Mentoring Graduate Students
• Mentors are…
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Mentors are...

Describe with one word who graduate mentors are.
Mentors are...

- Advisors - people with career experience willing to share their knowledge
- Supporters - people who give emotional and moral encouragement
- Tutors - people who give specific feedback on one’s performance
- Masters - in the sense of employers, to whom one is apprenticed
- Sponsors - sources of information about, and aid in obtaining opportunities
- Models of identity - of the kind of person one should be to be an Academic (Zelditch, 1990)
What is mentoring?

A mentoring relationship is a close, individualized relationship that develops over time between a graduate student and a faculty member and that includes both caring and guidance. Although there is a connection between mentors and advisors, not all mentors are advisors and not all advisors are mentors.

– Rackham Graduate School
Why mentor?

Student Perspective
• Promotes graduate student success and productivity more than any other factor
• Opens doors and creates opportunities

Faculty Perspective
• Achieve personal satisfaction in your own work
• Attract good students
• Stay on top of your field
• Develop your professional network
• Leave a legacy
Quality Mentorship

• Shared responsibility for ensuring high quality mentorship
• Respect students as colleagues; encourage sharing of ideas, and experiences
• Guide students toward professional independence – encourage publication and presentation
• Expectations should be clear - develop a work plan, short and long term goals and a timeline
• Provide opportunities for students and faculty to get to know one another as persons and as professionals
• Create intellectual challenges and make standards clear through open, frequent, and consistent communication
• Provide advice about process; policy, procedures.
• Be available and welcoming – let student know what’s reasonable for you
• Be a role model; inspire students to become mentors themselves.

– Oklahoma State University
Mentoring Strategies

- Know Your Students
- Listen
- Demystify the graduate experience
- Build networks among your students (peer mentoring)
- Provide constructive and supportive feedback; promote timely progress
- Be aware of disability, gender, minority and cultural issues
- Address fears without belittling
- Support professional development (teaching, research, career)
- Look out for your students’ interests (advocate, promote, nominate)
- Be proactive
Rules to Follow

1. Students at the stage of trying to settle on a thesis topic should meet regularly with a faculty supervisor or mentor to talk about possible ideas the student may have because the supervisor knows much more than the student and can identify what ideas have potential vs. those that will probably run into big difficulties, are very risky or have already been done in the literature.

2. Faculty members should view the POTENTIAL of a topic or idea rather than the particular expression of it made by the student early in their thesis development stage.

3. One of the most useful roles of a supervisor is to keep the student on the rails and not let them get bogged down with peripheral details. Keep the student focused on what is to be done.

4. It is very important to help identify, refine, foster and respect ideas of the student rather than simply responding to a student’s idea that it has or has not been done or that it does not fit under a student’s immediate research interests.

Charles Beach, Economics
Words of Wisdom

I have found that it is important to be relatively flexible about how to structure a working relationship with each graduate student. Some students land here running. They have done the foundational reading, they have a good project in mind and they are self-disciplined and independent workers. Others need far more guidance in the early stages and take far more time. Setting basic expectations about monitoring work, meetings, etc. must take these differences into account. And of course things can change. Students who are on track and require less intensive supervision may go off track and require much more at certain points, sometimes for personal reasons that will never be clear to the supervisor. So, keeping an open mind about the intensity of supervision needed and adjusting accordingly is important.

Mark Walters, Law
The quality of the relationship you developed with your graduate students is the most important element of their future contribution to academia and society. Establish a relationship that is based on caring, compassion, enthusiasm and autonomy.

Jean Côté, Kinesiology and Health Studies
Words of Advice

• Get your students writing regularly right from the start and give them feedback on what they have written.
• Meet with them as a group, weekly, both to discuss their plans and progress of their own research but also to discuss a recent paper in your field
• Have each student make a fairly detailed month by month timeline to completion and review this every term at least. Good time management is an asset and there are additional ways to help them with this.
• Encourage seminar attendance (at least once a week) and conference attendance (at least once a year).
• Do something fun with your research group every month or so, even if it’s just going for a picnic lunch in the park, or celebrating birthdays or publications with a cake.

Bob Montgomerie, Biology
Common Sense Advice

Treat your graduate students, not as undergraduates, but as younger colleagues. Give them trust and show them respect, and let them pursue their own ideas to the extent that is possible. Be a role model. Set for them standards that you can live up to as well. Make yourself available; this is nothing worse than an invisible supervisor. Promptly respond to their inquiries. Read what they have written and provide feedback in a timely manner.

Familiarize yourself with the degree requirements of your students and their program timelines.

Try to be a mentor and a friend. Offer advice and guidance when they are needed. Give your time generously, and help their time as graduate students be the time of their life.

Selim Akl, Computing