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## Each One, Teach One: A Blackprint for Mentoring Postsecondary “Twice Exceptional” Student Scholars In “Search of Education, Elevation and Knowledge”

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# Each One, Teach One: A Blackprint for Mentoring Postsecondary “Twice Exceptional” Student Scholars In “Search of Education, Elevation and Knowledge”

## **Keywords**

Black women, mentoring; undergraduate research; postsecondary; student scholar; twice exceptional

## **Cover Page Footnote**

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Selena T. Rodgers and Tiffany Cudjoe

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**Abstract**

Through the prism of a faculty-student mentoring relationship, this article highlights best practices to gain insight into resources for “twice exceptional” student scholars. Practical application stands at a position of intersecting domains—changing the tapestry of scholarly service and undergraduate research mentoring, and as an Each One, Teach One black-print model for mentoring. The article concludes with recommendations for best practices for postsecondary mentors, educators, and counselors invested in developing student scholars in Search of Education, Elevation, and Knowledge.

*Keywords: Black women, mentoring, undergraduate research, postsecondary, student scholar, twice exceptional*

**Introduction**

Black women have celebrated completion of baccalaureate degrees over time (Wilder, Bertrand, & Osborne-Lampkin, 2013) and stand at the demographic intersection of race, gender, and graduation rates across the nation. Females earned approximately 66 percent of all baccalaureate degrees conferred in 2008-2010 (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). However, in spite of such strides, vigilance concerning “twice exceptional,” the notion of being considered both gifted and a differently abled learner in Search of Education, Elevation and Knowledge (SEEK) program, has received less attention. The Percy Ellis Sutton (1920-2009) Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge or SEEK was created in 1966. The New York State Legislature enacted a law that mandated the creation of such programs to provide access and support to New York City residents and to advance the cause of equality and educational opportunity at the City University of New York. Today the university maintains a commitment to admit students under the provisions of this law and accept students who normally would not qualify through regular admissions criteria through the SEEK program.<sup>1</sup>

Approximately 80 percent of all full-time undergraduate students received some form of financial aid in 2007–08, including grants, loans, work-study, and other resources such as SEEK, which provides stipends for books, course material, a portion of tuition, counseling, and tutoring (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Within the case example offered here—a SEEK student

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.york.cuny.edu/student-development/seek/about>

born in Guyana, South America migrated to the United States of America at the age of six conveyed that the transitional phase between educational systems was particularly challenging mostly due to acculturation and language difficulties. The literature affirms that many immigrant students who arrive in the United States lack English proficiency (Teranishi, Suárez-Orozco, & Suárez-Orozco, 2011). In spite of cultural duality barriers, in 2007, she earned a high school diploma and electrical engineering apprenticeship diploma and later the same year was accepted into a baccalaureate program as part of a SEEK program. According to the York College CUNY Fact Book, 711 students were enrolled in SEEK during AY 2012-2013 (p. 89).

During the 2009-10 academic semester, after almost three years of tutorial support and failing the American College Testing (ACT) mathematics test seven times, the SEEK student scholar questioned if she was “college material” or as prolifically asserted by Bailey and Rose (2011), a “twice exceptional” learner—both gifted and a differently abled learner. Within this conceptual context, the student learner recognized her difficult time understanding math. At the other end of the spectrum of this case scenario, was a gifted student scholar. Practical application stands at a position of intersecting domains—(a) *Changing the Tapestry of Scholarly Service and Undergraduate Research Mentoring*, and an (b) *Each One, Teach One Blackprint Model*.

*Changing the Tapestry: Scholarly Service and Undergraduate Student Research*

Mentoring relationships often form gradually and informally (Johnson, 2002). Fondly reflecting on the day she met her mentor, the student scholar came upon a faculty member’s open office door—pondering if she should ask for help—she turned and started to walk away. At that moment, the faculty member (also a former “twice exceptional” student scholar of Headstart<sup>2</sup> New York City public school system<sup>3</sup> and Arthur O. Eve (1967-2003) HEOP—Higher Education Opportunity Program for economically and disadvantaged students<sup>4</sup>) looked up and asked, “May I help you?”

Standing in the doorway of possibilities, the student scholar initially responded, “I would like to learn about the social work program, but I don’t think I’m college material.” To which the faculty member asked three questions the student will never forget—“What does ‘college material’ mean to you?” “How can I help you become college material?” “Are you available to stop by tomorrow during my office hour?” While the student scholar did not have an answer to her first two questions, she agreed to return the next day, the next, and most days thereafter. So began the change in tapestry—weaving a mentoring relationship. The student scholar recognized the importance of receiving frequent encouragement from the faculty member, consistent coaching from a tutor and continued supportive services from SEEK which prepared her to pass the ACT math examination the eighth time around. She transitioned from having difficulties with math to excelling as a student research assistant.

