Mentoring: A Guide for Students

How to Obtain the Mentoring You Need

From The University of Washington's Graduate School:
https://www.grad.washington.edu/mentoring/students/

A mentor is more than an adviser. A mentor provides you with wisdom, technical knowledge, assistance, support, empathy and respect throughout, and often beyond, your graduate career. Mentoring helps students understand how their ambitions fit into graduate education, department life and career choices.

An effective mentoring relationship develops over time. The student benefits from the mentor's support, skills, wisdom and coaching. Later, both people deepen their working relationship, perhaps collaborating on projects in which the student develops into a junior colleague.

After a while, the mentee may need some separation from the mentor to test his or her own ideas. This distancing is a sign that the mentoring relationship is maturing and providing the mentee with the skills needed to function independently. Finally, both mentee and mentor may redefine their relationship as one of equals, characterized over time by informal contact and mutual assistance, thus becoming true professional colleagues.

Benefits of mentoring

As an undergraduate, your objective was to obtain knowledge; in graduate school your objective is to contribute knowledge to a field of study and begin to function as a member of a profession. Even though you may be passionate about a particular subject, your ultimate goal for pursuing an advanced degree may still be evolving. This is an opportunity for your mentors to assist you with that evolution.

Studies indicate that graduate students who receive effective mentoring demonstrate greater

- productivity in research activity, conference presentations, pre-doctoral publications, instructional development and grant writing
- academic success in persisting in graduate school, achieving shorter time to degree and performing better in academic coursework
- professional success with greater chances of securing a tenure-track position if seeking employment in academe, or greater career advancement potential if seeking leadership positions in administration or sectors outside the University.

Mentoring enables graduate students to

- acquire a body of knowledge and skills
- learn techniques for collaborating and networking

- gain perspective on how a discipline operates academically, socially, and politically
- develop a sense of scholarly citizenship by grasping their role in a larger educational enterprise
- deal more confidently with the challenges of intellectual work.

Mentoring enables faculty members to

- engage the curiosities and energies of fresh minds
- keep abreast of new research questions, knowledge, paradigms, and techniques
- cultivate collaborators for current or future projects
- identify and train graduate assistants whose work is critical to the completion of a research project or successful course offering
- prepare the next generation of intellectual leaders in the disciplines and in society
- enjoy the personal and professional satisfaction inherent in mentoring relationships.

Strategies: Building your mentoring team

Rather than trying to find a single mentor, you may choose to build a mentoring team. While mentors often are faculty members, they can be your peers; advanced graduate students; departmental staff; retired faculty; faculty from other departments, colleges, or universities; and professionals outside the University. The team approach you take will likely be an informal one, and the mentors you select may or may not see themselves as part of a formal team. If you have drawn individuals from varied fields or professional sectors, your mentors might not know each other, at least not initially. It is up to you to decide if there are advantages to introducing your mentors by proposing collaborative work.

Your mentor's varied roles

Mentors play many roles in your life -- guide, counselor, adviser, consultant, tutor, teacher and guru. A mentor's combination of professional expertise, personal style and approach to facilitating learning influences the kind of mentoring you will receive.

Effective mentoring is multidimensional as mentors play three core roles to assist your educational, professional and personal growth.

Disciplinary guide

Sometimes a faculty member will be a thesis/dissertation adviser and a mentor; in other cases, you benefit by having different people carry out each role. Either way, the role of a disciplinary guide is to help you become a contributing member of your discipline.

This guidance helps you to understand how your discipline has evolved as a knowledge enterprise; recognize novel questions; identify innovative ways of engaging undergraduate students through your teaching and collaborative research projects; and see your discipline, its questions and methodologies in relation other fields. Another role of the disciplinary guide is to help you grasp the impact your discipline has on the world and to assist you in pursuing the impact you hope to have.

Skills development consultant

While graduate study is about learning how to generate knowledge, its pressures for specialization can make you lose sight of the array of skills you need to succeed. Your mentor can help you develop intellectual and professional skills including, and going beyond, those related to research.

Oral and written communication skills. These include clearly expressing the results of your work; translating field-specific knowledge for teaching and interacting with the public; and persuading others, such as funders, policy makers, organizations and conference audiences, of the value of your work.

Team-oriented skills. Some of the most innovative learning occurs in teams that problem solve collaboratively. Increasingly, complex problems require interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary solutions. Your mentor can help you develop collaborative, problem-solving skills by organizing group exercises and projects.

Leadership skills. As a graduate student, you can become an intellectual leader in many settings. Mentors invite you to assume leadership roles throughout graduate study—for example, in seminars, student government, disciplinary societies and community outreach, as well as on departmental or university committees. These activities will help you build people skills which are indispensable for your career.

Career consultant

In recent years, the mentor's role as career consultant has acquired greater importance, especially for doctoral students. In some disciplines, the number of doctorates produced annually is far greater than the number of available tenure-track positions. As a result, many doctoral graduates are choosing positions in a variety of educational settings and sectors of the economy.

An effective mentor helps you link aspects of your graduate work with other potential mentors beyond your department—alumni or other professionals in colleges, universities, schools, community groups, the private sector, non-profit organizations, government and industrial laboratories. Mentors outside your department can help you explore career options, so that you learn how your graduate education translates into various professional opportunities.

Develop a vision of the mentoring you need

To envision the kinds of mentors you should seek, reflect on others who served as mentors earlier in your life and answer these questions

- What kind of mentoring have I received in the past? Was it work-related? School-related?
- Would I describe my past mentoring relationships as collegial ones (as equals or near equals) or apprenticeship ones? What does this difference mean to me now? Which do I prefer at this stage of my professional development?
- What did I find most useful about the mentoring I received? What did I find least useful?

- What kind of mentoring did I not receive earlier that would be particularly helpful to me now?

Strategies: What a good mentor does

Engages students in conversation

- Welcomes students to talk often, and invites them to discussions during office hours, in the lab, department lounges or hallways
- Is in touch with students at least once a quarter
- Invites students to coffee or outings away from the office for informal discussions

Demystifies graduate school for students

- Helps students interpret program guidelines and the Graduate School's policies and procedures
- Adjusts academic discussions to help students know what questions to ask or what certain terminology means
- Clarifies unwritten or vague aspects of program expectations for coursework, exams, research and teaching
- Helps students understand the finer points of forming a committee and how to approach a thesis or dissertation
- Helps students understand the criteria used to judge the quality of their work at different stages of graduate study
- Alerts students ahead of time to possible pitfalls, especially those that may affect their funding status.

"It has been extremely helpful to me to have a mentor who recognized that academic procedures and protocol— everything from how to select classes to how to assemble a panel for a conference— are not familiar territory for a lot of people."

"My mentor has been willing to answer the most basic questions without making me feel foolish for asking them."

Provides constructive and supportive feedback

- Provides students with frank, helpful and timely feedback on their work, and knows that delays in responding create insecurities that can hinder student progress
- Is equally specific when giving praise as when giving criticism. The mentor's high standards help mentees improve
- Does not assume a lack of commitment if a student falls behind in work and tries to assess, with the student, what is going on and offers help
- Knows the benefits of early intervention and addresses quickly any question about a student's ability to complete his or her degree.

