

We believe that graduate students benefit from working closely with faculty mentors as they progress through their graduate degrees and the PFL program. Mentors can help you realize the full range of roles, responsibilities and requirements you will need to master in preparation for employment after graduation. This is information that you don't often get in your coursework but can be just as important in your success as a student and as a potential job applicant. Therefore, participants in the PFL program are required to select a faculty mentor to work with as they work toward professionalization and understanding the norms, values, practices and procedures required of them in their chosen disciplines.

We encourage you have to have a circle of multiple mentors as different people can fill different mentoring roles for you. You should have a mentor that works in the same field and research area you plan to study and pursue a career in, but also consider the interdisciplinarity of your research and career goals and think about seeking out mentors from other research areas and disciplines as you build a supportive circle of mentors.

Successful Mentoring Relationships Provide:

- Professional socialization with working and experienced professionals in your discipline
- Personal support for the highs and lows in your graduate career
- Advice, support and feedback for the advancement of your research, presentations, publications, and teaching
- Models for productive, ethical and responsible professional
- Guidance, advocacy and networking for successful job placement

Building an effective mentoring circle is a rewarding experience and benefits mentors, students and your discipline. Below are 5 general steps we think might be helpful for identifying, approaching, and working with mentors.

Step 1 – Understanding Your Goals and Expectations for Your Mentorship

Before you begin thinking about your potential mentors, it is often useful to reflect on what your expectations, desires, and goals are for your mentorship. Some questions you might ask yourself:

- What am I expecting to get out of this experience?
- What are my educational and career goals?
- What are my objectives and goals for this mentoring process?
- What specific questions do I want answered?
- What can I offer or add to the mentoring relationship?
- What would a successful mentorship look like and do for you?
- What are my strengths?
- What are my weaknesses and what skills do I need help developing?

Step 2 – Identifying Potential Mentors

Once you've got some clarity about your own goals, objectives and expectations are for your mentorship, the next step is to identify potential mentors. Talking to other graduate students about their working experience with different faculty mentors can be beneficial in getting an overall picture of potential faculty mentors. Some questions you might ask yourself:

- What specific skills, qualifications, background, personality traits, work habits and/or research agendas do I want my mentor to have?
- What faculty members have I come in contact with that have inspired or influenced me?
- What faculty members research and teach in the areas that correspond to my own interests?
- Who can best answer the questions I want answered?
- Who can best offer support and insight for helping me achieve my educational and career goals?

Step 3 – Approaching Potential Mentors

Once you've narrowed down the list of potential mentors it's time to approach them and ask if they would be willing to work with you. Here are some suggestions for approaching and meeting with potential mentors:

- Email is a good way to establish first contact with your potential mentors. You should ask to set up a meeting to talk with them about your interest in their work and the possibility of them working with you. Another tactic might be to include a short letter of interest and some data about you, along with stating your interest in setting up a meeting to discuss working together.
- Once the meeting is set up, be prepared with questions and ideas about how their work interests you. Be prepared to state why you want to work with them specifically. Also, be prepared to talk about your own research and professional goals cogently and specifically. Establish a connection about your shared academic and professional interests so you can lead in to asking them if they would be willing to mentor you.
- You'll want to clearly communicate the time commitment to mentoring you would like them to engage in and some of your expectations and goals for the relationship. You can provide them with a copy of the "PFL Information and Guidelines for Mentors" (found on the PFL website) in the meeting, or ahead of time so they can get an idea of what the PFL program is and what their mentoring obligations will be.
- Don't always expect an immediate answer in the meeting. Thank them for their time and give them an opportunity to think it over and make a decision on whether they are willing and able to commit to mentoring you.
- If they are unwilling or unable to act as a mentor, move on to contacting the next potential mentor on your list, but don't discount the opportunity to work with this faculty mentor in the future. A negative response often says more about the faculty member's prior commitments than about you. They might not be able to commit to mentoring you at this particular time for all sorts of reasons, but this could change next semester, or next year, so keep them in mind for potential mentoring opportunities in the future. If you feel comfortable, ask them for suggestions for colleague who they think would be effective mentors for you.

Step 4 – Beginning Your Mentorship

Once you've agreed with a faculty member to engage in a mentoring relationship you'll want to discuss and clarify how the mentoring relationship will proceed. Some topics for discussion to consider include:

- Goals → What short and long-term goals do you want to achieve during the mentorship? And what timeframe do you expect to achieve those goals in?
- Meetings → How often and when do you want to meet with your mentor face-to-face? How do you go about setting up a meeting time with them?
- Feedback and Communication → A lot of mentoring work can be performed and shared without meeting face-to-face, so discuss ways that you will want to receive feedback on things you are working on and how best to communicate with your mentor outside of face-to-face meetings. Be clear on what kinds of individual feedback you are looking for.
- Time Expectations → Be clear upfront on the time commitments you are expecting from your mentor. Establish timelines and timeframes for completion of tasks and receiving feedback. Remember that your faculty mentors are extremely busy, so you'll want to give them plenty of time to set up meetings or complete feedback for you. And if for any reason you have to deviate from your established timeframes or timelines, tell your mentor right away so you can work together to establish new dates and times for moving forward.

Step 5 – Working with your Mentors

As you continue to work with your mentors it is essential to keep communicating with them about your core expectations and needs. Problems in mentoring relationships occur most often when there is a misunderstanding because of a lack of clear communication. Be mindful and respectful of the many obligations and commitments your faculty mentors are engaged in. Keep these strategies in mind:

- Be proactive and take the initiative for communicating with your mentors. Don't wait around for them to tell you what to do or to ask you how things are going. Take responsibility for your own goals and needs in the mentorship while being respectful of your mentor's time and own needs and goals.
- Be explicit and clear as possible when asking mentors to do something for you. Tell them exactly what you are looking for and what you need. Thank your mentors when they offer you help and let them know how they are helping you specifically. Mentors want to know that they are helping and are putting their own time to good use.
- Be professional in your reception of criticism. Be open to other points of view and be able to clearly articulate the reasons you either agree or disagree with the points of the criticism.
- Transition from student to potential colleague. Graduate school is a transitional time for you to think about transition from accomplished student to potential scholar and professional colleague, so take your work and yourself seriously and get committed to your profession. Get involved in your departments and seek out opportunities in professional organizations and in your disciplines.

- Give your mentors ample time and notice for meeting deadlines, scheduling meetings, offering feedback, and any other related tasks you are asking them to perform
- When it comes time for applying for jobs, have a mentor that you can work closely with on drafting your job documents and who can give you up-to-date advice on the current trends and requirements of the job market.

Working with mentors is an immensely helpful and rewarding experience. Sometimes there can be problems that arise during a mentoring relationship for a number of various reasons. If you find that you or your mentor are unable to continue the mentoring relationship, thank them for the time they have committed to you and continue to rely on the other mentors in your mentor circle while you consider seeking out other prospective mentors. As your professional and scholarly goals change don't be afraid to change your mentor circle to help you best prepare for your future.