

Planning for and Defining a Mentoring Relationship (*New Participants*)

It is important to spend some time thinking about what you want out of your mentoring relationship(s). Since mentoring may involve both people you know and perfect strangers, the most successful relationships happen when partners have thought through their definition of mentoring, and their own preferences and parameters for their relationships before embarking on such relationships.

Once you have defined for yourself what mentoring means (worksheets at the bottom), have a discussion with your mentors to see whether they share your view of mentoring. Having this initial discussion with your mentoring partners will help to avoid potential problems.

Common problems that surface in mentoring relationships are:

- A. Miscommunication, lack of communication: Mentees (students) have been hesitant to “bother” their mentors with “silly questions” when they are obviously such busy people. Conversely, Mentors (professionals) who were not being asked for help did not want to interfere in their Mentees’ lives by seeming pushy and thus did not contact their Mentees without express invitation. This concern for the mentoring partner’s freedom, time and independence can lessen the impact and usefulness of the mentoring relationship. *It is **important for you to be pro-active** in your relationship with your mentors and your peers so that you get what you need.* Your mentors cannot begin to help if they do not know what your needs are.
- B. Expectations: Mentees’ expectations for their partners can be unrealistic. One or two mentors cannot be the *only* resource on every topic. Mentors should be able to admit that they do not have expertise in a particular area, but should then look for other people who might be appropriate resources on that topic.
- C. Realities: Remember: if you have been paired with a stranger or strangers, this is a somewhat artificial way of establishing a relationship and means that, through no fault of the mentee or the mentors, some relationships may not gel as well as others. This possibility is much less likely if you begin your mentoring relationships with a frank and honest discussion about what you want and need, and have the mentors speak frankly about how they see the role of mentor.

Important: you need to look for several mentors so that you get all relevant information and guidance that you need.

Reflection: *Who I am and how that will affect how I work with my Mentor/Mentoring Team*



Idea: review this document individually, then at your first offsite meeting, discuss your answers and come to a mutual framework of the partnership

1. Do I feel comfortable asking for advice and accepting criticism? In what contexts, if any?
2. How often and under what circumstances would I like to meet my mentor, or to communicate?
3. Do I want to share everything with my mentor and mentoring peers or be selective about what I discuss with those people? What kinds of things do I want to share? What kinds of things seem best not to share?
4. Am I comfortable sharing personal reflections with others, or do I prefer to maintain a purely professional relationship?



Planning Your Mentoring Relationships

This worksheet is designed to help you plan your relationships and guide your first meeting with your mentors and/or mentoring team. Please add your own items whenever you do not find them listed.

1. A mentor might be defined as
 - a. a guide, trusted counselor
 - b. an advocate
 - c. a friend
 - d. a sympathetic ear
 - e. a resource for information
 - f. other?

Ideally, which of these roles do I see my mentors playing?

What do I see as the most useful role my peers can play?

2. What types of issues do I want to discuss with my mentors or mentoring peers?

3. What kinds of activities would I like to engage in with my mentors or mentoring peers?
 - Go to formal mentoring events
 - Meet informally over coffee, lunch or dinner
 - Go to educational events (lectures, talks, discussions etc)
 - Participate in structured activities (Ex: structured peer editing of grant proposals)
 - Engage in non-academic activities (hiking, art museums, movies)
 - Other?

4. What kinds of things are off-limits in our mentoring relationship?
 - Going to restaurants to meet
 - Using non-public places to meet
 - Sharing private aspects of our lives
 - Other:

5. How much time can I spend with my mentors or mentoring peers each week?

6. How much time each month?