"I wrote several drafts before he felt I had begun to make a cogent argument, and as painful as that was, I would not have written the dissertation that I did without receiving strong, if just, criticism, but in a compassionate way."

"Honest advice, given as gently as possible, is something all of us graduate students need."

Provides encouragement

- Encourages students to come forward with their ideas at all stages of development
- Motivates students to try new techniques and to expand their skills
- Reminds students that mistakes lead to better learning
- Shares less-than-successful professional experiences and the lessons learned from them
- Knows that many students experience anxiety about their place in graduate school and helps them understand that seasoned professionals also experience this kind of anxiety
- Teaches students how to break down potentially overwhelming projects into manageable tasks.

"Mentorship is far more than a one-time conversation about your career plans or a visit to a professor's home. It is the mentor's continuous engagement in a student's professional growth and the ongoing support and encouragement of a student's academic endeavors."

"My professors encouraged me both to publish my work and to participate in conferences. Without their encouragement, I might not have made the effort to accomplish these things."

Fosters networks and multiple mentors

- Helps students locate assistance from multiple sources and sees faculty, graduate students, alumni, department staff, retired faculty and faculty from other universities as resources
- Introduces students to faculty and other graduate students in the department and at conferences
- Helps students connect their work with experts in the community who can provide career perspectives
- Builds a community of scholars by coordinating discussion groups or social events among students.

"My co-chair referred me to a faculty member doing related research at UNC at a time when my research was floundering and I really needed additional support. I could not have completed my dissertation were it not for this recommendation."

"My advisers really made a team of their graduate students, having regular meetings and informal parties and get-togethers, working on projects together, and forming interest groups. That comradeship was essential to my academic growth and my sense of having a community."

Looks out for students' interests

- Conveys that he or she wants students to succeed

- Creates opportunities for students to demonstrate their competencies by encouraging them to present at meetings, conferences and in university forums

Thinks about students' mentoring needs

- Nominates students for high-visibility fellowships, projects, teaching and internship opportunities
- Promotes students' research and teaching projects inside and outside the department
- Is an advocate for all graduate students

"My mentor allowed my tasks to grow along with me, offering appropriate opportunities and challenges at each stage of my education."

"I knew that I was not just an ordinary student when she invited me to co-teach with her. We worked together as colleagues, not as teacher and student."

Treats students with respect

- Minimizes interruptions and distractions during meetings with students
- Tells students what he or she learns from them
- Acknowledges the prior skills and personal and professional experiences students bring to graduate school

"She treated me and her other students with respect— respect for our opinions, our independence, and our visions of what we wanted to get from graduate school."

"It sounds silly but the best thing my mentor did for me was to actually sit down and listen to what I had to say. When graduate students are allowed to feel that what they have to say is actually worthwhile, it makes interactions more rewarding."

Provides a personal touch

- Is approachable and demonstrates caring, even when students need to discuss non-academic issues
- Does not assume that students experience challenges in the same way and assists them in finding creative solutions
- Keeps abreast of the mentoring and professional development resources at the Graduate School and elsewhere.

"Having someone supportive when things go wrong is the difference, in my mind, between an adequate mentor and a great one."

"A few of my professors were always willing and eager to talk with me about my career interests, professional pursuits, and issues such as juggling career and family. This may not sound like much, but it truly makes a difference."

Strategies: Understanding common concerns

Need for role models

All graduate students benefit from role models they can admire. Quite often, people identify role models based on shared outlook and connections to similar experiences. Although the composition of faculty at UW is becoming more diverse, students from underrepresented groups – whether underrepresented in higher education in general or within certain areas of study -- can face greater challenges finding faculty role models who have had experiences similar to their own. Some students convey that they hope to find "someone who looks like me," "someone who immediately understands my experiences and perspectives" and "someone whose very presence lets me know I, too, can make it."

While shared background and experiences are important, they do not guarantee a good mentoring relationship. Shared interests and interpersonal compatibility are the keys. All students also benefit from reaching out to potential mentors who are different from them in race, gender or other characteristics.

- Expand your knowledge of people within your department, across the UW or at other universities who may help you obtain the experiences and resources you need.
- Ask other students to identify faculty they regard as role models and why.
- Discuss with students and faculty how your department's climate welcomes all contributions.
- Know that you can receive good guidance from mentors who are of a different gender, race or culture from you. Focus on what you need in order to learn and make progress.

Fear of being categorized as a "single-issue" scholar

Some students are concerned if they select a thesis/ dissertation topic related to their own gender, race, sexual orientation or culture that faculty will mistakenly assume they are interested in pursuing only these topics. If you are passionate about these questions in your research and teaching, do not feel apologetic. To bolster the scholarly nature of your agenda

- Articulate clearly and compellingly to potential mentors the value of your research interests
- Make connections to others' work, as well as to other major topics and questions in the discipline
- Discuss with your peers and faculty members the ways that race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity and other characteristics expand questions asked in your discipline and the approaches used for answering them
- Seek assistance from faculty and advanced graduate students on how to frame the issues that drive your intellectual curiosity
- Practice job talks and interview responses that demonstrate the depth and breadth of your research interests
- Understand that some people who are uninformed about your topic may perceive it as narrow or limited, so practice effective ways to address questions from skeptics.

Feelings of isolation

At times, you might find that graduate study can be isolating. Isolation, whether from other students or from one's home community, is something all graduate students face. If it goes unchecked, isolation can lead students to loneliness and self-doubt. In more severe cases, it can

lead to depression or dropping out. Depending on the discipline, students from underrepresented groups might feel more isolated than other students, especially if the composition of students, faculty and content in the department is homogenous. To prevent isolation

- Ask advanced graduate students and faculty to introduce you to peers and potential mentors with complementary interests
- Attend as many departmental functions as you can
- Offer to organize functions or form groups (e.g., interest, study, or writing groups) to contribute to department life
- Invite mentors to join these activities
- Be aware of students who are not taking active roles in academic or social activities and find ways to include them
- Get involved with organizations, such as cultural groups, reading groups and professional associations, to increase your sense of community.

Burden of being a spokesperson

When certain issues arise in classroom or discussions, especially those relating to race, class or gender, the pressures of being a spokesperson arise. Consider the pressures put on a woman in an engineering seminar if asked, "How would a woman approach this design problem?" or on the man in a feminist theory class if asked to provide "the male perspective." You can help to alleviate this burden.

- Avoid asking your peers and professors to speak as spokespersons for a group to which you think they belong. Simply ask for their perspective.
- Avoid assuming that the "white male" experience is the norm. Seek to understand how race, gender and other characteristics influence perspectives.
- Emphasize that you speak from your own perspective. If you voluntarily take on a spokesperson role, explain that others present may not feel the same way.
- When other students voluntarily take on spokesperson roles, acknowledge what you have learned from their contributions to the discussion.

