

Annotated Excerpt from a Successful Mentoring Plan

Applications for the William T. Grant Scholars Program require different types of supporting materials than traditional research grants. We've found that applicants sometimes have difficulty developing strong mentoring plans. In the following annotated excerpt, we demonstrate how the applicant convincingly detailed his mentoring plan. Additional examples of mentoring plans can be found in the full proposals posted on this site. 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 situation.

We hope you find these resources useful.

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Annotated Mentoring Plan:

Mark Hatzenbuehler, Columbia University

**Mentoring Plan Excerpt:
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D.1. Current Areas of Expertise. I have a long-standing commitment to studying the health impact of stigma. As a graduate student in clinical psychology at Yale University, I received a National Research Service Award (NRSA) to support my pre-doctoral interdisciplinary training in the dual areas of clinical psychology and the social psychology of stigma. The NRSA award was focused on identifying psychological mechanisms linking stigma to health. Based on this

This is a well-crafted, compelling mentoring plan that presents a very strong case describing how the applicant's stretches will be supported. Note how well the pieces of this plan fit together narratively and logically.

work, I developed a psychological mediation model, published in *Psychological Bulletin*,⁶⁷ that depicts how stigma-related stress combines with basic psychological processes to create sexual orientation disparities in mental health. Towards the end of graduate school, I started to realize that a more comprehensive understanding of how stigma contributes to health disparities would require research beyond the perspectives that my psychology training offered. In particular, at the time, stigma research was largely focused on the perceptions of stigmatized individuals and the consequences of such perceptions for micro-level interactions. While important, this research was criticized for overlooking structural forms of stigma, such as institutional policies, social norms, and societal-level conditions that can affect the stigmatized.⁴⁵ To learn more about structural factors as determinants of health disparities, I accepted a post-doctoral fellowship as a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Health & Society Scholar at Columbia University. This

The applicant sets up his "stretch" areas by narrating the trajectory of his research agenda and accomplishments while identifying gaps in the field.

fellowship attracted me because it provided a marked contrast to my training as a clinical psychologist, which had focused largely on individual-level processes. The population health approach that I learned during this fellowship challenged me to reconceptualize the ways I approached the role of stigma in creating risk for adverse health outcomes.

To that end, I began to pursue research on the consequences of structural stigma for population health inequalities, with a particular focus on sexual orientation health disparities. In the first study that I conducted on this topic, my colleagues and I developed a measure of structural stigma by coding whether state-level policies (hate-crime statutes and employment-nondiscrimination acts) included sexual orientation as a protected class. We linked this policy information to individual-level data on mental health and sexual orientation from a nationally representative survey of U.S. adults. We found that sexual orientation disparities for some psychiatric disorders (i.e., dysthymia) were eliminated in low-structural stigma states; conversely, sexual orientation disparities in other psychiatric disorders (e.g., Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) were nearly four times greater in high-structural stigma states.⁶⁸

This finding raised several new questions that I have pursued as part of my program of research on structural stigma and health inequalities over the past several years (for a review, see⁶⁹). For

example, my first study on this topic used a cross-sectional observational design, and so I sought to determine whether I could obtain evidence using stronger methods. Thus, in a series of quasi-experiments, we examined health outcomes before and after structural forms of stigma were instituted or diminished (e.g., state laws that either restricted or expanded rights for gays and lesbians).⁷⁰⁻⁷² This work demonstrated an increase in psychiatric disorders among LGB respondents who lived in states that recently banned same-sex marriage⁷⁰ but a decline in health care use and costs among gay men after same-sex marriage was legalized.⁷¹ Additionally, we have examined whether there is evidence for plausible alternative explanations for the relationship between structural stigma and health, namely social selection. That is, do healthier LGB respondents move to low-stigma states, leaving unhealthy respondents behind? Thus far, we have not found strong evidence for this alternative explanation.⁷³ Finally, while my research to date has largely focused on LGB populations, I have recently been expanding this line of work to explore whether structural forms of stigma related to race⁷⁴⁻⁷⁷ and immigration status⁷⁸⁻⁸⁰ similarly affect health inequalities. Based on this evidence across multiple outcomes, methods, and stigmatized groups, my colleagues and I have argued that stigma in general, and structural stigma in particular, may represent a fundamental cause of population health inequalities.^{81,82}

