

UConn | THE GRADUATE SCHOOL



**Graduate Student Mentoring
A Mentee's Guide**

Preface

Graduate students serve in various roles throughout their time in graduate school. One of these important roles is that of a mentee. As a mentee you can learn from and connect with various faculty during your degree program. This document briefly outlines best practices for graduate students in their role as mentees at UConn. These best practices were developed by the faculty affiliates working with The Graduate School, graduate students, faculty and professional staff from across the university. This was supported through The Graduate School Faculty Affiliate for Inclusive Excellence Fellowship Program 2022 -2024.

Who is an academic advisor?

Your program usually assigns you an academic advisor but how this assignment happens differs from program to program. The primary role of an academic advisor is to assist you with navigating the degree program including understanding the degree requirements, department policies, required milestones, policies of The Graduate School, and UConn policies and requirements. If you pursue a thesis or dissertation as part of your degree program, your academic advisor will typically serve as your major advisor. While your academic advisor can also serve as a mentor, they may not be able to fully support the scholarly and personal development needed to succeed in graduate school and beyond, and you are likely to benefit from having several different mentors.

Who is a mentor?

Mentors can play many roles in your life — guide, advisor, 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. Your mentors are there to support you through challenges and celebrate your successes; to assist as you navigate the unfamiliar waters of a graduate degree program; and to provide a model of commitment, productivity, and professional responsibility. During the graduate experience, your mentors will guide you toward becoming independent creators of knowledge. They will prepare you to become a colleague as you complete the degree program and move on to the next phase of your professional life. Regardless of what challenges you face, mentors can provide psychosocial support and may serve as role models.

Finding a mentor

To find a mentor, first think carefully about the kind of guidance you need. Then talk with your fellow students and with faculty members whom you trust to get advice on who may be able to offer that guidance. It might be another member of your department. It might be someone who shares an important part of your identity. It might be someone who has special insight into the kind of career opportunities that interest you. Whatever it is, once you have identified someone, stop by their office and ask to chat if you know them already. If you do not know them, write them a short email introducing yourself, asking if they are willing to talk, and explaining why you would like to talk with them. Whether you already know them or not, keep your first conversation brief and informal, but ask them before you leave if they would be willing to talk with you more. A good

place to start would be The Graduate School's Network Enriched Mentorship program (see link under resources).

Seeking out multiple mentors

A mentor is anyone who helps you move towards your full potential. They are advocates, sponsors, role models, advisors, supporters, tutors, experts, coach and friend. Given the different roles they play, including being your cheer leader, one faculty mentor cannot meet all your professional needs. For instance, it is common for a graduate student to have mentors who provide guidance in career development, while other mentors supply support on navigating challenges of living in a new country. The longer you know your mentor(s), the nature of the mentor-mentee relationship can change. Like non-academic relationships, mentoring relationships will change as the mentor and mentee grow, learn and gain experience in the relationship. For these reasons, we recommend that you identify faculty who can provide you with the full range of mentoring support you may need. While some programs/departments have formal mentoring programs, you can build the mentor team you need. This team can include faculty from your department, within UConn and professionals at other institutions/industry working in your field of interest. UConn also has professional staff who could be a great addition to your mentor team to obtain holistic mentoring as you navigate graduate school.

How to assemble your mentoring team?

A mentor may be a friend and a colleague, but neither is a prerequisite to a successful relationship. It is important to be proactive in assembling your team. A good starting place would be to reflect on your goals or motivation for seeking a mentor. To do this, you must understand what your unique needs are as a graduate student before identifying who might meet these needs.

