



# UNC CHARLOTTE

The Graduate School

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## Best Practices in Mentoring

*Mentoring is a two-way relationship that should be beneficial to both parties. However, in an academic setting, mentoring success is based on the willingness of the mentor (expert) to provide guidance, time and feedback to the mentee. The importance of good mentoring is well documented. Successful graduate students consistently point to the guidance they received from their mentors. While there are many styles of mentoring, we hope this brief guide will provide some resources to faculty interested in offering effective mentoring to their students.*

### A Proposed Definition: Mentors...

- take a genuine interest in another person's well-being, including their career progression
- have both a professional relationship as well as an interpersonal relationship with their mentees
- help to advance the person's academic and professional goals based on the interests and priorities set by the individual
- adjust their advice and approach to meet the style and content most needed by the individual, including adjustments for gender, culture and other differences.

## Best Practices in Mentoring: Examples

### Sciences

A structured approach to matching students with faculty members based on their interests and needs can yield great dividends to both. One way to evaluate the match is through directed study or lab assignments during a student's first term. In some cases, these assignments can stretch into the second semester, as well as into the summer. These assignments give students exposure to working with faculty in different areas of research. The program director can then meet with each student to discuss which faculty member might be the best match for his or her interests.

### Humanities

Students in this program are reviewed annually by the faculty. In preparation for the meetings, students prepare a progress report that is reviewed by their advisor. The faculty prepares written feedback for each student. The feedback is explicit and is intended to provide students with structured mentoring.

### Social Sciences

Several programs hold regular professional development dinners with their students. The purpose of the dinner is twofold: It builds community with the program and it provides a forum for students and faculty to discuss developments in the field, new research and other interests. These dinners allow students and faculty to get to know one another, making the selection of a mentor more transparent.

### Student Agreements

Early discussion and agreement on responsibilities sets a strong foundation for mentoring. Graduate students need to understand their responsibility for their own success, as well as the role their mentor may play in supporting them. Both students



and mentors can sign an agreement that outlines the responsibilities inherent in their role. This simple task makes implicit assumptions explicit, avoiding future misunderstandings.

### **General Guidelines for Mentors**

1. Setting clear expectations for the mentoring relationship helps both of you from the start.
2. Your time is valuable, so it is a gift you can give your mentee. Be available and approachable.
3. Constructive feedback is an important learning tool. When providing feedback, be specific and timely. It is more likely to help your student if it is coupled with praise for their efforts.
4. Be supportive regardless of the issue. Students face a variety of obstacles, both academic and personal. Having a supportive mentor can provide the encouragement they need to overcome these challenges.
5. Treat students as potential colleagues. Share what you know but also tell them what you have learned from them.
6. Involve them in your professional activities (i.e. journals, conferences, teaching, etc.) Doing so shows your confidence in their abilities.

The Center for Graduate Life provides resources to students and faculty. Students may meet with the Graduate Student Ombudsman for confidential advice. Faculty may consult with one of the Faculty Associates in the Center about a range of issues.  
Phone: 687-5661  
[www.gradlife.uncc.edu](http://www.gradlife.uncc.edu)

Special thanks to the Rackham Graduate School at the University of Michigan for sharing their handbook, "How to Mentor Graduate Students"

### **A Few Things Departments Can Do...**

1. Offer a departmental orientation for new students.
2. Assign a temporary advisor to new students.
3. Develop a list of core expectations for faculty and students in a mentoring relationship.
4. Provide an annual review of each student. This can be accomplished in different ways, but it is an important tool.
5. Provide opportunities for socialization and networking within the department.

### **Other Resources:**

**Mentoring the Successful Graduate Student of Tomorrow**, *Research in Higher Education Journal*,  
<http://www.aabri.com/manuscripts/11803.pdf>

**Adviser, Teacher, Role Model, Friend: On Being a Mentor to Students in Science and Engineering**, The National Academies Press,  
[http://www.nap.edu/openbook.php?record\\_id=5789&page=1](http://www.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=5789&page=1)

**Ph.D. Completion Project, Council of Graduate Schools, Mentoring and Advising**,  
<http://www.phdcompletion.org/promising/mentorinq.asp>