D.2. New Areas of Expertise. One of the reasons I decided to apply for the Scholars award was the opportunity it affords to receive new mentorship from leading scholars in “stretch areas” that will enable me to significantly expand my work in several exciting directions. Specifically, this grant would provide additional training and mentorship in: 1) new methods (legal content analysis, qualitative interviews); 2) new structural levers for addressing and reducing inequalities among youth (litigation, agency enforcement); and 3) new settings (schools). Below, I describe how I will use this training to advance my research and professional development.

Area #1: Earlier in my career, I obtained the requisite skills to transition my research from psychology to public health in order to examine structural influences of health inequalities. I now find myself at a similar inflection point: I want to shift my work to evaluate the role of litigation in addressing youth inequalities, but I currently lack the tools necessary for coding and analyzing the outcomes of court cases. As such, I am seeking training in how to conduct legal content analyses of court decisions (both impact litigation and private cases). *With this award, I will therefore acquire new methodological skills that will enable me to conduct transformative research at the intersection of social science and the law.*

Area #2: In my work, I have used quantitative methods to identify mechanisms that generate stigma-related inequalities. Qualitative interviews offer another important method for ascertaining underlying mechanisms; further, this method may even reveal mechanisms that are not possible with quantitative designs. However, given my quantitative background, I have never received any training or coursework in qualitative interviews. *Consequently, I am seeking new*

The applicant very clearly identifies how the award will enable him to develop his research agenda in new ways. Continue to note the strong organizational flow and rich but concise content development. Each stretch area is elaborated on below, with emphasis on how each stretch will help the applicant contribute to the field. Also, note the simple, effective parallel construction of each point below. Elegance is effective.

training in qualitative interviews that can reveal why and how the structural levers that I hope to explore through this award affect homophobic bullying.

Area #3: My work on structural stigma has thus far examined the role that state-level policies (e.g., employment non-discrimination acts, constitutional amendments banning same-sex marriage) play in contributing to health outcomes among LGB populations.^{68,70-72} This policy focus has been appropriate because the legislative process is one important structural-level factor that can either mitigate or exacerbate inequalities. At the same time, my work (and the social sciences more broadly) has tended to overlook two other structural strategies that are frequently used to address youth inequalities in the education setting: litigation and OCR complaints. As such, I am seeking mentorship in legal scholarship on impact litigation related to discrimination and in OCR processes and procedures for handling civil rights complaints in schools. *Expanding my substantive expertise in these new areas will enable me to transition my work from focusing on legislation to incorporating other important remedies for reducing youth inequalities.*

Area #4: Given my focus on state-level policies, schools as an institutional setting have not been an area of inquiry in my work, despite the fact that schools represent a primary source of both stress and resilience among LGB youth.⁸³ Through this award, I hope to extend my research to include the school context, which will be accomplished through learning the literature on schools as an institutional setting that contributes to LGB youth development. *This training will provide new content expertise that will enable me to conduct research at the intersection of multiple institutions (schools, courts, administrative) that affect youth inequalities.*

D.3. Rationale for Proposed Mentorship Team. Two pre-eminent scholars have agreed to serve as my mentors on my project.

Mentor #1: Stephen T. Russell, Ph.D. is the Priscilla Pond Flawn Regents Professor of Child Development at the University of Texas, Austin and past-president of the Society for Research on Adolescence. Stephen is a dedicated mentor, having mentored 11 doctoral and 9 post-doctoral trainees, as well as W.T. Grant Scholars. In recognition of his mentorship, he was awarded the 2011 Excellence in Mentoring Award from the University of Arizona Honors College. Stephen's research is guided by his interest in creating social change to support healthy adolescent development, with a particular focus on adolescent sexual orientation and the health and well-being of sexual minority youth. As a W.T. Grant Scholar (Class of 2006), Stephen published a series of papers that were the first to document significant health risk among sexual minority adolescents using nationally representative data (the Add Health Study), including the first national studies of adolescent sexual orientation and suicide risk, substance use and abuse, and experiences of victimization and violence. Since then, he has continued to study health risk and resilience among LGB young people. Stephen's work has been used to shape local and state policies and laws for school safety among LGB youth, most directly in California. For example, the California Safe Place to Learn Act (AB 394, 2008) was named for a report that he authored.

