

What is a Mentor?

- In a broad sense, a mentor is someone who takes a special interest in helping another develop into a successful professional.
- A good mentor seeks to help a student optimize an educational experience, to assist the student's socialization into disciplinary culture, and to aid the student in finding suitable employment.
- A fundamental difference between a mentor and an advisor is that mentoring is more than advising; mentoring is a personal as well as a professional relationship. An advisor might or might not be a mentor, depending on the quality of the relationship.
- An effective mentoring relationship is characterized by mutual trust, understanding and empathy.
- The goal of a mentoring relationship is to advance the educational and personal growth of students.
- A good mentor is a good listener.
- Everyone benefits from having multiple mentors of diverse talents, ages and personalities.
- A successful mentor is prepared to deal with population-diversity issues, including those peculiar to ethnicity, culture, sex and disability.

Entering Mentoring, 48.

What would you add to this list?

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Advice for New Mentors

For most people, good mentoring, like good teaching, is a skill that is developed over time. Here are a few tips for beginners:

- **Listen patiently.** Give students time to get to issues they find sensitive or embarrassing.
- **Build a relationship.** Simple joint activities (walks across campus, informal conversations over coffee, attending a lecture together) will help to develop rapport. Take cues from students as to how close they wish the relationship to be.
- **Don't abuse your authority.** Don't ask students to do personal work, such as mowing a lawn, babysitting, or typing.
- **Nurture self-sufficiency.** Your goal is not to "clone" yourself but to encourage confidence and independent thinking.
- **Establish "protected time" together.** Try to minimize interruptions by telephone or visitors.
- **Share yourself.** Invite students to see what you do, both on and off the job. Tell of your own successes and failures. Let the student see the human side and encourage them to reciprocate.
- **Provide introductions.** Help the student develop a professional network and build a community of mentors.
- **Be constructive.** Critical feedback is essential to spur improvement, but do it kindly and temper criticism with praise when deserved.
- **Don't be overbearing.** Avoid dictating choices or controlling students' behavior.
- **Find your own mentors.** New advisors, like new students, benefit from guidance by those with more experience.

Entering Mentoring, 44.

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