Balancing work and lifestyle

Students from all disciplines observe that professors devote large parts of their lives to their work. In turn, students can become overwhelmed if they feel that faculty expect them to spend every minute on their work. This causes concern for those seeking to balance success in their graduate career with other interests and responsibilities. To keep the pressures of graduate school in check

- Ask faculty whom you admire how they balance their professional and personal lives
- Request their advice on how you can balance your obligations
- Ask your peers how they balance family or personal problems and what they do when they encounter difficulties
- Attend UW workshops and panels on work/life balance
- Demonstrate through your behavior and work that you are focused and productive when in your office, classroom or lab.

Strategies: What influences your mentoring needs

The Graduate School believes that a diverse graduate student population enriches the University, and we are committed to enhancing the mentoring of students from underrepresented populations. These improvements will make the University a richer and more democratic community and benefit the entire graduate student body.

No two students experience advanced study in the same way. Students with similar backgrounds and characteristics can experience different challenges. Some graduate students of different backgrounds share similar concerns, such as presenting or publishing papers and job searching. Your gender, gender identification, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, disabilities, age, prior work experience, career aspirations, family responsibilities and socioeconomic background influence the mentoring you need.

Assertiveness

The unspoken code in graduate education is that, aside from being intelligent, students who are assertive in classroom discussions or conference presentations attain success. However, students from marginalized groups often demonstrate a different approach to academic interactions. Many women, minorities and international students express concern about difficulties they experience making their contributions heard. For example, in classroom discussions, some women have noted that to contribute an idea, often they have to interrupt another student. They tend to see interjecting themselves in this manner as rude and disrespectful; yet they fear that professors and peers will wrongly attribute their lack of participation to having no ideas at all. Many women report that when they assert their ideas strongly, they feel subjected to criticism in a way that their male counterparts are not—even though the assertive behavior is the same.

Competitiveness

Research has shown that an overly competitive and critical atmosphere in graduate programs can alienate minority and women students. Women have said that the system does not reward praising the contributions of other scholars. More opportunities for collaborative work would help balance the competitive culture of graduate school.

Importance of positive feedback

Many students want frequent constructive feedback on their work, and the lack of constructive feedback can lead students to doubt their capabilities. Some women tend to attribute negative experiences they have in graduate school to personal deficiencies, while some men tend to attribute them to insufficient guidance or problems within the department. Many men are more content than women with mentors who offer solid instrumental – yet seemingly impersonal -- advice. Women and members of other underrepresented groups may interpret a professor's distance as an indication that he or she has a negative opinion of them.

Recommendations

- Discuss with your mentor or professor what makes your participation in seminars or projects difficult. Suggest ways that he or she can help you participate more, such as by directing questions to you.
- If a professor or peer interrupts you, point out that you would like to complete your thought or contribution.
- Avoid addressing your peers or professors as spokespersons for their gender. Invite your peers to offer their perspectives and ask how gender may or may not influence them.
- Try to influence the tenor of group discussions that become excessively critical by asking, "What contributions does this particular article/person/report make?"
- Participate in discussions and projects through small group work, e-mail discussions or discussion boards, journal comments, informal discussions and office hours.
- Include all who want to participate in peer or discussion groups.
- Ask your mentors and/or professors to provide clear feedback on your work.
- Give your peers specific feedback on their projects.
- Consult departmental resources and Graduate School representatives if you are being treated in ways that negatively impact your graduate work.

Resources

- UW Center for Instructional Development and Research offers consulting and workshops on how to make learning environments and mentoring more inclusive. | http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/ | 206.543.6588
- Center for Workforce Development provides graduate student mentoring and resources geared towards women pursuing careers in the sciences and engineering. | http://www.engr.washington.edu/cwd/ | 206.543.4810
- Center for Curriculum Transformation assists individual faculty and academic departments with curriculum change related to gender and cultural pluralism. | http://depts.washington.edu/ctcenter/ | 206.685.8276

Sexual orientation and gender identity

Unlike other underrepresented students, many gay, bisexual, lesbian, transgender and queer (GBLTQ) students are "invisible" because sexual orientation and gender identity are not always determined through physical expression, or because some students choose not to be out. Some students talk about their sexual orientation or gender identity openly. Your mentors have the responsibility to maximize your learning. Whether you are a GBLTQ student or not, you can help your academic community eliminate, or be more aware, of the following:

Homophobia

Despite a fairly accepting climate such as ours, GBLTQ students can still encounter homophobia around campus. Behaviors can range from the blatantly offensive, such as verbal or physical threats or attacks, to the less obvious, such as the casual remark "that is so gay" in classroom or hallway conversations.

Heterosexism

Many graduate students and professors discuss topics with the unconscious assumption that everyone is heterosexual. Some straight faculty and students who have a heightened awareness

of gender issues might still talk about the world from a heterosexual perspective. GBLTQ students experience such scholarly discussions as biased, and the absence of GBLTQ perspectives can make them feel isolated from intellectual engagement.

Genderism

Genderism is the assumption that male and female assignments of gender are fixed at birth. This is not the case for every person. Gender biases in classrooms and departments (e.g., saying "it" to refer to individuals of ambiguous gender; gendered bathrooms) are oppressive to individuals who feel the need to alter their gender identity.

Disclosing

Being out as a GBLTQ student is not a one-time event, but a decision he or she makes in each new situation. Each new interaction comes with the burden of having to assess the personal, social and political ramifications of disclosure. Heterosexual students do not bear this weight when interacting with peers and professors.

Recommendations

- Assume that GBLTQ students or faculty are present in every classroom, lab, seminar or campus meeting and that they might not feel safe being out.
- Assess your department's environment and your level of comfort with being out if you are a GBLTQ student.
- Ask peers and mentors whom you know are out to suggest how department members can create an environment that is conducive to everyone's learning and professional needs.
- Establish standards for inclusive language and communication collaboratively with your peers and professors.
- Avoid homophobic, gendered, sexist or other discriminatory comments. For example, when talking about families, avoid talking as if every family were composed of a husband, wife and children. Use words like "spouse and partner" instead of just "spouse" or "husband" or "wife." These terms go a long way in letting GBLTQ students and students who are single know they are represented in discussions.
- Treat sexual orientation as a multidimensional phenomenon in your relationships with peers and mentors. Understand that homosexuality is only one of several expressions of sexual orientation and that gender identity may not be fixed for everyone.
- Encourage your department to put GBLTQ concerns on the agenda for graduate student orientations and training programs for faculty and staff.

Resources

- ASUW Gay, Bisexual, Lesbian, Transgender Commission offers programs regarding issues of sexual orientation. | 206.685.GBLC (4252) | http://gbltc.asuw.org/
- Affirming Diversity: Moving from Tolerance to Acceptance and Beyond, a presidential task force report on GBLT issues, suggests ways to improve campus climate, student resources and policies. | http://www.washington.edu/reports/gblt/gblt.pdf
- Q Center is a resource for classroom speakers, research, and information on Queer issues. | 206.897.1430 | http://depts.washington.edu/qcenter/

- QGrad is a support network for graduate sexual minorities. | qgrad@uw.edu.