Of particular relevance to my proposal, Stephen has written extensively on how the school context shapes academic, psychosocial, and health outcomes among LGB youth. He was among the first scholars to focus attention on homophobic and bias-based bullying as distinct subtypes of youth violence and to study school-level factors, such as Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), that may protect LGB youth from victimization experiences in school. As a result of that work, he

has experience linking census data on GSAs to individual-level outcomes among youth,⁸⁴ an approach I will use in this study. Stephen uses a mixed-methods approach in his work that includes qualitative interviews, an area in which he will mentor me for this project. Stephen's work on school context and homophobic bullying among LGB youth culminated in a recent book that he co-edited called *Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Schooling: The Nexus of Research, Practice, and Policy*.⁸³ This volume brings together contributions from researchers, policy analysts, and education advocates to synthesize the practice and policy implications of research on sexual orientation, gender identity, and schooling.

Applicants should show why particular mentors are the right ones to guide the stretch. Here, the applicant draws on key aspects of the proposed mentor's work to show how he will be able to support the proposed project and related stretches.

Thus, it is clear that Stephen is the ideal mentor for both the content and methodological training that I have outlined. I also asked Stephen to mentor me because of the extensive network of relationships that he has established through his years of work on creating safe schools for LGBT youth in California. It is because of these relationships that Stephen was able to facilitate the linkage of the teacher- and student-level datasets that I will be using in this study. In addition, Stephen has already put me in touch with individuals who will play key roles in the project, including Elizabeth Gill and Robert Kim, members of my Advisory Board (**Appendix C**).

Stephen and I met as invited speakers at a conference on LGBT families in 2011. Several years later, he asked me to be a collaborator on one of his grants to lend my expertise in structural-level influences on LGBT health. These interactions have made me confident that we will work well together, but they have not provided the structured time and resources necessary for developing and nurturing a mentoring relationship. Thus, the Scholars award offers a formal mechanism that will enable me to substantially deepen my relationship with Stephen, thereby adding significant value to our mentoring relationship.

Mentor #2: Suzanne Goldberg is the Herbert and Doris Wechsler Clinical Professor of Law and Director of the Center for Gender and Sexuality Law at Columbia University. She is an award-winning mentor and teacher, having received Columbia Law School's Willis L.M. Reese Prize for Excellence in Teaching. Suzanne is one of the country's foremost experts in gender and sexuality law. She has published several influential articles on sexual orientation discrimination and impact litigation.⁸⁵⁻⁸⁸ Before entering academia, Suzanne served as a senior staff attorney at Lambda Legal, the country's first legal organization focused on achieving full equality for lesbian and gay people. During her time at Lambda, she served as co-counsel in two cases that resulted in landmark gay rights victories before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Despite the fact that Suzanne and I have mutual research interests and are faculty members at the same institution, we have never worked together. Thus, the Scholars award offers an exciting opportunity for me to establish a new mentoring relationship with her. In addition, all of my prior mentors have been from the social sciences, whether in clinical psychology (Susan Nolen-Hoeksema), social psychology (Jack Dovidio), or sociology (Bruce Link). This award therefore provides the first chance I have had to obtain mentorship from a legal scholar, something that is especially important as I seek to conduct new work at the intersection of social science and law.

Suzanne brings to this project a rare combination of distinguished legal scholarship and expertise in legal practice, which will enable her to provide me with mentorship in legal methods (i.e., legal content analysis) as well in relevant literatures related to impact litigation, anti-discrimination law, and sexuality law. Furthermore, through her litigation work, Suzanne has developed a deep network of lawyers who are working on sexual orientation-related court cases.

