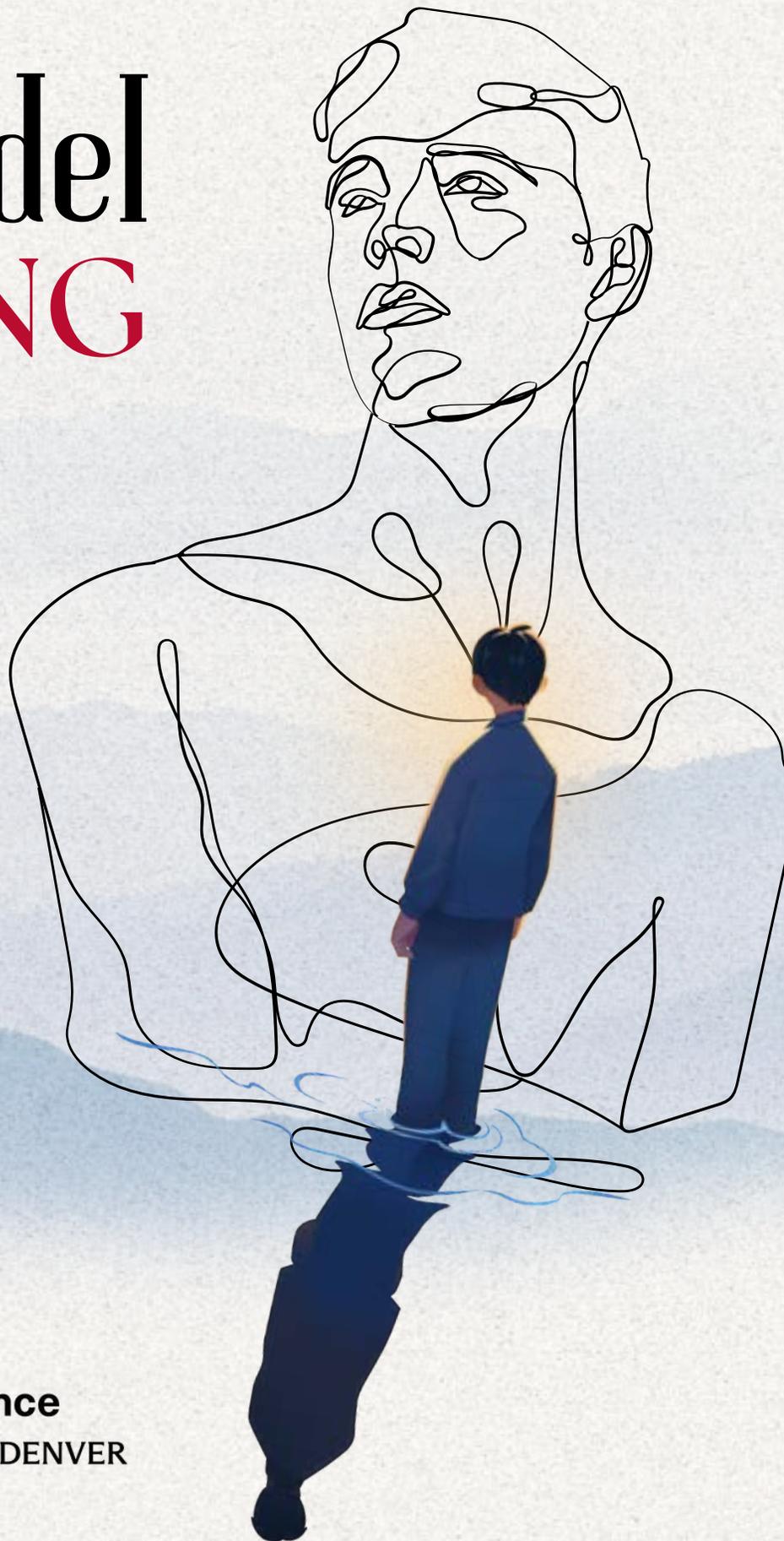


# Role Model MAPPING



**4D Experience**  
UNIVERSITY OF DENVER

## **“Who do you want to be when you grow up?”**

It’s one of the first questions we are asked as children. For many of us, this question conjures up images, stories, and mythologies of childhood **heroes**—the people we secretly and openly admired and emulated, *real* people in our own neighborhoods and communities, and even *fictional* characters in books and television shows we fell in love with.