Race and ethnicity

Race and ethnicity shape your academic, social and professional experiences on campus. Although the racial and ethnic diversity of the UW graduate student population has been increasing over the last 20 years, the campus community as a whole remains relatively homogenous. One reason is that efforts to enhance the pipeline of students at primary and secondary levels preparing for higher education have been well-meaning, but sporadic and limited.

Another reason is that disciplinary programs are still learning how to expand their student recruitment and outreach efforts. As a result, ethnic minority graduate students at the UW can feel marginalized, not only in the student population but in how research problems and curricula reflect -- or fail to reflect -- their scholarly influence and experiences. We need more role models of faculty and students who engage in multicultural scholarship, research and teaching to strengthen diversity awareness and support structures in graduate training.

Role models

When students enter the complex structure of a research university, they can experience feelings of isolation or become overwhelmed. One of the first things students do is seek out people with whom they can identify in order to temper those feelings. This search can be challenging for students of color. The lack of minority faculty members makes it difficult for graduate students to find an adviser or mentor in their fields. Ethnic minorities often seek role models – regardless of race -- who have "paved the way," who work through the dissonances between their home communities and the academic community, and who can help students do the same. When one of the few faculty of color leaves the UW, minority students feel the impact.

Stereotyping

A stereotype that students of color worry about is whether other students and faculty will have low expectations of them. White faculty and peers may unwittingly avoid reaching out to, or worse, end up discouraging students of color in seminar or lab interactions. This stereotype can make minority students feel awkward when seeking advice and guidance. Another harmful stereotype is that "all ethnic minorities are alike" or have the same goals for graduate school and experience the same challenges. These assumptions compromise collegial interaction and undermine students' individual needs and talents.

Lack of an explicit support system

At least two kinds of support are necessary for students, and in particular students of color, to succeed. The first is sufficient financial support and the second is environmental support, including mentoring and networking. Departments should not assume that students automatically "know" how to navigate the system or pursue support. Underrepresented students in higher education may have fewer direct channels to such sources of assistance. If workshops on these issues are not offered regularly in departments, or not publicized well, then opportunities remain hidden and students miss out.

Exclusion from support networks

Underrepresented students on fellowships may be inadvertently overlooked for teaching and research assistantships, and, as a result, experience fewer opportunities for collegial, career-building interactions with faculty and peers. They also miss out on how teaching and research assignments can enhance graduate training and strengthen their curriculum vitae.

Recommendations

- Attend diversity forums on campus each year, and bring ideas for community building back to your department.
- Understand that graduate students from different racial and ethnic groups confront different issues and challenges in their programs. At the same time, avoid assuming that all students from a given racial or ethnic group have the same perspectives or needs.
- Recognize your peers' unique strengths.
- Learn about scholarly advances that have resulted from the inclusion of multicultural research, knowledge and perspectives in your discipline.
- Reach out to students of color in seminars, discussions and group assignments. Collaborate on research or teaching projects, and look for opportunities to present these projects in departmental forums or disciplinary meetings.
- Ask your department to offer workshops on financial support, mentoring, diversity, community-building and success strategies.
- Consult the Graduate School's website for academic, professional and community resources.
- Talk with your mentors about ways they can help you achieve professional development experiences. If you are a student of color on a fellowship, tell faculty and peers that you are interested in guest lecturing or collaborating in lab groups. Ask to be considered for teaching or research assistantships as a substitute for a certain amount of fellowship time.
- Join student policy, curricular or cultural groups. Shape the needs of your community by being a student representative at faculty meetings, joining the Graduate and Professional Student Senate or leading writing, study or teaching groups.
- Become involved with national networks for underrepresented minorities and women students.

Resources

- The UW Center for Instructioinal Development and Research offers web and print resources on inclusive teaching and assistance with workshops. | 206.221.4116 | http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/
- Center for Multicultural Education focuses on research projects, activities, and services designed to improve practice related to equity issues, intergroup relations, and the achievement of students of color. | 206.543.3386 | http://education.washington.edu/cme/
- Center for Curriculum Transformation helps individual faculty and departments to address cultural pluralism in the academic curriculum. | 206.685.8276 | http://depts.washington.edu/ctcenter/
- Ethnic Cultural Center promotes diversity, cross-cultural exchange, lectures, and learning beyond the classroom for graduate and undergraduate students. It also provides meeting space and theatre events. | 206.543.4635 | http://depts.washington.edu/ecc/
- Graduate Opportunities & Minority Achievement Program (GO-MAP) provides graduate student outreach and recruitment programs, and supports diversity with numerous resources and opportunities. | 206.543.9016 | http://www.grad.washington.edu/gomap/

- Office of Minority Affairs provides outreach and academic support services to ensure a welcoming climate in which all students can realize their full potential. | 206.685.0518 | http://depts.washington.edu/omad/

Disabilities

Students can have physical disabilities, learning disabilities (such as attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder or dyslexia), chronic disabilities (such as lupus or multiple sclerosis) and psychological disabilities (such as depression or bipolar disorder). Their needs may vary depending on whether they have had a disability since birth or if it developed – or was diagnosed - later in life.

Students should work collaboratively with their professors and with Disability Resources for Students (DRS) http://www.washington.edu/students/drs/ to ensure that their needs are met. The DRS office is charged with establishing eligibility for disability-related services such as academic adjustments and auxiliary aids for qualified students with disabilities, and can assist students and faculty in determining effective ways to meet disability-related needs in courses or programs. If you or any of your peers has a disability, be aware of the following factors that can influence mentoring needs.

Reluctance to ask for help

Some students with disabilities fear appearing or becoming too dependent if they ask for help. Those whose disabilities are a recent onset, as well as those with invisible disabilities, may be unaccustomed to asking for help. Students also fear being seen as less capable or less competent because of their disabilities or their needs for accommodations.

Efforts to keep up

For many students with disabilities, meeting basic course requirements demands more time and energy than it does for other students. A student with multiple sclerosis may have a certain number of hours each day for school and studying before fatigue, vision problems and cognitive deficits flare. A student who is hard of hearing and uses a real-time captioner (like a court stenographer) may have to review several pages of notes from the captioner in order to create study notes. Some students cannot participate in professional activities such as submitting papers for conferences because they need to devote time and energy to meet the demands of their programs.

Problems that arise from last-minute changes

Changes in reading assignments can be difficult for students who are blind or visually impaired. At the beginning of the quarter, these students may need readings to be converted into an alternate format, such as Braille, audiotape or electronic text. Conversion often involves a computer screen reader, or enlargement, with specialized software. Readings added later in the quarter require students to have them converted in a short period of time, and they may not be able to meet reading deadlines. Room relocations may also cause hardships for visually impaired students and students with mobility limitations.

