

## Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies

### Mentoring Program Guide for Mentees

#### ***What can I do to be a successful mentee?***

Success involves actively managing relationships with peers, colleagues, and mentors and being proactive about both these relationships and one's career. In other words, it is up to you to make the right decisions about your career, and thus up to you to find the information needed to make those decisions. *No single mentor can fulfill every mentoring function or have an answer to every question.*

***Successful mentees evaluate what they are hearing:*** It is important to listen carefully to the information that your mentor shares with you, but you must sift through it and critically evaluate it: Does what the mentor says mesh with what others have told you? If not, why not—is it just a different perspective on the same thing or is there something else going on that makes the two opinions different? As the mentee, are you challenged by what is being said because you had different expectations?

***Choose to do that which fits your values and strategic goals:*** Take the time to think through your professional goals—why you have chosen the direction you have chosen, what makes you passionate about it. Only when you begin to know what your goals are can you listen effectively to the many different kinds of advice.

***Getting started:*** Before speaking with your mentor, you should clarify for yourself what your expectations are in your mentoring relationship. Expectations and goals are topics for an early discussion with the mentor, and should be open for negotiation or change as you develop your relationship.

Be proactive. Contact your mentor first; send him or her your CV/résumé along with your research interests and/or career goals. It is important to talk early and regularly to establish a level of comfort in the relationship around the easy topics—then when a challenge arises, it is much easier for both of you to have a useful discussion.

Agree on the parameters and responsibilities of the relationship: what kinds of topics do you want to talk about? How will you communicate – via e-mail, phone, skype and/or in person at the ASEES Convention; and how often – once a month or 3-4 times during the academic year? What would you like the mentor to do? What does your mentor expect you to do? Again, these expectations can be renegotiated but must be established early to avoid misunderstandings in the future.

Build a relationship based on trust and respect so that you can speak frankly, candidly and comfortably with your mentor. Maintain confidentiality.

Be receptive to constructive feedback. As much as possible, listen and take what is positive from your mentor's comments to you.

Appreciate the work your mentor is doing. Be generous toward the comments or advice you are receiving from your mentor—he or she may have perspectives and motivations the value of which you do not yet see.

#### ***What are possible mentoring activities?***

- As the first activity, exchange CV's with your mentor to stimulate discussion about career paths and possibilities

- Discuss teaching strategies, research and publication opportunities, potential funding sources
- Discuss career goals and needs, reflect with your mentor on the achievement of your goals and adjustments to your career plan
- Discuss processes for promotion and career advancement
- Discuss setting priorities, managing time, handling stress, and balancing workload effectively
- Discuss ways to network with other scholars and specialists with similar interests
- Ask for help in setting up a plan of short- and long-term goals

Consider using the following tools from the U of Albany Mentoring Program to help you prepare for a more effective mentoring relationship:

- Planning for and Defining a Mentoring Relationship ([Word](#) / [PDF](#))
- Mentoring Activities and Topics ([Word](#) / [PDF](#))
- Goals Reflection for Mentees ([Word](#) / [PDF](#))
- Short and Long-term Goals Planning ([Word](#) / [PDF](#))

### ***Benefits and Challenges: What can I expect from my mentoring relationship?***

The benefits of having a mentor are many: you will learn the ropes, gain information on how a career path works, enlarge your career network, learn of opportunities in the field, and develop new and different perspectives.

No mentoring relationship is automatically a success. It takes intentional effort on both sides to ensure an effective mentoring relationship over time. Mentoring relationships are dynamic, and each one is unique. So while there is never one single best way to overcome challenges or avoid pitfalls, some general statements about problems that can arise and how you might avoid them are in order.

#### **Too much respect for your mentoring partner's time:**

A primary reason that mentoring relationships do not “take” from the very start is an ***overly pronounced concern for the mentoring partner's time***: You may be hesitant to “bother” your mentors with “silly questions” when they are obviously such important and busy people. You need to remember that asking your mentor for help, advice, or a small favor is a way of showing respect and building your relationship. Conversely, mentors who are not regularly asked for help often do not wish to seem “pushy” and thus do not contact their mentees without express invitation.

While well-intentioned, such concern for the mentoring partner's time often has a negative impact on the usefulness of the mentoring relationship and on the mentoring partner's attitudes toward mentoring in general. A large part of the success of a mentoring relationship lies in the trust that builds up over time when mentors and mentees get to know one another. This trust builds through informal and regular contact, and is what will allow you to share any difficulties you may be facing. ***It is important for you to be proactive in the relationship*** so that you get the support you need for professional success. Your mentor cannot begin to help if she has not spoken often enough with you and does not know what your primary questions and concerns are.

#### **Unrealistic expectations:**

Mentees' expectations for their mentors can be unrealistic: one mentor cannot be the only resource on every topic. Out of respect for the experience of their mentor, mentees can overestimate the information and guidance a single person can provide. As mentioned elsewhere, you should always be looking for additional mentors and sources of information to help you get your questions answered. You can also ask your mentor to suggest other people who might have expertise in a particular area.

Mentors can also readily overestimate their mentees. This usually takes one of two forms. First, having the

benefit of great experience in a profession, mentors may not remember how hard it is to be a graduate student or to learn a new work culture as a young professional, to figure out the best ways to communicate one's achievement or to learn the unwritten rules of success. Over time, all of these have become second nature to the mentor, and thus not necessarily visible as useful foci of discussion with you. Additionally, your mentor is presented with a mentee who already seems very accomplished, and he may underestimate your need for guidance. Out of a concern of "getting in the way," your mentor may hesitate to ask questions, and thus miss the early signs that you need more information to succeed.

**Relationships that don't work:**

It is important to remember that, through no fault of the mentee or the mentor, some relationships may never "gel". This possibility is much less likely if you begin your mentoring relationship with a frank and honest discussion about what you want and need, and how you see the role of mentor and mentee. As part of its foundation, any mentoring relationship should have a no-fault termination possibility so that mismatched mentoring partners are not trapped in a negative relationship.

The best way to counter these pitfalls is to meet regularly, ***even if there is no particular problem to discuss***. As we have stressed elsewhere, it is in the more informal contact leads to good communication, which allows the more difficult conversations, if there is a problem, to take place more readily.

*[Some parts of this guide are excerpted from U of Albany Mentoring Best Practices:  
<http://www.albany.edu/academics/mentoring.best.practices.toc.shtml> ]*