

Graduate Student Guide to Mentorship Relationships

Seeking out and cultivating productive, supportive mentorship relationships is not only key to your academic and professional success as you navigate graduate school, but also enriches the culture of collaboration and scholarly enterprise in your discipline. While you are a graduate student, your mentors can help you feel empowered to identify and pursue your academic and career goals, counsel you in effective and innovative research and teaching practices, and offer psychosocial support in navigating the challenges and responsibilities of your specific graduate program as well as your broader discipline and the institution.

This toolkit offers an archive of resources for graduate students who are eager to learn best practices for pursuing and maintaining productive mentorship relationships with faculty members.

Identifying potential mentors is a process of self-reflection, communication, patience, and collaboration. Reflecting on your personal mentorship needs is a great way to begin this process.

[CITL's Graduate Student Mentorship Needs Checklist](#)

For more information and advice on identifying and selecting mentors, see:

- K.D. Shives, *Inside Higher Ed.*, ["Picking a Good Mentor"](#)
- Kerry Ann Rockquemore, *Chronicle Vitae*, ["When It Comes to Mentoring, the More the Merrier"](#)

Once you have identified a faculty mentor, schedule regular meetings with them to discuss your goals, your academic progress, and your professional development.

[CITL's Hot Tips for Meeting with Faculty Mentors](#)

Planning Tools and Agreements

Individual Development Plans

An Individual Development Plan (IDP) is an individualized planning tool used to identify and track academic and professional development goals. IDPs serve to: 1) identify and describe long- and short-term academic, career, and personal goals; 2) isolate the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve those goals; and 3) institute a timeline for tracking and measuring skills acquisition and scholarly activity. IDPs also serve as a useful communication tool between mentees and their mentors. [This video](#) from the University of Wisconsin-Madison Graduate Division overviews the uses and process of creating IDPs.

There are two widely used free online IDP tools: [MyIDP](#) (for those working in STEM fields) and [ImaginePhD](#) (for those working in the humanities and social sciences).

[CITL Sample IDP](#)

Mentorship Agreements

It can also be useful to develop, with your mentor, a practical mentorship agreement/compact that establishes how and when you will meet and overviews each of your responsibilities. These compacts

provide the structure for a conversation about shared goals, and create a sense of mutual investment and responsibility for the mentorship relationship. Mentorship compacts might include:

- List of your academic and career goals
- Steps for achieving those goals
- Expectations of you as the mentee
- Expectations of your mentor
- Frequency and location of meetings and scheduling practices
- Meeting topics
- Rules of engagement for in-person meetings
- Communication etiquette
- Agreement about confidentiality and disclosure
- Plan for addressing conflict
- Plan for evaluating the mentorship relationship
- Relationship termination clause

[CITL Sample Mentorship Agreement](#)

Other Sample Compacts and IDPs:

- University of Wisconsin [Mentorship Agreement Template](#)
- University of Michigan [Sample Mentoring Agreement](#)
- University of Washington [Sample Mentoring Agreement](#)
- Kentucky University [Mentoring Agreement Template](#)
- *Entering Mentoring: A Facilitator's Manual*, [Mentor-Mentee Contract](#)
- UCLA [Postdoctoral Student Compact](#)
- University of North Carolina [Postdoctoral Student IDP Worksheet](#)
- Florida State University [Individual Development Plan Template](#)
- USC Neuroscience Department [Individual Development Plan](#)

Other Resources for Mentees:

Guidebooks on Being a Mentee:

- University of Michigan's Mentorship Guide for Graduate Students ["How to Get the Mentorship You Want"](#)
- Council of Graduate Schools' ["Great Mentoring in Graduate School: A Quick Start Guide for Protégés"](#)

Other Articles of Interest:

- Katie Shives, *Inside Higher Ed.*, ["Managing Your Advisor"](#)
- Indira Raman, *Neuron* 81, ["How to Be a Graduate Advisee"](#)
- Michael Lanning, ["The Many Varieties of Mentors"](#)
- Hugh Kearns and Maria Gardiner, *Nature* 469, ["The Care and Maintenance of Your Advisor"](#)
- Brady Krien, *Inside Higher Ed.*, ["Chart Your Course"](#) (on IDPs and career planning)

Resources on Faculty's Role in Mentoring Graduate Students:

