to support multiple original data collection projects, including the nine year and counting Mobile Youth Study which serves as the core for my proposal. John has also had great success in turning the results of his work in Huntsville and Mobile into intervention programs to reduce risk behaviors in the neighborhoods he studies—something rarely done in social science research. His success in designing and funding these programs is due in part to his rigorous and intensive research activities, but it is also due to his strong and long term relationships with many city and state agencies in Mobile. These agencies trust John, and have been providing him with wide access to essential individual level data for the MYS, such as juvenile court records. I can learn firsthand from John about Mobile and the MYS because he designed the study, and is more familiar with the data and the neighborhoods than anyone else. He can
help me create appropriate and sensitive interview questions and neighborhood measures that will reflect his extensive experience in the areas. After all, John walked every street in all 13 targeted neighborhoods in 1998 to create the sampling frame for the non-public housing sites!

John will also introduce me to a rich interdisciplinary team of Southern researchers who are very familiar with Mobile and the socioeconomic and structural contexts of the region. This network of scholars can also help me interpret my work from a public health perspective and enhance my psychometric skills, given the batteries they have designed for the MYS. John’s experience with program evaluation and programs to reduce adolescent risk behaviors through community development will help me interpret how my findings about residential mobility and neighborhood change can be useful for the city of Mobile. Lastly, John will guide me as I help him direct the 25-30 undergraduate interns, who collect the yearly survey data every summer (the hope is also that some of the students who take my neighborhoods course at Johns Hopkins will be part of this team during the span of this study). The team of interns not only makes data collection of this magnitude possible, it also provides an incredible chance for the students to learn field methods while John and I teach them about social science theory and research design. I can also learn how to implement a similar kind of research program in the future.

The summer support I receive to do the fieldwork in Mobile will also help John and I develop our mentorship plan. I will be working side by side with John to collect the surveys in Mobile, and he will be present in Mobile the entire time I will be conducting my mobility interviews and street level observations. During the school year, John and I will exchange analytic results and manuscript drafts via email and hard copy (I have allowed for this in my postage budget). These efforts will also be supplemented by weekly phone calls and additional meetings at academic conferences.

My third mentor, J. Michael Oakes, is an Associate Professor at the University of Minnesota in the Division of Epidemiology and Community Health. He is a social epidemiologist with expertise in research methodology and applied statistics, particularly methods that examine the effects of social systems and socioeconomic status on
health outcomes. Oakes has published widely on the application of hierarchical linear models, SUTVA assumptions, propensity scores and community/group randomized trials as they apply to the study of neighborhoods. His recent book, *Methods in Social Epidemiology*, has received acclaim as a guide for researchers attempting interdisciplinary work in public health and has been helpful for me as I designed this proposal. Michael is about to begin a project to examine the effects of social environments using the Mobile Youth Survey, so he is also aware of its strengths and limitations.

Michael will help me as I design the analysis of the panel survey data for all three datasets; in particular, he will assist with the determination and application of appropriate model specifications and methodology, such as the use of propensity scores for estimating the effect of mobility on youth, latent class analysis, as well as concerns about measurement and statistical power. In addition to the methodological mentoring Michael will provide, he will also help me to better understand how to study the effects of mobility, family and neighborhood context on the mental and physical health related outcomes across my three datasets. Critically, he will help me see and explain the assumptions necessary to infer effects.

While my training thus far has prepared me to study processes related to educational and behavioral outcomes, I am eager to extend my work into health related domains. With support from my WT Grant award, I will travel to Minneapolis to meet with Michael twice a year, as well as meet with him at professional meetings. This allows us the opportunity to talk through the design of the research as it develops, and strategize how best to adjust the modeling techniques as I grapple with the complexities of the panel studies when they arise. An additional meeting with Michael will occur each year when he travels to Mobile, since that trip will coincide with the fieldwork and survey collection I will be conducting there. During the rest of the year, I will correspond with Michael via email, as he has agreed to review my empirical progress and research results in preparation for journal submissions.