Students tend to participate in undergraduate research during junior and senior years (Russell, 2008). One such opportunity has occurred through Undergraduate Research Programs. According to York College’s website, student undergraduate research is designed to, “promote and facilitate student engagement in research and other creative activities in order to demystify research, increase knowledge about its nature and methodologies, and secure competitive advantage for graduate and professional school and the workforce.” For example, the

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs>

<sup>3</sup> <http://schools.nyc.gov/default.htm>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.highered.nysed.gov/kiap/colldev/HEOP/>

undergraduate research program fosters supportive and constructive mentoring relationships, offering opportunities to co-present at professional conferences, publishing scholarly articles in peer-reviewed journals and newsletters, scholarly service and other mentoring projects (see Rodgers, in press).

Participation in the research program for two consecutive years required the student learner to commit and engage in countless hours of assisting faculty members on their research projects. Using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), the student scholar created datasets, entered data, performed data analysis, and presented segments of research findings. Within this example, one might explicate that having a research mentor is paramount to productivity, successful career decisions, and becoming a mentor to others (Dohm & Cummings, 2002; Taraban & Blanton, 2008; Taraban & Logue, 2012).

For some, mentoring relationships might also assist with developing interpersonal, leadership, and presentation skills. Within the present case example, these talents have contributed to the student scholar's success at undergraduate research day. Through facilitation drama, advocacy, and mentorship, the student scholar educated and empowered high school and college students on health topics and issues related to HIV/AIDS and obesity. She has also served as a college ambassador, helping to create a student-friendly environment for incoming freshmen. The aforementioned skills have also resulted in her receiving invites to serve on various college committees and represent her peers and the college at political functions. The twice exceptional student scholar in "Search of Education, Elevation, and Knowledge" launched *HumbleNation* in 2012—a photography, music, apparel and networking movement rooted in creative arts, diversity and empowerment. Her community-themed photograph—*Park chess match*—is forthcoming in a new literary and art online publication (Cudjoe, 2014).

### **Each One, Teach One: A Blackprint for Mentoring**

Modeled after the African American proverb, "Each One, Teach One," this section offers brief recommendations for best practices for postsecondary mentors, educators, and counselors to develop responsive "twice exceptional" student scholars by way of (a) *Passing the Torch*, (b) *SEEK Counseling with a cause*, and (c) *Postsecondary Students Scholars and Testing*.

**Passing the Torch.** Mentors should offer a balance of challenge and support to help student scholars develop a professional identity (Taraban & Logue, 2012). The first author affirms that she has been fortunate to receive informal and formal mentoring from several trailblazers in the social work profession and academy. Each one has been inspirational, helping to nurture clinical, research, scholarship and teaching skills. A good mentor discerns a mentee's personal and vocational dream, endorses this as realistic, and offers an environment conducive to facilitating this dream (Johnson, 2002). Bailey and Rose prophetically asserted that within the spectrum of differences among gifted students, there are those who bring a combination of superior strengths (for example, overcoming language barriers, earning a high school diploma, perseverance to take an examination multiple times, earning a baccalaureate degree) concomitantly with specific learning weaknesses to school such as difficulty passing a state administered math exam (Bailey & Rose, 2011).

**SEEK Counseling with a Cause.** Counselors can play a key role in mobilizing coping resources and helping students develop an academic plan (Chao, Mallinckrodt, & Wei, 2012). Counselors are instrumental in helping students negotiate academic and personal demands. According to the Interim Director of The Percy Ellis Sutton, SEEK Program at York College (S. Belle, personal communication, August 28, 2014), "the students in the SEEK Program are talented with a tremendous amount of potential. The counseling staff is dedicated and prides

itself in going above and beyond by providing our students with guidance, support, and empowering them with the tools necessary to achieve personal, professional and academic success.”

**Postsecondary Student Scholars and Testing.** Giftedness and differently abled learning can co-occur in the same student (Brody & Mills, 2000). They may demonstrate exceptional skills in one area (e.g. undergraduate research) and academic achievement difficulties in similar areas (e.g. struggle to pass entrance examination). For many postsecondary student scholars, learning challenges often go unnoticed, ignored, and poorly addressed. To ensure that postsecondary student scholars reach their aspirations, educators, counselors and helping professionals, alike, must remain observant, and when necessary refer students for additional testing.

As discussed in this paper, a growing body of literature supports the need for undergraduate research mentoring (Russell, 2008; Rodgers & Cudjoe, 2013), but warrants further investigation among “twice exceptional” student learners and scholars in SEEK—Search of Education, Elevation, and Knowledge who matriculate through and beyond P-16. The discussion presented here reflects a single mentor/mentee relationship between two former “twice exceptional” student learners and is not readily generalizable to other mentoring relationships. This article has only grazed the surface of mentoring. Further examination regarding SEEK experiences is absent from this discussion.

The paper also equally recognizes the critical need for baccalaureate colleges to continue to develop undergraduate research programs that target economically disenfranchised students who are Black and female. A handful of rigorous evaluations and studies have provided an initial base from which to launch and improve new mentoring initiatives (Rhodes & DuBois, 2006). Rodgers (in press) contends that mentoring also is an area within which female faculty of color devote an inordinate amount of energy and time. Therefore, resources are needed to help support faculty members and their commitment to more holistic approaches that prepare the next generation of student scholars for the 21st century.

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