From an early age, role models help shape who we become and how we navigate the world, and this continues into college and adulthood as we begin to carefully **choose** and **cultivate** our mentors. This guided reflection helps you identify the people you *consciously* and *subconsciously* take cues from, and reflect on what is unique and special about their approach to apply to your own life as you pursue the *public good*.

By mapping your role models and mentors across four critical dimensions of growth built into your DU 4D Experience (*character, intellect, well-being, and purpose*), you can begin to recognize patterns, **expand** your networks to include other perspectives, and begin to curate an ever-evolving constellation of mentors ready to help you achieve your fullest potential.



# Role Models

Role models are the people we admire and look to for guidance. They can be **real** e.g. your grandmother, a professor, a mentor, or a community leader. They can also be **symbolic** e.g. a historical figure, a celebrity, or a character from a TV show or book. Based in social learning theory (Bandura, 1969), role models consciously and subconsciously influence how we *think, feel, and act*.

Role models shape our identity formation, confidence, self-esteem, behavior, choices, and even what we think is possible for our future. Research shows that **2 in 3** young adults are more likely to be satisfied with their career choices and financial standing if they had someone with a successful career to look up to, especially if they share similar *life experiences* (Gallup, 2021).

Role models can be **positive** e.g. modeling healthy choices, high self-esteem, and emotional resilience. On the other hand, **negative** role models can normalize harmful and high-risk behaviors e.g. aggression, delinquency, and substance misuse (Atif et al., 2022).

At the same time, it is important to recognize that no role model can be **perfect** at everything, and we should treat those we look up to as human beings. This includes people in our lives and those online—in an era of “cancel culture” and increasingly intense *parasocial* relationships, we should strive to give grace when our role models fall short and take *genuine* accountability for their mistakes.



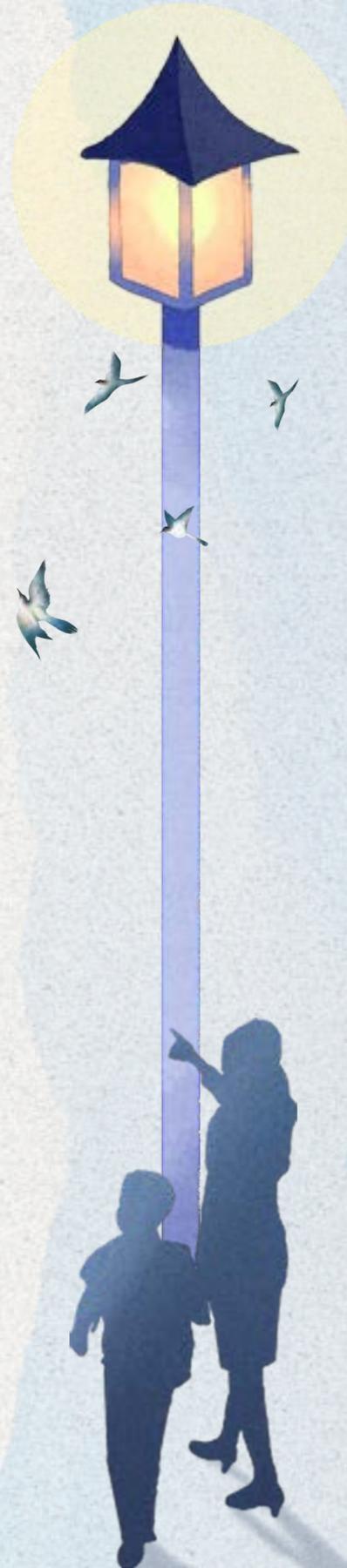
Who were some of your earliest childhood **heroes**?  
When did you first meet or become **exposed** to them?



Who is someone you currently **admire** or look up to?  
What **qualities** in them do you hope to develop?



Think about a time when someone **supported** or  
guided you. What **difference** did it make in your life?