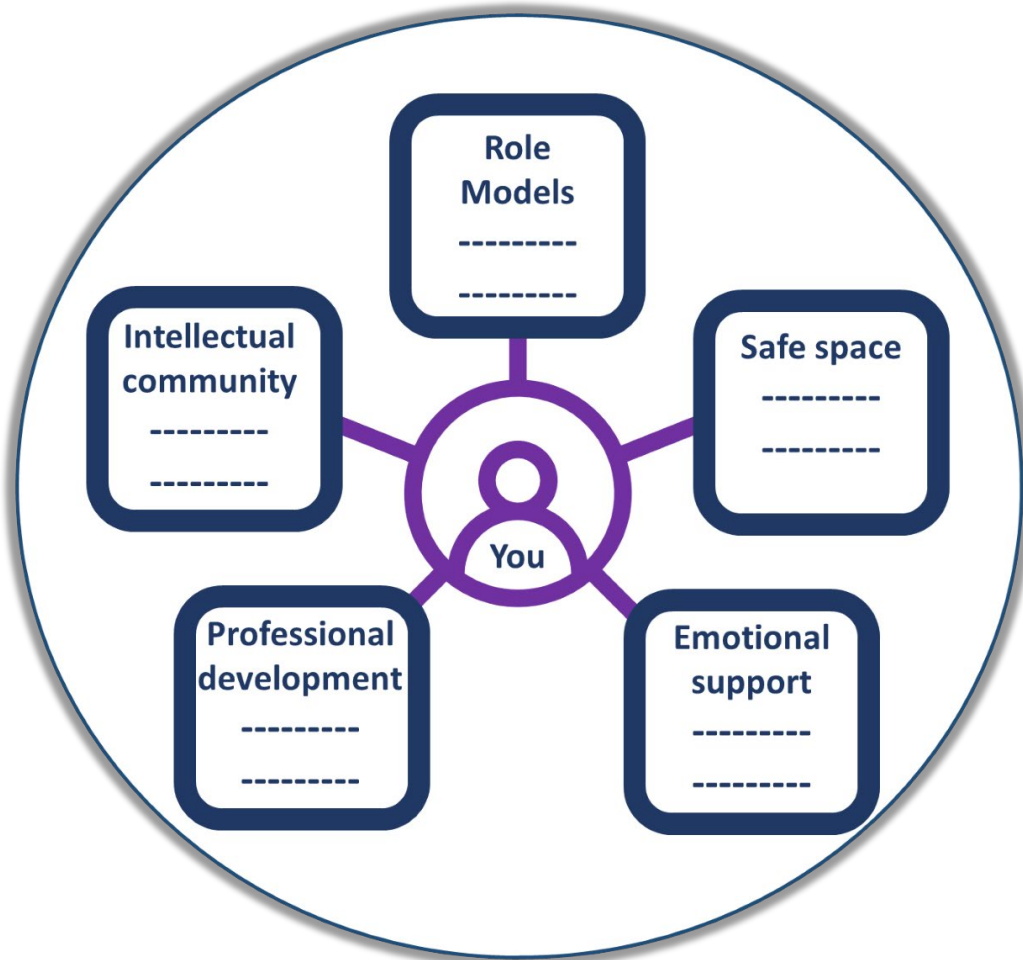
Here are some sample questions to reflect on:

- What is your reason/objective for pursuing graduate education?
- What career do you want to pursue?
- What strengths do you have?
- What skills/training do you need to develop?
- Do you need a role model?
- Are you seeking a safe space?
- Do you need a sponsor/networking support?
- Are you looking for psychosocial support?
- Do you need an accountability coach to ensure timely progress?
- Are you looking for an expert in your field to provide technical expertise/assistance?

The importance of these various competencies will differ depending on your needs and will be reflected in your mentoring team. Also, the mentors you need during your first year of graduate school may be different from those you need later. Once you have identified your unique needs, it is important to prioritize what you need from your mentors. You can then begin to narrow down who might be best able to support you. Before you reach out to the faculty mentor, familiarize yourself with their work to get a sense of their past and current interests. Further, you can see how

they interact with colleagues and other graduate students in and out of the classroom. You can also ask your peers about their advisors and mentors and for suggestions on whom you might reach out to. In selecting your mentor, you can take your social identities into consideration. At the same time, shared identity does not guarantee good mentorship, nor does a shared identity automatically ensure a mentor can mentor you well. Successful mentoring relationships can be formed regardless of the gender, age, ethnicity, race, educational level, field disciplines, marital and parental status of the mentee or mentor. Carefully selecting a team of mentors fitting your personal and professional needs increases the likelihood you will have professional experiences and support you desire.

Mentoring circle/network



Navigating the mentor-mentee relationship

The mentor-mentee relationship is a sustained, multifaceted partnership enhanced by mutual respect and concern. It is a two-way relationship. Hence, it is important for graduate students to actively contribute to the relationship as they navigate and take responsibility for their time in their graduate program.

Responsibilities of mentees

In addition to clarifying your reasons/objectives for the mentoring relationship, it is critical to understand your responsibilities in the relationship. Being responsible in your mentoring relationship builds respect and trust. This requires paying attention to professional courtesies such as: Returning emails/phone calls in a timely manner, scheduling the next contact time, participating in scheduled meetings, notification of any changes, following through on agreed upon responsibilities, establishing regular check-ins between meetings, and ending the relationship if it does not work or if you are no longer able to participate. See sample mentor-mentee agreements below.

1. Research/fieldwork/clinical practice/coursework

- Work responsibly toward completion of the degree in a timely fashion
- Learn the research methods and historical knowledge bases of the discipline
- Communicate regularly with faculty mentors and the master's/doctoral committees especially in matters relating to research and progress within the degree program
- Exercise the highest integrity in all aspects of their work, especially in the tasks of collecting, analyzing, and presenting research data.
- Identify any challenges to progress towards your degree and ask for help in overcoming them

2. Teaching/Training

- Pursue appropriate training and evaluation for all instructional roles students are asked to assume
- Receive an appropriately sequenced variety of teaching opportunities relevant to your career goals
- Devote the same seriousness to undergraduate or graduate instructional duties that you would expect from your own instructors.
- Build on pedagogical skills by participating in trainings offered through CETL and other resources (see resources below).

3. Professional Development/Program Progress

- Work with your advisor/mentors to develop your individualized development plan (see below)
- Develop, to the extent possible, a broad network of professional relations
- Contribute, wherever possible, to the discourse of the scholarly discipline through conference presentations, publications, collaborative projects, and other means
- Seek out a range of faculty and peer mentors that can help them prepare for a variety of professional and career roles and responsibilities
- Take responsibility for keeping informed of regulations and policies governing their graduate studies and to complete all required paperwork and other degree obligations in a timely fashion.

