Guidelines for the Mentor

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What is the Purpose of the Mentor Program?

A report by the Goodman Research Group, Inc. indicated that women in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) fields who find community will persist to complete their academic degree programs. Community allows students to build networks and create critical mass across disciplines that are, in some cases, underrepresented by women. Networking provides information, support, and the knowledge that students are not alone in the challenges they face.

The typical Rensselaer student enjoys working hard and playing hard, and when Rensselaer students collaborate as a team, they’re unstoppable! Although female undergraduates represent approximately 30% of the undergraduate population at Rensselaer, they earn higher grade point averages and their graduation rates are higher than their male peers and they hold the majority of leadership positions across student organizations.

The role of the peer mentor is to help a first-year student make a smooth transition to Rensselaer and to provide information and guidance to support the mentee in meeting her first year academic and personal goals. When mentors and mentees gather together for monthly activities, they create a supportive community that enables all Rensselaer women to succeed.

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PEER MENTORING

What is mentoring?
Mentoring is a power-free, two-way mutually beneficial learning situation in which the mentor provides advice, shares knowledge and experiences, and teaches using a low pressure, self-discovery approach. (Starcevich, Matt, 1999, “Coach, Mentor: Is There a Difference?” www.coachingandmentoring.com)

What do mentors do?
- Coach… by providing examples of how to perform a task
- Facilitate… by creating opportunities for learners to use new skills
- Counsel… by helping the learner to explore the consequences of potential decisions
- Network… by referring the learner to others when the mentor’s experience is insufficient

What a mentor is…   What a mentor isn’t…
Coach      Savior
Facilitator     Therapist
Listener     Servant
Friend      Omniscient being
Guide

Effective mentoring behaviors
Supportive
Patient
Respectful
Motivational
Concerned
Resourceful

Tips for Mentors Who Do Too Much
Establish boundaries. Acknowledge your desire for a for a successful partnership but emphasize your limited time in order to achieve your personal goals.
Generate interest. Ask about how she’s spent her time since you last spoke and share what you’ve been doing.
Incorporate routines. Include your mentee in an activity that you would do anyway, like going to the Bookstore, or shopping.

Typical Mistakes that Mentors May Make
- Saying “call me if you need me.” Don’t leave it in the hands of your mentee to take full responsibility for connecting with you. Schedule specific times to speak or meet that work mutually well for both of you and decide together how to spend that time.
- Promising too much. While you may be eager to do a good job, offer a realistic amount of time for your schedule and plan reasonable activities. Don’t promise friendship until and unless it makes sense as the relationship progresses.
- Discouraging your mentee’s goals. Don’t judge your mentee’s goals and visions and squash her ideas with discouraging words or body language. Help her to explore the positives and negatives of planned goals and stay neutral or positive while she’s making her own choices and decisions.
- Working harder than your mentee. Don’t devote more time, energy and resources to the mentee’s development than she does for herself. Model good behavior by keeping commitments and working with her to achieve goals that she’s established for herself. Monitor the balance and speak up if necessary.

HOW TO BE A SUCCESSFUL MENTOR

1. Prepare for your first meeting/conversation.
   - Provide information about yourself.
   - Prepare questions to learn about your mentee.
   - Remember what it was like starting out at RPI your first year.

2. Take the initiative. Stay committed.
   - Initiate the first communication with your mentee and initiate subsequent communications.
   - Keep appointments with your mentee, unless you have a true emergency. If you schedule a conversation or meeting and an emergency arises, be sure to get in touch with your mentee as soon as possible, explain your circumstances, and reschedule.
   - If you forget to keep an appointment with your mentee, don’t beat yourself up! Get in touch with your mentee as soon as you discover you’ve missed the appointment; apologize, explain what happened, and reschedule.
   - If your mentee misses an appointment, leave her a message that lets her know that you missed her, that you hope everything is alright, and ask her to be in touch to reschedule.