- If you are a student with a disability, inform your professors and contact DRS as soon as possible to determine how your needs can be accommodated to ensure equal access.
- Request a syllabus in advance from your professors. Ask them to prioritize readings or assignments if you anticipate difficulties completing them by the deadlines.
- Ask your professors to write an outline on the board for each class or seminar, if that would be helpful to you.
- Ask your professors how flexible they can be with deadlines. If you need additional time to complete tasks because of your disability or the accommodations you need, discuss this with your professors.
- Alert your professors to the additional steps or time you might need to deal with sudden changes in syllabi or assignments.

Resources http://www.grad.washington.edu/mentoring

- Disability Resources for Students (DRS) establishes a student's eligibility for disability accommodations and works collaboratively with faculty and staff to coordinate and implement these accommodations. DRS is a resource for students, faculty, and staff regarding the provision of equal access for students with disabilities in all aspects of campus life. DRS provides knowledgeable guidance and consultation and is a resource for publications on disability-related subject matter. | 206.543.8924 (V/TTY) | http://www.washington.edu/students/drs/
- DO-IT Program (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internet-working and Technology) provides resources for disabled students in engineering and the sciences to help increase independence, productivity, and participation in education and employment. Though directed primarily to undergraduates, graduate students may find helpful information too, or they can volunteer to mentor younger students. | 206.685.DOIT (3648) (V/TTY) | http://www.washington.edu/doit/

Strategies: International students

Language and culture in the classroom

Despite their many achievements, some international students can feel their competence diminished early in their graduate programs. Linguistic proficiency and lack of awareness of how the U.S. academic system works may be initial hurdles to overcome. Most international students have different collaborative or classroom communication patterns. For instance, in the educational systems of East and Southeast Asia, the student's role is a more understated one in interactions with professors, whose authority goes unquestioned. Thus, some international students are surprised to encounter U.S. students speaking up without being called upon, or challenging their professors' remarks.

Behavior in graduate seminars can seem unnecessarily competitive to international students, who fear that if they do not exhibit these same behaviors, professors will judge them less capable or intelligent. Many international graduate students come from countries in which only a small percentage of high school graduates is admitted to university, so the different levels of preparation of first-year undergraduates in the United States can be a challenge for international teaching assistants.

The rules of the academic game

When international graduate students arrive on campus, they need to demystify three cultures: the U.S. culture, the culture of the research university and the academic culture in their departments.

They discover that policies in graduate departments can be quite different from those in their home institutions, or are opaque or difficult to interpret. For instance, some may find it initially hard to understand why they can accept teaching or research assistantships but are not permitted to work off-campus. On a subtler note, international students rely on different assumptions about how faculty members and graduate students should relate to each other. Many East Asian graduate students, for example, have reported sensing a kind of interpersonal "coldness" from some U.S. faculty who, while informal and jovial with students during seminars, might remain distant regarding students' personal or family lives. In other countries, the faculty-graduate student relationship extends beyond academic discussions.

Social stresses

In moving far away from families and friends, international students can feel displaced. Those who are new to the United States, and who bring their partners and children with them, worry about how well their families will adjust to American life. After a while, some students may wonder how they will be accepted at home with different dress, talk and behavior. In essence, they worry about being foreigners in their own countries.

Recommendations

- Reach out to international students by asking about their research and outside interests.
- If you are an international graduate student, ask advanced international and U.S. graduate students for advice on navigating the UW.
- If you are an international student, ask your peers, professors and mentors for the best way to interact -- in person, e-mail, phone, office hours or group meetings.
- Refrain from stereotyping international students as having difficulties with English.
- Help your peers and faculty mentors learn that international students who speak English very well can still experience cultural dissonance or confusion about U.S. graduate education.
- Be aware that the rules governing graduate studies and funding in the United States are often different from those in other countries. Most students have a single country visa that prohibits them from traveling freely outside the United States. Also, they cannot work for pay, except for TA or RA positions. If you have questions about your program's requirements, speak with your graduate program coordinator or department chair. If you have questions about international student travel or work, contact the International Services Office.

Resources

- International Student Services Office addresses a range of issues for international students and provides one-on-one assistance. | 206.221.7857 | http://iss.washington.edu/
- International Teaching Assistant Program, in the Center for Teaching and Learning, provides workshops and individual consultations to help prepare international students for roles as

graduate teaching assistants. | 206.543.6588 | http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/consulting/ita.html

- Foundation for International Understanding through Students (FIUTS) links UW international students, visitors, and scholars with the Puget Sound community and provides opportunities for cross-cultural friendship and events. | 206.543.0735 | http://www.fiuts.washington.edu/

Strategies: Age and experience

Older students can be more focused and aware of their goals for graduate school than their younger colleagues. Their maturity is an asset because they are usually not intimidated by the prospect of engaging in discussions with you, and they are familiar with complex problems and independent thinking.

Fear of having "rusty" skills

Older students, especially if they have been in the work force for several years, might worry about how they compare to their younger counterparts. Younger students, or those who were recently undergraduates, may be more up-to-date in the discipline or have more experience with technology than those who have been away from the university environment.

Devaluation of life experiences

Many older students pursue graduate school after spending a considerable number of years running a business, leading developments in industry or the public sector or raising a family. One issue they face is learning that their hard-won, "real-life" knowledge is sometimes devalued during the graduate experience. This can be frustrating when older students' array of experiences contradicts the research or theory they are studying.

Invisibility in the classroom

Older students commonly describe how bad they feel when a professor refers to an event or popular film from many years ago and then says to the entire class, "And of course none of you would remember that." Although not intended to be harmful, this kind of remark makes older students feel overlooked.

Isolation from fellow students

Because of the age differences between them and their peers, older graduate students may feel socially isolated. Many older students prefer to socialize in environments different from those of younger students. Although friendships can and do develop with younger colleagues, older students are aware that some of them may be the same age as their children.

Awkwardness with faculty

Some older students are closer in age or older than their professors. Some may worry that their professors are more accustomed to interacting with younger students.

Prior work experience and career aspirations

Regardless of their reasons for pursuing advanced studies, students enter graduate school today with more experience and more diverse career aspirations than ever before. Today, many graduate students often have had one or more careers before beginning advanced study.

Recommendations

- Talk to your peers and mentors about how your professional and educational experience transfers to graduate study. Link real world examples to theory.
- Visit one-on-one with faculty members to help them understand who you are and what you are about.
- If you have been in the workforce for several years, jot down your five most polished skills and identify how they correlate to academic work.
- Lead discussion groups or projects that mix people of different ages and experiences. Avoid always joining or forming study teams that consist only of same-age students.
- Ask other graduate students for suggestions on readings or for technological assistance if you need it.
- Offer technological assistance to your graduate student peers.
- Initiate social activities on and off campus, such as dinner parties or community events.
- Start an interest group or a writing group.