Here again, the applicant clearly details how the proposed mentor will support the proposed stretches.

Her mentorship will facilitate access to this new professional network, which will provide an invaluable resource for my career development as I seek to conduct research that creates more robust partnerships between social scientists, legal scholars, and legal practitioners.

Advisory Board. To complement the mentorship of Stephen Russell and Suzanne Goldberg, I have also added 3 individuals who have agreed to serve on my Advisory Board. They provide additional expertise that will contribute to the success of the project. **Appendix C** provides a description of their expertise, their role on the project, and the nature of our interactions.

This table effectively summarizes and integrates the proposed stretches, activities, research aims, and mentors.

D.4. Mentoring Activities Designed to Develop New Expertise. In **Table 2**, I outline the areas of new methodological and content expertise to be acquired as part of this award, along with the mentoring activities that will enable me to acquire this expertise, the individuals who will mentor me in these new areas, and the research aim that corresponds to the new expertise.

New Area of Expertise	Mentoring Activities to Acquire Expertise	Corresponding Research Aim	Mentor/ Advisory Board
Methodological			
Legal content analyses	1. Monthly in-person meetings with Professor Goldberg that will focus on learning legal content analysis, including coding, analysis, and interpretation of case law data 2. Course: Advanced Legal Research Techniques (Columbia Law School)	Aim 1	Suzanne Goldberg
Qualitative interviews and analyses	1. Monthly meetings (via Skype) and two annual in-person meetings with Dr. Russell (mentor); in-person bi-annual meetings with Dr. Nathanson (Advisory Board member). Meetings will focus on learning how to design and conduct qualitative interviews as well as acquiring skills in coding, analysis, and interpretation of qualitative data. 2. Course: Qualitative Research Methods (Department of Sociomedical Sciences, Columbia)	Interpretation of results from Aims 1-4	Stephen Russell Constance Nathanson
Content			
1. Process and outcomes of litigation related to sexual orientation-based bullying in California schools 2. Process and outcomes of Office for Civil Rights complaints regarding sexual orientation-based discrimination in California schools	1. Individual bi-annual meetings and additional calls (as needed) with Advisory Board members: Robert Kim (in person) and Elizabeth Gill (via Skype)	Aims 1-2	Robert Kim Elizabeth Gill
1. Legal literature on impact litigation, discrimination law, and sexuality law	1. Guided readings on these topics under mentorship of Professor Goldberg 2. Course: Gender, Sexuality, and Law (Columbia Law School) 3. Workshops: Center for Gender and Sexuality Law (Columbia Law School)	Aim 1	Suzanne Goldberg
1. Literature on determinants and consequences of homophobic bullying 2. Role of school context in shaping victimization outcomes for LGB youth	1. Guided readings on these topics under mentorship of Dr. Russell 2. Annual conference meetings (e.g., Society for Research on Adolescence, American Education Research Association)	Aims 3-4	Stephen Russell

D.5. Description of Interactions with Mentors.