In addition to Kathy, John and Michael, I receive strong intellectual support in the Department of Sociology here at Hopkins. Andrew Cherlin and Karl Alexander are both internationally recognized
scholars who have designed and conducted original data collection projects involving disadvantaged families and youth. Both Andy and Karl have expressed interest and excitement for my proposed work and have always been committed to my professional development as a junior member of the department. Lingxin Hao is a methodological expert in the study of poverty, social policy and youth and is a wonderful resource for additional skills.

In addition to the Sociology faculty, faculty at the Institute for Policy Studies and the Bloomberg School of Public Health provide extensive local support for the study of neighborhoods. Sandra Newman at IPS is a recognized scholar in the field of poverty and housing research, especially HOPE VI sites, and is enthusiastic about my research agenda. Tama Leventhal is also a supportive colleague, who works in very similar areas and provides me with feedback from a developmental point of view. At the School of Public Health, Nan Astone has been gracious over the years and is very excited about the prospect of my new work becoming part of the research at the Center for Adolescent Health. Clea McNeeley has also been generous with her support of my work, including the development of this current proposal.

My proximity to Washington also allows me to share my work with colleagues in the world of housing policy. Susan Popkin and Margery Turner at the Urban Institute are both national experts on housing policy and neighborhood effects. Sue has agreed to act as an additional source of local research support for me, and her experience with the HOPE VI panel study as well as the MTO Three City study will be of great help as I try to understand the effects of involuntary mobility on youth outcomes in my samples. Phil Tegeler at the Poverty, Race and Research Action Council is active in connecting legal issues with social science. I can seek their advice about the usefulness of my research findings for housing policy.

**Role of Award**

For the last 8 years, I have analyzed data from three residential mobility programs that helped poor families relocate to better neighborhoods—Gautreaux, MTO and the Thompson program in Baltimore. Through this
work, I have become skilled in the use of census data, administrative data from government agencies and some geocoding applications. I have also had the opportunity to conduct fieldwork as a result of my MTO involvement. If I receive this award, the resources will allow me to further develop much needed skills to advance my research career and support my time in the field in Alabama. The award assists my professional development in four major ways: conceptual stretch, methodological skills, support for data collection, resources to support my time working on the project goals. In terms of conceptual growth, this award allows me to expand the theoretical framework of my research to include a more serious consideration of the dynamics of families in poor neighborhoods and how they interact with neighborhood effects. In previous work, I focused heavily on neighborhoods, and now can also incorporate the details of family life as well. Dr. Edin will be particularly helpful in this respect. I will also be able to bring together research in psychology and sociology by considering some psychological mediators of mobility and environment, such as hopelessness, stress and efficacy. I will also extend my work to include an examination of adolescent health outcomes, which I have not previously done. Drs. Bolland and Oakes will be instrumental in guiding this development. In terms of learning new methodological skills, I will be employing models that help advance my research questions, such as latent class models to measure mobility patterns and propensity score methods to better assess the causal links between mobility and youth outcomes. I can also spend supported time learning how to use the full capabilities of GIS software and the ArcView mapping program.

I am also excited that the support from this grant will allow me to execute my first original data collection effort and spend extended periods of time learning about the urban environment in which I will conduct some my work. By supporting my summer fieldwork in Alabama, I can also travel throughout the region to meet with other scholars who study the South. I have already contacted Debra MacAllum at UA Tuscaloosa and Alex Vazsonyi at Auburn University and both have offered to meet with me to discuss our research interests. The summer salary support and teaching release afforded by the grant will allow me the protected time to execute analyses, write up research results and travel to present the results of my work.
Lastly, the work that I begin with the WT Grant award will set the course for a rich long term research agenda using the NLSY97 and the MYS, which will continue to be collected, and further developing research projects that take advantage of the mobility interviews I will conduct. I can extend my work on mobility by looking directly at the schooling experiences of the MYS youth and the intersection between neighborhood and schooling effects. I can take the mobility interview instrument that I design during the period of the award and develop a larger scale, multi-city study of how mobility affects youth development and family functioning.
Subverting the Consequences of Stigma and Subordination:
Toward Empowering Settings for Sexual Minority Youth