Resources

- The Career Center supports students in exploring a variety of career options and employment services. | 206.543.0535 | http://careers.washington.edu/
- Center for Workforce Development provides graduate student mentoring programs geared towards women pursuing careers in science and engineering. | 206.543.4810 | http://www.engr.washington.edu/cwd/
- Women's Center, Re-entry Program, offers free referrals, assistance and financial information to women and men returning to university education. | 206.685.1090 | http://depts.washington.edu/womenctr/
- UW Computer Training offers a variety of free and low-cost computer training opportunities to all students, staff and faculty. | 206.685.2763 | http://www.washington.edu/itconnect/index.html
- The Center for Social Science Computation and Research offers all students computer training for academic and discipline-specific purposes. | 206.543.8110 | http://julius.csscr.washington.edu/

Strategies: Balancing work and lifestyle

Family responsibilities

As the graduate student population increases in age, so do family responsibilities, such as raising children and being a caregiver for elderly relatives. If you have children or parents who depend on you for support, you may find that the structure of graduate education in a large research university still presumes that you can be on campus at any time, which can conflict with your other responsibilities.

Cultural beliefs influence the ways students deal with family responsibilities while in graduate school. For example, when mourning a family member, some students may be expected to spend considerable time consoling relatives at home.

Dual commitments

Students with family responsibilities are often highly organized and intensely focused during the time they carve out for their graduate work. Unfortunately, students may fear that their professors might misconstrue their attention to other responsibilities as a lack of commitment to scholarship. Emergencies occasionally prevent them from attending a class, which can exacerbate that misperception. Childcare demands do not lessen after a child enters school. Other demands arise, such as illness or taking children to school or sports.

Isolation

Students with family responsibilities might find it difficult to attend some social, academic and professional functions. As a result, they may feel isolated from their cohorts and departments, missing out on the "academic business."

Time constraints

Students with family responsibilities often need to be home in the evenings. After-hours study group assignments or research projects can present difficulties, as can having to return campus for evening lectures or departmental meetings.

Recommendations

- Help your mentors and others understand that you might need to be away from class sometimes or are able to work in the department during certain hours.
- Ask professors to distribute assignment schedules in advance so students with family responsibilities can integrate them into their schedules.
- Alert your professors and peers if you use a cell phone to stay connected in case of a family emergency.
- Seek out graduate students and faculty who can share strategies and resources for balancing family and academic life.
- Ask your peers to be flexible with study group times, or invite them to meet at your home.
- Use e-mail, listservs, live chats or discussion boards to facilitate group discussions.
- Be open with others about your family responsibilities.
- Demonstrate your professional commitment and productivity by being highly focused and productive when you are in the classroom, office or lab.

Resources

- Center for Workforce Development provides graduate student mentorship and resources geared towards women pursuing careers in the sciences and engineering. | 206.543.4810 | http://www.engr.washington.edu/cwd/
- Center for Curriculum Transformation assists individual faculty and academic departments with curriculum change related to gender and cultural pluralism. | 206.685.8276 | http://depts.washington.edu/ctcenter/

- Childcare Assistance Program for Students offers a childcare subsidy program. To be eligible for funding, students need to demonstrate financial need and must use licensed childcare. Contact Childcare Assistance Program for Students, | 206.543.1041 | http://www.washington.edu/students/osfa/currentug/child.care.html , or the Office of Student Financial Aid | 206.543.6101 | http://www.washington.edu/students/osfa/
- Work/Life Office can help UW students find child care or elder care. | 206.543.6963 | http://www.washington.edu/admin/hr/benefits/worklife/index.html
- Housing and Food Services http://www.hfs.washington.edu/ or the Family Housing | http://www.hfs.washington.edu/student_housing/family_housing.aspx pages can be of assistance. | 206.543.4059

Strategies: Disadvantaged socioeconomic background

Students come to graduate school from a variety of socioeconomic trajectories, determined by their parents' educational and occupational circumstances or their own occupational histories. Many students delay higher education to save money, gain professional experience or support their families. Socioeconomic background is a largely "invisible" but important factor that influences students' mentoring needs.

Economic concerns

Some students do not have family members they can turn to for monetary support throughout graduate school. What's more, some students support their parents, siblings or other relatives while obtaining their degrees. These students often have jobs outside of their departments, even if they have graduate appointments or fellowships.

Access to professional networks

Graduate students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds can experience greater difficulties accessing or creating professional networks in academe. They might not have had as many opportunities to develop these relationships as their peers from more advantaged backgrounds, especially those peers who grew up in academic families. This disparity surfaces most pointedly when students struggle with the costs of traveling to research or professional conferences and the need to secure summer employment.

Summer professional opportunities

Students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds often must disrupt their academic training during the summer in order to work. Because of financial constraints, many need to seek better-paying jobs off-campus instead of taking no- or low-pay (but academically relevant) internships. Outside employment temporarily distances students from their studies, and fears of falling behind can set in. Professors who are unaware of their students' financial situations can inadvertently misconstrue interest in outside employment as a lack of commitment to academic study.

Difference in background experiences

Some students can find it intimidating to hear about the spring break or summer travels of fellow students. Those in the arts, humanities and social sciences can feel especially vulnerable knowing that some of their peers have traveled to or lived in the foreign countries they are studying.

Disconnection from family and friends

Many graduate students probably have had to move away from their families. Once students become socialized into their disciplines, talking with family members or old friends about academic work can sometimes be difficult. This communication gap can cause students to feel isolated or disconnected because they feel less comfortable in their old worlds, but not yet settled into their new worlds.

Recommendations

- Learn from faculty and more experienced students about the ways academic networking works.
- Be alert to and creative about funding opportunities, especially for the summer. Before spring quarter begins, ask your mentors and professors about their resources and how they can help you strategize for continuous support during your degree program.
- Ask your professors to put books or course packets on reserve at the library or in the department to help reduce expenses.
- Encourage and support your peers' aspirations, just as your mentors and peers support yours.

Resources

- Graduate Funding Information Service (GFIS), UW libraries, offers a user-friendly database, workshops, and individual consultations to help current and admitted graduate students, regardless of economic situation, identify external funding. | 206.616.3084 | http://www.lib.washington.edu/gfis/
- Office of Student Financial Aid can help students secure short-term loans for emergency assistance. Applications are available through My UW's Personal Services or in person at the Office of Student Financial Aid, 105 Schmitz Hall | 206.543.6101 | http://www.washington.edu/students/osfa/

Strategies: Finding good mentors

Be proactive

The faculty-student ratio at the UW may be larger that of your undergraduate experience, especially if you studied in a smaller academic setting. At a large research university, you may need to seek out interactions with faculty members. You should approach professors openly and initiate discussions. If you are less comfortable with direct approaches, visit professors during their office hours.

Seek out multiple mentors

Identify and cultivate multiple potential mentors. They can be faculty members within or outside the University, departmental staff, current graduate students, alumni and other professionals in the community.

Develop realistic approaches to mentors

Invest time in assessing what you need from your mentors and request that assistance clearly and professionally. Requesting specific guidance is more effective than general requests for mentorship.

Be visible

Being visible in your department is important. Office and hallway conversations help you build relationships and glean vital information. If you have an office in the department, use it as much as possible. If you have other responsibilities such as a family or work, talk to your mentors about how you can remain engaged in regular happenings.