# Mentorship

A mentor is someone in your life who shares *knowledge, perspective, and encouragement* to support your **growth**. They serve as a guide to help you define and understand your own goals, and pursue them successfully to achieve your personal and professional aspirations.

Maybe you had a high school teacher who helped you apply for college, or an internship supervisor who helped you discover a new passion or interest. Mentors remind you that you're not alone and are willing to put themselves out there to **invest** in your potential, potentially even opening doors for you.

Instead of one 'perfect mentor,' most of us benefit from a network or **constellation** e.g. professors, peers, alumni, family, coaches, or community leaders. Research shows that 76% percent of college students say they *value* having mentors, but only 37% percent *actually* have at least one (Forbes, 2019).

Mentorship can be **formal** e.g. a mentoring program that pairs you with a mentor, or a requirement for a specific role or program, often with a set timeline that may not lead to a long-term relationship. Mentorship can also be **informal** e.g. occurring organically and *spontaneously*, evolving naturally without formal expectations, and often leading to long-term bonds.



# Worldview & Representation

Who we look up to is often based in our worldview, the unique way in which we see the world and make meaning of everything we experience. It is the **internal** lens through which we take in information, interpret events, make decisions, and form opinions.

It is shaped by our **personal** identities, **social** identities, and lived **experiences**—including our skills, hobbies, race, gender, culture, education, life circumstances, and even the social and political context we live in. No two people can have *exactly* the same worldview, even if they share some traits. And our worldview *shifts* and *expands* over time as we learn and grow.

Our worldview helps explain why we are drawn to role models and mentors who share our identities and experiences, feeling a deeper sense of connection and **belonging**. However, in many fields, individuals from some backgrounds may not see themselves *represented*—and it's not about talent, but access to opportunity.

Although women currently make up around 50% of the STEM workforce, they are overrepresented in health-related professions and vastly **underrepresented** in the ranks of engineers, architects, and life, space, and computer scientists. Hispanic workers hold only 8% and Black workers 11% of STEM jobs (Pew Research Center, 2021). Not seeing people who look like us ahead of us can negatively impact our confidence and lead to *imposter syndrome*.

Research shows that exposure to diverse role models and mentors reduces stereotypes, builds **empathy**, and fosters cultural appreciation (Osula & Irvin, 2009). It also provides us with a diverse set of life experiences and technical expertise to draw on as we navigate complex real world problems, helping us look at situations from different angles to determine the best way forward.





How would you describe your worldview to someone else? What **identities** and **experiences** make up the core of how you see and navigate the world?



Think about a time when you felt like you didn't **belong**. What made you feel this way? **Who** might have been able to make a difference for you in that space?



Have you ever gotten helpful **perspective** from someone you wouldn't expect? What would have happened if you weren't **open** to their ideas?



# Alternative Ways



College is one of the first times we're surrounded by people who model **ways of thinking, being, and doing** that can expand how we approach learning, relationships, and purpose.

Finding role models and mentors who **think differently** challenges us to re-examine our own assumptions. Instead of seeing the world in binaries (e.g. right or wrong, success or failure), these mentors help us get comfortable with paradox and complexity. They teach us how to navigate ambiguity, hold multiple truths, and combine logic and science with *creativity and intuition*.

Mentors can show us alternative **ways of being**: how to live with greater intention, balance, and authenticity. They might model *vulnerability* by talking about setbacks, or show how *mindfulness* and gratitude keep them grounded amid pressure. For students who are constantly "performing" competence, seeing a mentor lead with presence and self-awareness can be a powerful reminder that growth isn't just about achievement, it's about *alignment*.

Mentors can also teach us new **ways of doing**. Instead of chasing efficiency or perfection, they model how to work with purpose, collaborate across differences, and treat rest and reflection as *essential* parts of success. They remind us that failure isn't final, it's feedback. For college students balancing academics, jobs, and relationships, observing alternative ways of doing can open up healthier, more *sustainable* paths forward.

The best mentors don't just help us do more, they help us **be more**. By seeking out mentors who model these alternative approaches, you can grow in ways that feel transformative, authentic, and *whole*.