Phillip Hammack
University of California, Santa Cruz

Five-Year Mentoring Plan

Previous Training and Role of the Award

The proposed research will benefit from my training in human development, cultural psychology, and qualitative methods, while substantially broadening my disciplinary and methodological acumen. I received my doctoral training in the Committee on Human Development at the University of Chicago, specializing in cultural psychology and undergoing extensive training in qualitative methods, including ethnography. My dissertation research was a longitudinal, qualitative study of Israeli and Palestinian youth who participated in a peace education intervention. To conduct the study, I partnered with two existing peace organizations.

Thus I have significant experience using qualitative methods to study primarily individuals but also organizational settings (though not from the systems perspective proposed in this research). I also possess training in theories of human development that emphasize person-setting co-constitution and transaction, consistent with a cultural psychology framework (e.g., Shweder, 1990). These perspectives and experiences will serve me well in the theoretical conceptualization of the work and its integrative nature, as well as in the phases of the research that rely primarily upon qualitative methods and organizational collaboration.

My previous research on Israeli and Palestinian youth is relevant to the current project in that it used qualitative methods to examine an intervention conducted in an organizational setting. However, the interventions studied were all designed by adults and emphasized individual psychological change in the context of a structural/political conflict. My findings revealed that individual psychological changes were not sustainable over time among youth participants, which I ascribe to the fact that the interventions did not promote efforts at structural change or community activity designed to influence the extremely negative political situation (Hammack, 2011). These findings influenced my desire to investigate youth-designed interventions.
that explicitly target structural issues that affect the lives of youth in the US context.

While never conducting a largescale empirical study of sexual minority youth, I identify as a sexual minority, have worked closely with sexual minority youth for over 10 years, and have contributed to theories of sexual identity development in several papers that emphasize the historical and cultural context of sexuality (e.g., Hammack, 2005; Hammack & Cohler, 2009). I conducted a qualitative study of sexual identity using narrative methods and have called upon that data to contribute to the literature on sexual identity development and public policy (Hammack & Cohler, 2011; Hammack et al., 2009). My extensive familiarity with theoretical perspectives on sexual identity development and sexual minority youth, coupled with my experience interviewing sexual minority youth and serving as a Youth Advisor in the Horizons Youth Group in Chicago, will serve me well as I launch this new program of research.

This project considerably expands my disciplinary, conceptual, and methodological expertise. Appendix Table 4 contains an overview of the five-year mentoring plan, including new disciplinary perspectives and skills to be acquired. I plan to take a sociological and public health approach to the study of LGBT youth and intervention. This disciplinary expansion pushes me toward communities, settings, and policies as units of analysis, while my training in psychology has always privileged the individual. Fusing a sociological approach with insights from public health and community psychology (two novel disciplinary perspectives to me), the research will seek to test a model of minority stress processes, to link these processes to community-level indicators, and to examine the ability of a community-based organizational setting to be empowering. Taking a problem-centered, rather than discipline-centered, approach to the research amplifies the relevance of the knowledge produced to a variety of constituents, including health and social service practitioners, public health practitioners and scientists, community and policy advocates, and sexual minority youth themselves.

Beyond the disciplinary shift toward sociology and public health, I will develop new expertise in key methods, including community climate assessment, community survey methods, setting analysis, and PAR. These methods are labor intensive and require adherence to key principles.
My mentorship plan is intended to address these demands.

Finally, the desire to link research findings to explicit social policy advocacy is new for me and requires careful mentoring on the link between empirical research and structural influence (i.e., translation of research for public policy). I have carefully considered mentors who will assist me toward this end.