Be responsible

Recognize the value of taking responsibility for your education, which includes developing a vision for your future and taking care of everyday details. Be prompt for meetings with your mentors, and prepare agendas. Update your mentors once a quarter about your progress, and articulate how they can help you.

Show commitment to your professional development

Professors commonly point out the importance of students embracing their own work—an important aspect of professional leadership. Initiate or lead study, writing, discussion or interest groups among your peers. Asking a peer or a faculty member to co-author a paper, seeking a grant and applying your scholarship to civic concerns demonstrate your professional commitment.

Receive criticism in a professional manner

A core part of intellectual work is exchanging ideas and debating their merits. Accept criticism of your work in a professional manner. Accepting criticism does not mean agreeing with everything that someone says about your work, but rather reflects your willingness to consider and evaluate the merits of other views.

Let mentors know you appreciate their advice

Tell your mentors that you value their time and that you use their input productively. After reading books or making contacts your mentor suggests, talk about the results of what you learned. Don't feel compelled to follow every bit of advice, but inform your mentors when their advice is helpful, even when it leads you in an unexpected direction.

Strategies: Getting started

Self-appraisal

The person who best knows your goals, needs and passions is you. Reflect on the following questions to help assess what you have to offer and what you need from your mentoring relationships.

Goals for graduate school and beyond

- What are the connections between my experiences and my decision to go to graduate school? What do I hope an advanced degree will help me do?
- What type of training do I want?
- What skills do I need to develop?
- What kinds of research or creative projects do I want to work on?
- What career do I want to pursue?
- What networks might I need to develop?
- What work or training experiences might I need?
- How do I want my learning to impact communities beyond the University?

Strengths and weaknesses

- What skills do I bring to graduate study (e.g., creative, analytical, statistical and organizational)?
- What skills do I need to develop further?
- What experiences might help me strengthen my skills?

Work style

- Do I like to work independently or collaboratively, or a combination of both?
- Do I like to manage meetings with an agenda, or do I prefer to let priorities emerge during meetings?
- How does my work style help or prevent me from learning?
- How does my work style compare to that of others who have served as mentors in my life?

Explore your prospects for forming a mentoring team

Take the initiative

At a large research university, approaching a potential mentor can be daunting at first. However, taking the initiative to talk with faculty is more helpful than waiting for them to approach you. Prospective mentors will appreciate your interest in their work and will be eager to talk to you.

Strive for diversity

Consider the composition of your informal mentoring team. You can benefit from individuals whose background, characteristics and perspectives are different from your own. Some of the most meaningful mentoring occurs when mentor and student explore different takes on problems and yet focus successfully on what matters most: mutual interests and learning from each other. Beyond assessing rapport, inviting individuals of a different ethnicity or gender to serve as your mentors will help you develop a more reflective understanding of your own work and possibilities.

Balance between senior and junior faculty

Look for a balance of senior and junior faculty members. Each can be of assistance, although possibly in different ways. Senior faculty may help you better with networking. Junior faculty may help you cope better with the stresses associated with being a graduate student.

Individuals outside the discipline/university

Seek potential mentors outside your department or the University whose intellectual or professional interests relate to yours. These individuals will provide you with a fresh perspective on your work and help you understand how it relates to questions or problems in other fields.

Initiate contact with potential mentors

You are now ready to discuss your aspirations with prospective mentors and familiarize yourself with their professional accomplishments. Make a positive impression, establish a good rapport and assess whether the person is a good fit for you.

Your first meetings should be exploratory. A mentoring relationship evolves and often arises out of a particular need. You can extend more explicit mentoring invitations down the road after some planning (see Worksheet 3, Planning for first meetings).

Mutual interests

Potential mentors want to know if you have intellectual interests similar to theirs. Share how your prior academic, professional or personal experiences relate to theirs. Ask about their recent work, and explore ways in which their work intersects with what you envision doing.

Motivation and direction

Mentors enjoy mentees who are motivated to grow professionally. State your goals, and ask how you can explore these goals together and about courses or key projects you should consider.

Ask potential mentors to suggest other people and experiences that will help you develop your skills and knowledge. Make those connections, and let your mentor know you have taken action.

Skills and strengths

Highlight the qualities you bring to the relationship, such as research or language skills, creativity, analytical techniques, computer skills, willingness to learn, persistence, passion, enthusiasm and commitment.

Strategies: Learn about what mentors can offer

Availability

- Assess how much time a prospective mentor can provide you by asking about his or her other commitments. Find out from other students how much time this person normally spends with graduate students. Will that amount of time be sufficient for you?
- Ask prospective mentors about their plans. Do they anticipate being in the graduate program for the duration of your degree? Will they take sabbaticals or otherwise work away from the department during this time? If so, how would you maintain sufficient contact?

Communication

- Are you comfortable interacting with this person?
- Are you able to communicate your thoughts and ideas effectively?
- Does this person listen attentively to your ideas and concerns, and ask good follow up questions?
- Does this person like to meet one-on-one?
- Will you be able to work closely with this person?
- Do you enjoy this person's professional and personal style?

Workload and financial support

- What does the potential mentor consider a normal workload for graduate scholarship outside of your work as a teaching or research assistant? How many hours per week does he or she believe you should be spending on your research or creative projects?
- Does the potential mentor have or know of funds to support you? Will that financial support remain available until you complete your program?
- Do you see potential for developing a thesis or dissertation topic from the mentor's research?
- Does the mentor have appropriate space and laboratory equipment for your needs? What is the size of the mentor's research group, and is this size optimal for you? Will this person support your search for teaching assistantships?
- Will this mentor be able to help you obtain graduate assistantships or fellowships? Will he or she be able to help you achieve the professional development balance you want between teaching and research assistantships?

Publishing

- Does the potential mentor co-author articles with graduate students? If so, ask about his or her approach to determining first authorship.
- Is the prospective mentor willing to help you prepare your work for publication?
- What publishing contacts does he or she have?

Reputation with graduate students and staff

- Ask your peers whether the potential mentor has a history of giving proper attention to his or her mentees.
- Can this person provide you with teaching and research opportunities, access to financial resources and guidance for completing a thesis or dissertation?
- Does this person provide students access to professional networks, and assistance in exploring academic and non-academic career development?
- Have former students completed their programs in a timely fashion with this mentor's guidance? If not, why?

- What is the prospective mentor's approach to training graduate students for breadth, as well as depth, in anticipation of careers outside of academia?

Reputation within the field

- What opinions do others in your field have about the prospective mentor's work?
- What kind of professional positions did others mentored by this person obtain? Do you see yourself pursuing those kinds of career paths?
- Read reviews of the potential mentor's work in scholarly journals or convention proceedings, or in award nomination letters.
- Follow up with your prospective mentors via e-mail or phone to thank them for their time and let them know that what you learned was fruitful.
- If you agreed to pursue an idea or topic, let them know your plans and when you will get back in touch.