# Cultivating Mentors

Finding mentors isn't about waiting for the "right" person to appear—it's about being **intentional**, **curious**, and **open to connection**. College is full of potential mentors who think, lead, and live differently: professors, advisors, staff, coaches, alumni, peers, and community leaders.

Mentorship **begins** when you notice someone whose values, habits, or perspective spark something in you and you take the first small step to reach out. That could mean staying after class to ask a professor about their path, following up with a guest speaker whose story resonated, or getting coffee with a peer who seems to navigate college with a balance you admire.

Ask **thoughtful** questions like, "What helped you stay motivated when college got hard?" or "How did you decide what mattered most to you?" Mentorship thrives on curiosity and mutual respect, not formality. It's less about asking for help and more about creating a shared conversation about growth.

Once you find people you connect with, the key is to **nurture** the relationship. **Consistency** turns casual conversations into meaningful guidance. Check in, express gratitude, and share updates on how their advice helped you—small gestures that show you value their time and trust. Take **initiative**—clearly state your goals and expectations for the mentoring relationship e.g. frequency of meetings, communication methods, and topics you want to cover. Schedule meetings, respect your mentor's time, and come prepared.

Mentors often come from **unexpected** places. A student club leader might become your model for collaboration, or a supervisor might teach you empathy. By staying open, you can surround yourself with diverse perspectives that support all four dimensions of your growth: *character, intellect, well-being, and purpose.*



Think about someone you know who models **alternative** ways of *thinking/being/doing*. What **effect** do they have on other people? How can you **practice** this in your life?



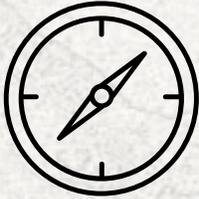
How do you go about seeking and **cultivating** mentors? What **strategies** have been the most and least helpful? How do you know if the relationship is being **successful**?



Is there anyone in your life who might currently consider **YOU** a mentor? In what ways do you **show up** for them? How often do you check in and **model** positive habits?



At the University of Denver, we share an ethos that is focused on developing **the whole person**. Through meaningful experiences, mentorship, and reflection, we support students' growth across four dimensions: *character, intellect, well-being, and purpose*.



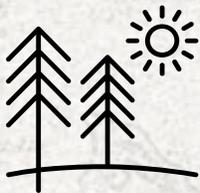
## CHARACTER

**Discover Character**—we cultivate empathy and compassion, challenge/reframe assumptions, engage across difference, develop and commit to values, practice resilience, and lead with authenticity.



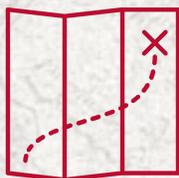
## INTELLECT

**Deepen Intellect**—we pursue our curiosity, create and innovate, seek new vantage points, engage with complex real-world challenges and questions, and learn to navigate ambiguity.



## WELL-BEING

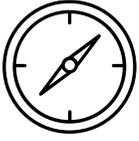
**Develop Well-being**—we strive to embrace healthy behaviors and decisions, give ourselves grace, nurture our spirits, and cultivate positive relationships.



## PURPOSE

**Design Careers and Lives of Purpose**—we connect the dots across our experiences, set and chart goals, apply skills and talents for the public good, and pursue continuous learning.

What **personal values** guide your decisions, and how have those values been tested or *strengthened* during your time in college?



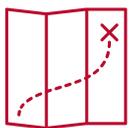
Think of a time when you faced a complex or **ambiguous** challenge—what strategies did you use to navigate it, and what did you learn about yourself?



What *habits* or *practices* help you maintain **balance** between academic demands, social life, and personal care?



How do you define a “*life of purpose*” and in what ways are you beginning to align your education, passions, and goals toward the **public good**?



# 4D Rolemodels in Pop Culture



## Mister Rogers – Character

- Mister Rogers modeled empathy, integrity, and deep respect for others in everything he did.
- Through his television show, he taught generations of children (and adults) how to name their feelings, treat others with kindness, and live out their values quietly but consistently.
- His character shone not through perfection, but through gentleness, patience, and authenticity – showing that leading with compassion can be a powerful form of strength.