Stephen Russell: *Frequency of interactions.* Stephen and I will meet monthly via Skype for 2 hours to accomplish the training aims. In addition to these monthly meetings, we will meet twice a year: once during the annual meetings of the Society for Research on Adolescence or the American Education Research Association, and once at the University of Texas, Austin. Stephen also travels to New York at least 2-3 times per year, which will provide additional opportunities for in-person meetings. Stephen has agreed to be available by email and phone to discuss any issues that arise in between our monthly meetings. The number of meetings will be adjusted as needed during later years of the award. *Content of meetings.* Our meetings will accomplish the goals outlined in Training Areas #2 and #4 (D.2). First, we will discuss guided readings that Stephen provides on the role of schools in shaping victimization experiences among LGB youth, and on determinants and consequences of homophobic bullying, so that I can learn the literature that is relevant to the proposed work. Second, I will receive mentorship in qualitative interviews, which will involve several components, including: 1) learning the theoretical underpinnings, strengths, and limitations of qualitative interviews (through guided readings); 2) developing competence in designing and conducting qualitative interviews; and 3) acquiring skills in coding and analysis of qualitative interviews, as well as in interpretation of qualitative data. I will accomplish these training aims through a three-phase process that Stephen has used in his own work. First, after we develop the qualitative interview, I will conduct a mock interview that I will tape and Stephen will review. Second, I will conduct 1-2 pilot interviews on real participants; Stephen and I will review the transcript and tape together. Following these two training steps, I will conduct the interviews myself. Once completed, he and I will review the codes and analysis, as described in C.6.4. I will complement this experiential learning with a course in Qualitative Research Methods that is offered every year in my department. The course covers several topics, including different methods of qualitative data collection (e.g., in-depth interviews, focus groups, participant observation), common errors in interviewing, diverse ways of asking questions, reliability and validity of interviews, data analysis procedures (e.g., grounded theory), software, and interpretation of qualitative data. *Addressing mentoring barriers.* Stephen and I have significant experience working effectively with collaborators across the U.S. In addition, Stephen has mentored students and colleagues long-distance, demonstrating his experience in, and willingness to pursue, such mentoring relationships. Finally, in working together on the pilot data for this project, Stephen and I have spoken every other week for an hour, providing ample evidence for his commitment to this project.

The applicant elaborates on the steps he will take to develop expertise in qualitative methods. Proposals should clearly demonstrate how the applicant will work with the mentor to develop the proposed stretches.

Suzanne Goldberg: *Frequency of interactions.* Suzanne and I will meet monthly in person for 2 hours during the first year of the award, when I am actively coding and analyzing the legal data. We will meet quarterly during later years of the award as I transition to other phases of the project. I will also attend workshops at Columbia's Center for Gender and Sexuality Law (that Suzanne co-directs), which will provide additional opportunities for learning and mentorship.

Content of meetings. Our meetings will focus on accomplishing the goals outlined in Training Areas #1 and #3 (D.2). These meetings will have two areas of focus: 1) developing content expertise and 2) obtaining methodological skills. With respect to content expertise, we will discuss readings that Suzanne assigns regarding legal scholarship on impact litigation, discrimination law, and sexuality law. These readings will provide me with foundational legal theories and court cases that are relevant to this project. I will supplement this learning with a course taught at Columbia Law School (Gender, Law and Sexuality), which will provide further context for the issues I will be exploring through this project—namely, impact litigation related to sexual orientation and legal scholarship on sexuality, discrimination, and law. With respect to methods, Suzanne will provide training in legal content analyses of court decisions that emerge from my search of litigation (C.5.1). This training will involve: 1) learning different approaches to legal content analysis of case law, with a particular focus on coding outcomes of cases; and 2) acquiring skills in the coding and analysis of case law, as well as in interpretation of the data. After reading several examples, I will conduct the legal content analyses for this study under the direct supervision of Suzanne (as described in C.6.1). I will complement this experiential training with a course at the Columbia Law School (Advanced Legal Research Techniques), which will provide me with additional hands-on learning in research tools for coding case law and court decisions.

The applicant will not only have conversations with his mentors, but he will take courses to further substantiate his knowledge – and demonstrate his commitment to stretching his expertise.

Addressing mentoring barriers. Since Suzanne and I are at the same institution, we will not confront the challenges of long-distance mentorship. Nevertheless, to address the barriers of busy schedules, we have scheduled regular, recurring meetings that are convenient for both of us and have agreed on a mentoring plan that is both feasible and mutually engaging.

D.6. Mentorship during later years of the award. Exploring whether my results are generalizable to another stigmatized identity/status characteristic would be a natural extension of this work. Thus, during later years of the award, I will likely add litigation and OCR resolutions for a second group that experiences bias-based bullying (e.g., youth with disabilities, immigrant youth, racial minority youth), which would necessitate adding a new mentor who can 1) help develop a reading list of relevant literature and 2) provide feedback on the appropriate variables to include in the analyses among this group. Adding a second group could provide important information on the scope of litigation and OCR claims beyond the area of sexual orientation.