- Adrianna Bankston, *Inside Higher Ed.*, ["Making Mentoring Relationships Meaningful"](#)
- Claire Potter, *Inside Higher Ed.*, ["Why Faculty Advising Matters"](#)
- Colleen Flaherty, *Inside Higher Ed.*, ["If You Want to Be My Student"](#) (one Columbia professor on his frank approach to mentorship)
- Kendall Johnson, ["Mentoring Matters: How to Support Students of Color in Academia"](#)
- Marissa López, ["On Mentoring First Generation and Graduate Students of Color"](#)

- Harriet W. Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning, Brown University, [“Inclusive Mentoring”](#)
- Linda DeAngelo, Council of Graduate Schools PowerPoint: [“Supporting Students of Color on the Pathway to Graduate Education: Barriers and Supports to Mentoring”](#)

Graduate Student Mentorship Needs Checklist¹

By identifying your mentorship needs, you can approach faculty with a clear sense of your expectations for them as your mentor. Clearly communicating these needs at the beginning and revisiting them collaboratively over the course of your time working together is integral to the success of the relationship. This checklist can also support you in figuring out if any particular forms of support you are seeking can be met by cultivating a larger network of mentors, from within or outside of your field.

Rank the below items in terms of personal importance.

I am seeking mentors who will...

Academic Support

- help me navigate departmental program requirements.
- institute deadlines for programmatic milestones.
- help me cultivate effective time management skills for meeting all my responsibilities.
- advise me on coursework selection.
- help me identify and pursue my research interests.
- show me how to employ ethical research practices in my field.
- meet with me regularly and productively to help me stay on track to meet program requirements.
- review my work and provide feedback in a timely and constructive manner.

Professional Development Support

- educate me about the practices and procedures of professional activities such as conference attendance, grant writing, applying for fellowships, and academic publishing.
- keep me apprised of professional development opportunities (including calls for papers [CFPs], grants, fellowships, publication opportunities related to my work, etc.)
- teach me about / model for me networking practices in my field.
- connect me with other faculty members or scholars doing work related to mine.
- help me identify and pursue my career goals (whether inside or outside of academia).

Psychosocial Support

- make me feel recognized and supported.
- make me feel as though I have worth as a researcher and teacher.
- advocate for me in the department and in other research and disciplinary spaces.
- make me feel comfortable voicing my ideas.
- listen to my needs and take my ideas seriously.

Other Needs?

¹ This worksheet adapted from Council of Graduate School's "[Great mentoring in graduate school: A quick start guide for protégés.](#)"

Seek out mentors who can meet your top-ranked needs. Remember that no one person will be able to fulfill all of your mentorship needs. It is likely that you will need to work with multiple people (faculty members, fellow graduate students, scholars on other campuses, etc.) to receive the support you need to succeed in graduate school and pursue your career interests.



Hot Tips for Meeting with Faculty Mentors

Create a mentorship agreement and follow its guidelines. Mentorship agreements are a great way to work collaboratively with your mentor to delineate expectations, responsibilities, and rules of engagement for your mentorship relationship. This document should also establish meeting etiquette, communication standards, and scheduling practices. That way, these practices can be easily referred to (and altered if necessary). Be sure to establish **meeting times, meeting frequency, and meeting locations** so there is no unnecessary logistical confusion.

Take the initiative to set the agenda yourself. Part of navigating graduate school and becoming a successful scholar involves taking charge of your academic experiences. Selecting a meeting topic, crafting a meeting agenda, and communicating these to your mentor in a professional manner are important skills to learn and can support you in achieving your goals.

Speak up! Don't be afraid to voice your interests and aspirations, even if they are different from those of your mentor. Learning to identify and name your interests and needs to those you are working with is a key skill for your interpersonal and professional academic life. Take advantage of your mentoring meetings to practice articulating new ideas / research methodologies / conceptual frameworks and be open to challenges and feedback from your mentor.

Make a practice of summarizing the meeting after it's over. This is an excellent practice for developing diligent listening and organizational skills. Documenting meeting minutes in written form (email or a shared document) is also a useful way to maintain an archive of your conversations with your mentor and keep tabs on your progress.

Establish expectations for next steps. This might be as simple as scheduling another meeting. Or it might mean thinking with your mentor about taking a certain action or completing certain tasks. Whatever it may be, don't let the meeting end without a clear sense (for both of you) of what's next.

Have a plan to address conflicts. Make sure that you have a conversation with your faculty mentor early on in the relationship (or you could even include this in your mentorship agreement) about how you two will proceed if a significant conflict arises. Will you involve the department chair? Will you bring in a conflict resolution facilitator? Having this plan in place before a challenging encounter occurs can save the relationship from undergoing irrevocable damage.