Take some time to reflect. If you later decide to ask this person to be a mentor, you both will have a better understanding of what each will gain from the relationship. If a mentoring relationship begins to take shape, this understanding will help you and your mentor create a professional development plan that is tailored to your needs (see Worksheet 4, Professional development plan).

Clarify expectations

When students and mentors have clear expectations of one another, relationships are more likely to be productive, enjoyable and mutually beneficial. To prevent misunderstandings, discuss the expectations you and your mentor have of each other, including how they may change over time. Not all mentors and mentees establish formal contracts. Some find formal agreements useful, while others prefer to work under informal agreements (see Worksheet 5, Sample mentor and mentee agreement).

Be realistic about what any one mentor can do for you, and avoid requesting too much assistance or assistance that is too broad. That is why having multiple mentors is helpful. Remember that mentors can respond better to requests for specific types of assistance than to requests for general mentoring. Analyze what you need from a given mentor and explicitly ask for those things. Part of your task is to develop and demonstrate your abilities as a colleague and a professional. Discuss with your mentor ways that you can take on more responsibility.

Strategies: The mentoring experience

Goals and work plans

Develop a work plan that includes short- and long-term goals within reasonable timelines. Talk with your mentor and with your graduate program coordinator to make sure these plans meet departmental requirements. At least once a quarter, update your mentor on your progress and obstacles you have encountered. Explore additional training and experience you need in order to achieve your goals. If you need to modify your timeline, work with your mentor to agree on a new work plan.

Meetings

Discuss how often you and your mentor will meet and what other modes of communication can keep your conversations going (e.g., occasional e-mails). Request the amount of meeting time you need to make progress. If this person will have a heavy travel schedule while you are pursuing your degree, ask the mentor to suggest others you can consult during that time. Find out if the mentor is comfortable being contacted at home, and let him or her know if you can be called at home.

Feedback

Clarify how often the mentor will give you feedback, including how long he or she typically needs to return papers or drafts of articles. Inquire about his or her current workload so you can plan your deadlines appropriately, and offer sufficient lead time when handing in your work. Ask the mentor if he or she tends to provide lots of feedback or sparse feedback.

Drafts

Discuss your mentor's expectations for drafts of your work before you submit them. Some professors do not want to review rough drafts. In that case, share drafts with a peer or writing group, and revise them before submitting them.

Publishing and presenting

Find prospective mentor's philosophy on presenting or co-authoring papers. Be explicit about the kinds of publishing or presentation opportunities you seek.

Intellectual property

If you are working closely with a mentor on a research project, clarify who owns the data that is being collected and whether others will be able to have access to it. Consideration for the ownership and sharing of research is important in all disciplines. Discuss the ownership of any copyright and patent agreements that might occur as a result of a project. For further information, contact the UW Office of Research, www.washington.edu/research, or the UW Center for Commercialization, http://depts.washington.edu/uwc4c/

Research and human subjects

The UW Human Subjects Division must review all research involving human subjects that is performed or supervised by UW faculty, staff or students. Students must seek Human Subjects review and approval before starting research activities. Research with human subjects cannot be retroactively reviewed and approved. Performing a human subjects study without prior review and approval is considered "serious" non-compliance according to federal regulations and must be brought to a full Human Subjects Committee for inquiry and action. More information: www.washington.edu/research/hsd/index.php.

Confidentiality

Be explicit about the confidentiality you want from your mentors, and offer strict confidentiality to your mentors. An exception to confidentiality is the obligation of all UW employees, including graduate assistants, to report instances of sexual harassment to organizational superiors.

Recommendation letters

Before you approach the job search phase of your graduate experience, identify people who could write letters of recommendation on your behalf. Ask how much advance notice your mentors like for a recommendation letter. Be sure to provide key details about the fellowship, grant, program or job that the letter of recommendation supports. Attach an updated copy of your curriculum vitae. Ask one or more mentors to visit the classes you teach or labs you run so that they can reflect on your professional abilities.

What to do if problems arise

Situations may arise that impact the timely completion of your work, such as the birth of a child or an illness. If this happens, discuss the issue with your mentors. As soon as possible, give them a new timeline for completing your degree.

Occasionally mentors face situations that can affect progress on your work. If significant delays happen often, talk with one or more of the following individuals.

The mentor or adviser

Remind the person of your needs. If you are not getting satisfactory results, schedule a face-to-face meeting with the person as soon as possible to review what is happening and your goals.

Other mentors or supervisory committee members

If other mentors on your team do not know the individual with whom you are experiencing difficulties, they will offer a fresh perspective and suggest solutions.

Peers

Other students who have frequent contact with the individual in question can tell you if the issue is typical and may suggest solutions. Your peers can explain the norms in your department regarding frequency of meetings, turn-around time for feedback and availability of faculty.

Other faculty

Other faculty can advise you on dealing with challenges. If you want someone to intercede on your behalf, senior faculty may be in a better position to do so than junior faculty. You may feel more comfortable asking general questions about a situation, rather than being explicit about those involved.

Department staff

Graduate program coordinators and graduate program assistants can clarify departmental expectations and policies. They also can offer suggestions on how to resolve difficulties, and are familiar with the people and the offices on campus that can assist you.

Department chair

If you have tried to resolve issues with the faculty member directly, and other peers, faculty and staff have been unable to assist you, you might find it helpful to talk to your department chair. Focus the discussion diplomatically and objectively on the assistance you need to meet your goals. Avoid making the discussion about personality or interpersonal style difficulties.

The Graduate School

At any point, you may talk with staff at the Graduate School.

Strategies: Changing mentors or advisers

At some point in your graduate career, you might want a new mentor or adviser. The issues can be more complex if the same person fulfills both of these roles for you. Because of the relatively informal nature of mentoring, there is no formal policy for acquiring mentors as there is, in most departments, for acquiring or changing a research or dissertation adviser. Know the differences between the two processes, and the basic guidelines applicable to each. Changing mentors is not an issue if the relationship is an informal one, i.e., the person is not your thesis/dissertation adviser.

Also, changing mentors does not necessarily imply difficulties in your relationship. Your priorities for mentoring may change based on your personal and professional growth, rather than by misunderstandings. A good mentor will support you in your search for others who can assist you.

Changing advisers is common in some fields of study and less so in others. It usually requires that you follow departmental procedures. Changing advisers is easier if your department encourages students to work with multiple faculty members and you make changes early in your career.

- Try to work through differences with your adviser before you make a final decision.
- Seek advice from a faculty member or peer to assess your needs and determine whether a different adviser would be good for you, particularly if you are attempting to change advisers towards the final phase of your graduate program.
- Approach another faculty member about being an adviser for you.
- Be professional at all times. Focus discussions on your interests and goals and not on negative incidents or difficulties. Avoid doing or saying anything that could have negative ramifications for your future.
- Practice diplomatic ways to express to your adviser or mentor why you are considering a change.
- Discuss and arrange a timeframe for completing any remaining work with your current adviser before the change takes place.

- Complete or update any paperwork that contains information about your adviser, e.g., internship paperwork, thesis, general exam or dissertation committee forms.