*Role of Mentors and Professional Development*

I have selected a team of mentors whose expertise will contribute substantially to my professional development, pushing me in new directions and providing critical support for this research agenda. Stephen Russell is a distinguished sociologist at the University of Arizona who has been a leader in the field of LGBT youth research. He has conducted extensive empirical work on sexual minority youth and has taken an explicit settings-based approach (e.g., Russell, 2002). In addition, Russell is a prior William T. Grant Scholar and thus fully understands the nature of the Award and its purpose, as well as the commitment expected of a mentor. Russell possesses the unique combination of being able to mentor me in a sociological approach to sexual minority youth while also being able to link me to existing community-based organizations in Northern California, where he has conducted research and consulted for organizations for years. In addition, Russell’s work takes a social policy focus, revealing a commitment to structural change for sexual minority youth. He has been intimately involved in policy advocacy to enhance the health and well-being of sexual minority youth. Russell’s mentorship will be essential throughout this research project, and his ability to guide me in a more sociological, policy-oriented approach and to link me to existing organizations and interventions will be key to the success of the project. He and I plan to meet at least once a month, either in person or by phone, in the first three years of the project, and we have agreed to meet in person at least twice a year throughout the duration of the research.

Ilan Meyer, Williams Senior Scholar of Public Policy at the Williams Institute, University of California, Los Angeles, has agreed to mentor me on issues related to minority stress theory, public health approaches, and the
development and implementation of the community survey in Phase 1. Meyer was formerly Professor of Clinical Sociomedical Sciences at Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health. He is an interdisciplinary social scientist whose training is primarily in public health. Meyer pioneered minority stress theory in the 1990s and has conducted research examining the link between stress and mental health among sexual minorities. In addition, Meyer has significant expertise in sampling strategies for sexual minorities and in linking science to social policy. He has worked extensively with the courts to file briefs in cases related to sexual orientation discrimination and provided expert testimony in the Perry v. Schwarzenegger (2008) case which overturned California’s voter-enacted ban on same-sex marriage (Proposition 8). Meyer’s mentorship will be pivotal as I expand my expertise to include a public health and public policy perspective. He has agreed to meet with me at least once a month via phone during the first three years of the research and at least once a year in person throughout the duration of the research.

This project importantly takes a “public science” approach to knowledge production in which the goal is to use science to enhance the public good and maximize the link between research and practice that works for individual and collective well-being (e.g., Torre & Fine, 2011). A critical aspect of this approach is the method of PAR, in which stakeholders (e.g., youth and program staff) are intimately involved in designing the research. Michelle Fine, Distinguished Professor at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY), possesses decades of experience advocating, designing, and implementing PAR with youth. Fine’s methodological expertise brings new opportunities for professional and intellectual development for me that are essential to the success of the research. Fine has agreed to meet with me by phone on a monthly basis during the third and fourth phases of the research.

In addition to the formal mentorship team, Ramona F. Oswald, Professor of Family Studies at the University of Illinois-Urbana/Champaign, has agreed to serve as a consultant on the community climate assessment which will occur in Phase 1 of the research. Oswald developed the method of community climate assessment for sexual minorities and will consult with me as needed during this critical phase of the project.
This appendix provides a quick snapshot of the mentoring plan.

**Appendix Table 4**

**Overview of Mentoring Plan**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>New Expertise/Skills</th>
<th>Mentor</th>
<th>Contact Plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>Sociological approach; survey design and analysis; community-based organizational collaboration; translation to policy and practice</td>
<td>Stephen Russell</td>
<td>Monthly via phone or Skype in Years 1-3; as needed in Years 4-5; in person every 6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>Public health approach; survey design, sampling, and analysis; translation to policy and practice</td>
<td>Ilan Meyer</td>
<td>Monthly via phone or Skype in Years 1-3; as needed in Years 4-5; in person once per year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>Participatory action research methodology</td>
<td>Michelle Fine</td>
<td>Monthly via phone or Skype in Years 3-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Community climate measurement</td>
<td>Ramona Oswald (Consultant)</td>
<td>As needed via phone or Skype in Year 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>