## Jane Goodall – Intellect

- Jane Goodall embodies intellectual growth through her lifelong curiosity and innovative approach to science.
- Her groundbreaking research with chimpanzees redefined our understanding of animal behavior and blurred the boundaries between humans and the natural world.
- Beyond her discoveries, she represents the courage to challenge scientific norms and to think with both rigor and empathy—reminding students that true intellect includes heart as well as logic.



# 4D Rolemodels in Pop Culture



## Michelle Obama – Well-being

- Michelle Obama models well-being through balance, self-awareness, and care for both mind and body.
- From championing healthy living and mental health awareness to speaking openly about self-doubt and vulnerability, she redefines strength as *wholeness*.
- She shows that caring for yourself and your community aren't separate acts—they're intertwined—and that joy, rest, and relationships are essential to sustained success.



## Bad Bunny – Careers & Lives of Purpose

- Bad Bunny models purpose through authenticity, cultural pride, and creative courage. He's built a career on *refusing* to fit neatly into expectations—blending genres, challenging gender norms, and using his platform to spotlight social issues in Puerto Rico and beyond.
- His success shows that purpose isn't about following a set path, but *creating* one that aligns with your truth. For students, he's a reminder that meaningful careers grow from owning who you are, staying connected to your roots, and using your voice to *uplift* others.

# Mapping Exercise

Choose **1 person** (someone you know or a public figure) who perfectly embodies what each dimension means to you.

Write their name in the middle of the circle, and then fill in the traits and qualities you admire about them. What makes them stand out? What can you learn from their example?



**CHARACTER**

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**INTELLECT**

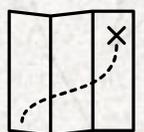
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**WELL-BEING**

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**PURPOSE**

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What is **unique** or special about their approaches to the dimensions?  
How can you cultivate these qualities in your own **personal** approach?



How similar or different are they from each other? **From you?**  
Why do you think you consciously or **subconsciously** chose them?



What roles, backgrounds, and perspectives might you be **missing**?  
How might you **benefit** from including others into your constellation?



What are 3 **action** steps you can take to **expand** your network of mentors  
and cultivate new relationships?



# Mentorship Resources



## **Crimson Constellation**

All first-year undergraduate students at DU are assigned a core group of mentors and advisors as a starting place for creating connection and belonging. Log in to connect with alumni, faculty, staff, and peers.



## **Career & Professional Development**

Career advisors are ready to help you explore different majors and career paths, search for internship and jobs, prepare for interviews and graduate school, and connect with alumni and industry professionals.



## **Office of Academic Advising**

Academic advisors can help you explore your interests, goals, and abilities, and connect them to your academic major. Student success coaches provide individualized one-on-one coaching to implement action plans and hold you accountable.



## **Health & Counseling Center**

Students' on-campus resource for quality medical and mental healthcare services, useful and engaging health education information, and support through transitions and challenges. Explore their affordable services to cultivate your well-being.



## **DUhelp**

DU offers a wide range of resources to support your success. Browse categories of options including safety, well-being, financial wellness, social connections, student support, academic support, and off-campus resources.



# A moment of Gratitude...

When was the last time you took a minute to reach out to someone who guided and shaped you?

**Send them a message expressing your gratitude.** You can share:

- *Your memory of first meeting them.*
- *How your relationship has evolved over time.*
- *A time when you were at your lowest, and they came to your aid.*
- *Ways they supported your personal and professional growth.*
- *Positive habits and skills they modeled for you.*
- *Ways they align their purpose with their passion.*
- *The impact of their service to the public good.*
- *How they influenced your leadership and mentorship style.*
- *Other connections and opportunities they helped facilitate.*
- *A piece of advice you will never forget and share with others.*
- *A time they showed up for you as a human being above all else.*

You can send them a text message, an e-mail, a voice note, or a **handwritten card** or letter posted to their address—analog, tactile communication can feel extra special and sentimental in today's world.



# Thank You!



Please take a few minutes to give us some **feedback on your experience** using this zine workbook.

& Visit **4D Education With An Edge** for more workbooks and resources!



# Role Model MAPPING



**4D Experience**  
UNIVERSITY OF DENVER

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