4. Community

- Create, in your own classrooms and laboratories, an ethos of collegiality and collaboration.
- Realize your responsibilities as individual and professional representatives of both the University as a whole and the department or program in which you are studying.
- Assist graduate student peers in their own professional and scholarly development.

5. Integrating work and life

It is important as a graduate student to integrate the different aspects of work and life in ways that promote healthy living as you navigate the challenges of graduate school. This can be challenging, but it can help make the pressures of graduate school more manageable. To keep the pressures of graduate school in check:

- Communicate clearly with fellow students, advisors, and instructors regarding your availability. If you need to be away from class or are unable to complete an assignment, let the students/faculty know in advance.
- Seek out faculty who can share strategies and resources for balancing family and academic life. Ask for suggestions/options on how you can integrate obligations.
- Ask your peers how they balance family or personal problems and what they do when they encounter difficulties.
- Attend workshops and panels on work/life balance.
- Disclose to others your family responsibilities/other demands on your time.
- Reflect on where you need to create healthy boundaries and discuss with your mentor how you can implement them.
- If you need help or are feeling overwhelmed, take advantage of available resources for support (see resources below). Clear communication can avert challenges down the road.

Some things to keep in mind while navigating your mentor-mentee relationship:

- Think of your mentor as a “learning facilitator” rather than the person with all the answers. Be open to using a variety of resources and discussing your findings with your mentor.
- Work with your mentor(s) to align expectations regarding how to communicate and how often. Be aware of what works best for you and try to communicate that.
- Seek discussion and input rather than advice. Look to your mentor to help you think more broadly and deeply.
- Apply the knowledge shared with you and discuss its application.
- Be open to your mentor’s efforts to help you see alternative interpretations as well as approaches to decisions and actions.
- Remember that you are responsible for your own growth. If your mentor’s style leans toward managing the relationship and directing your development, speak up diplomatically and do not hesitate to voice your concerns.
- Be receptive to receiving constructive feedback.

- Work with your advisor to develop clear expectations in terms of what is considered an appropriate workload, what is expected to successfully complete your program, what is the expectation to be successful in your discipline.
- Ask your mentor to share with you successful strategies and resources they have used in the past that could apply to the challenges you face.
- Enjoy the mentoring experience. Know that the energy you invest will have a significant impact on your development. Your mentor will also grow from the experience.

Resources available at UConn and through UConn partners

Network building resources:

- Graduate school NEM program: <https://grad.uconn.edu/faculty-staff-resources/network-for-enriched-mentorship/>
- CIMER: <https://cimerproject.org/mentoring-up/>
- NCFDD: <https://www.ncfdd.org/ncfddmentormap>

Teaching resources:

- CETL: <https://cetl.uconn.edu/resources/>
- NCFDD: <https://www.ncfdd.org/teachingtoolkit>

Support services:

- Grad school: <https://grad.uconn.edu/graduate-students/student-resources/guidance-support/>
- SHAW (Student Health and Wellness): <https://studenthealth.uconn.edu/mental-health/>
- Together All (UConn app): <https://account.v2.togetherall.com/register/student>

Sample advisor/advisee agreements:

- mentorcliQ: <https://www.mentorcliq.com/blog/mentoring-agreements>
- Mentoring@Iowa: <https://mentor.uiowa.edu/sites/mentor.uiowa.edu/files/2021-12/Sample%20Mentoring%20Agreement.pdf>
- Academic Affairs, Iowa State University: <https://academicaffairs.oregonstate.edu/research/creating-mentoring-agreement>
- UW Institute for Clinical and Translational Research: https://grad.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/329/2023/03/Mentorship-Agreement-Template_Institute-for-Clinical-and-Translational-Research.pdf

Developing your individualized development plan:

- Science Careers: <https://myidp.sciencecareers.org/?AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1>
- Yale University: <https://your.yale.edu/work-yale/learn-and-grow/career-development/individual-development-planning>
- UCLA: <https://www.postdoc.ucla.edu/professional-development/individual-development-plan-idp-best-practices-tools-for-postdocs-faculty/>

- NIH: <https://hr.nih.gov/training-center/services/individual-development-plan-idp-consulting-and-workshops>

Other mentee guides:

- UC Davis: <https://alumni.ucdavis.edu/sites/g/files/dgvnsk451/files/inline-files/Mentor%20Mentee%20Guide%20CAAA.pdf>
- Stanford Medicine: <https://med.stanford.edu/oa-mentoring/new-program-toolkit/preparing-the-mentees/quick-guides-for-mentees.html>
- McGill University: <https://www.mcgill.ca/caps/students/services/mentor/mentee>
- Carnegie Mellon University: <https://www.cmu.edu/faculty-office/faculty-development/Mentoring/guide-mentee.html>
- Yale University: [https://fly.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/MenteeGuide\(1\).pdf](https://fly.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/MenteeGuide(1).pdf)
- University of Michigan: <https://rackham.umich.edu/downloads/student-mentoring-handbook.pdf>

