

# SET UP A MENTORING CULTURE FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS:

## *Roles of Faculty and Peers*



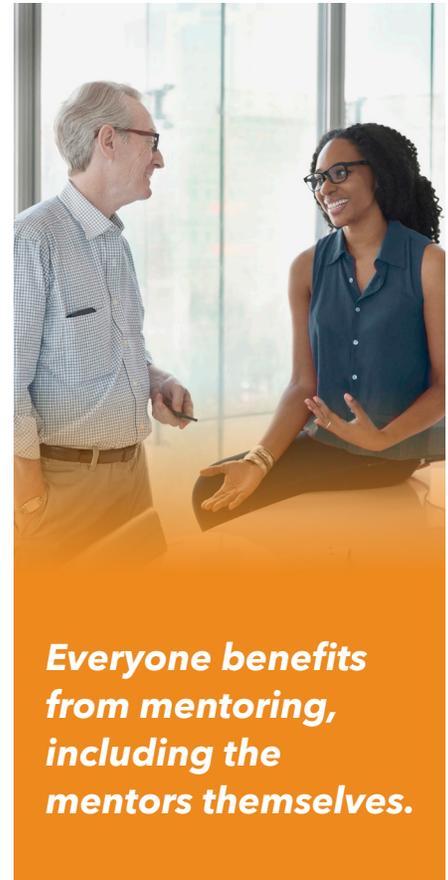
Mentoring programs are an excellent way to support graduate students' sense of belonging in the local intellectual community and help them move forward in their professional careers. Everyone benefits from mentoring, including the mentors themselves, especially when both mentors and mentees are fully committed to the relationship.

**Peer mentors** (sometimes called "buddies") can help new graduate students feel more comfortable in the program, connect to campus resources and student groups, share information about courses, and navigate the local intellectual community. In the sciences/engineering, peer mentors often do career mentoring as well, although only advanced PhD students are likely to have the knowledge and experience.

Graduate students also need **faculty mentors** to help them prepare for their careers and introduce them to the field. In addition to mentorship from the advisor, it can be helpful for students to have additional faculty mentors, representing different skills, experiences, or perspectives. Students can even benefit from having a faculty mentor from outside their department (and its politics).

From the mentor's perspective, mentoring increases one's interpersonal and communication skills, and provides a strong sense of satisfaction and connection. Mentoring can be time-consuming, however, and untenured faculty members (especially women and underrepresented minorities) need to balance their own needs with those of the many students who seek them out.

The different roles of peer and faculty mentors are shown in the table below.



**Everyone benefits from mentoring, including the mentors themselves.**

### ROLES OF PEER MENTORS

- Psychosocial support: acceptance, confirmation; explain what the doctoral student experience is like and how to cope.
- Department/campus networking: connect new peers with other students in the program; acquaint them with campus resources; talk to them about faculty and courses.
- Friendship: cannot be forced; greatest positive effect when friendships formed.
- Role models: model interaction with others in the new role of graduate student; learn to mentor.

### ROLES OF FACULTY MENTORS

- Skill-building: how to conduct academic research, write academic papers, give conference presentations, write grant proposals, and develop other professional competencies.
- Career mentoring: what to expect and how to navigate a research career; assistance/protection if something goes wrong (either career-related or personal).
- Networking: bring students to conferences, introduce them to others doing similar research, and champion them into the field.
- Role model: demonstrate professional behaviors and competencies; model mentoring behavior.

# HOW TO SET UP AND RUN A GRADUATE PEER-MENTORING PROGRAM

## SET UP THE RELATIONSHIP:

- If possible, match mentor pairs by race/ethnicity, gender, and international status; also try to match by life situation, e.g., having kids. Having similar professional interests or hobbies is less important.
- Mentors need a reason to participate, so consider making it a requirement of third-year students. Advanced graduate students benefit by preparing for their role as graduate advisors.

## ESTABLISH ACCOUNTABILITY STRUCTURES:

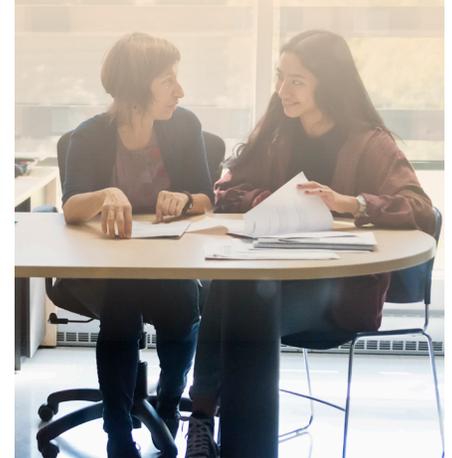
- Recommend relationship duration (i.e., set a sunset date).
- Hold a kick-off meeting where mentees meet their peer mentors. Provide food if possible.
- Sponsor talks or get-togethers to facilitate meetings. Encourage mentor pairs to attend together and discuss the subject matter afterwards. Mentees find academically oriented meetings (e.g., brown-bags on impostor syndrome or conference presentations, etc.) more valuable than informal socializing.
- Monitor the participants and require regular feedback. If a mentee doesn't get along with his/her mentor, or a mentor isn't doing his/her job, switch them to someone else.
- Explain what to do if the mentee (or mentor) needs to report abuse, tragedies, depression, or other issues (as defined by the university).

## SET REASONABLE GOALS AND RECOMMEND CONVERSATION TOPICS:

- Set up a meeting schedule, including how often pairs will meet.
- Either provide a meeting space or suggest that pairs meet in an informal or neutral location to disrupt local power relationships.
- Provide meeting topic "prompts" such as "how to give a conference presentation." Mentor pairs can discuss the degree to which they agree or disagree with a topic, what seems important about it, etc.

## OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Students benefit from mentors who share their diversity, even if the mentors are in a different field.
- International students tend to find mentoring support invaluable.
- Women tend to appreciate mentoring more than men; older students – those with more life experience – may find mentoring less helpful.



## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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