3. Be clear about purpose and boundaries.
   - Determine your boundaries and stick to them. You may be a generous person, but what you choose to give should not be a burden. Think seriously before loaning money, giving gifts or offering to drive. (Help your mentee find out how she can take the CDTA bus!)
   - Refer your mentee to other campus resources for assistance with problems beyond your knowledge.
   - Communicate how you are willing and able to support your mentee.

4. Create an agenda: know what you want to accomplish when you meet. (See Agenda Plan on page 8.)
   - Get to know each other (What does each of you enjoy doing in your leisure time? What are the two of you passionate about? What do you think you might like to do for careers? What was the last good book you read and why?)
   - Discuss her goals and expectations for the coming year and yours.
   - Allow your mentee to ask questions and encourage her to express any concerns she may have.

5. Listen with empathy and interest and ask questions. Suspend judgment.

6. Plan for the next meeting.
   - Know how you want to contact each other. Exchange, emails, cell phone numbers, AIM accounts, dorm room numbers- whatever works best for the two of you.
   - Arrange a meeting, cup of coffee, trip to bookstore, study time in Union, trip to WalMart or to Crossgates Mall.
   - Determine what would be helpful to your mentee.

7. Focus on what you know.
   - Remember that you are a resource.
   - Help your mentee to network and to develop other contacts and resources.
   - Share knowledge from your experiences.
   - Rather than telling your mentee how to handle a situation, offer ideas on what you might do and then ask her questions that guide her to a solution that works for her.

8. Maintain and respect privacy, honesty and integrity. Consider that your mentee’s value system may be different from yours! You may have grown up in different environments, have different family backgrounds or culturally acceptable ways of communicating and interacting with family and non-family members. Suspend judgment! Explore and celebrate what makes you different and what makes you the same. Look for common goals, or at least common ground!
Benefits of Mentoring:

✓ Helping others
✓ Gaining new perspectives
✓ Growing leadership skills
✓ Contributing to the Rensselaer community

TWELVE CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

1. **Positive Attitude**: Encourage the student to approach life and goals with enthusiasm and to be accepting of self and others.

2. **Valuing**: Encourage the student to examine beliefs and ideals in an effort to establish personal values and goals.

3. **Open-Mindedness**: Encourage the student to keep an open mind to ideas.

4. **Interrelations**: Impart sharing, caring, and empathy in the interactions between yourself and your mentee.

5. **Creative Problem-Solving**: Encourage the student to use creative problem-solving process.

6. **Effective Communication**: Encourage your mentee to be an attentive listener and an assertive questioner.

7. **Discovery**: Encourage the student to be an independent thinker.

8. **Strengths and Uniqueness**: Encourage the student to recognize individual strengths and uniqueness and to build on them.

9. **Confidence**: Assist the student in developing self-confidence.

10. **Awareness**: Stress that an individual be aware of the environment, be intuitive, be problem sensitive, and be ready to make the most of opportunities

11. **Risk-Taking**: Encourage the student to be a risk-taker and to be an active participant, rather than a spectator.

12. **Flexibility**: Share with a student the importance of being flexible and adaptable in attitudes and action, looking for alternatives, and seeing situations/persons from different perspectives.

TEN TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE MENTORING

1. **Maintain Regular Contact.**
   Mentors should assume they are the givers in the relationship. Consistent contact models dependability and builds trust. At least weekly contact is recommended, but twice a month is expected.

2. **Always be honest.**
   Trust and respect are the foundations on which mentorship is built.

3. **Avoid being judgmental of a student’s life situations.**
   Acceptance without conditions communicates that your concern comes without strings attached.

4. **Avoid excessive gift giving.**
   Don’t do for a student what she can do for herself. Your greatest gift is to help a person discover his/her own solutions to the problems.

5. **Don’t expect to have all of the answers.**
   Sometimes just listening attentively is all anyone needs.

6. **Help your student access resources** and expand support networks. Discuss the importance of maintaining positive relationships.

7. **Be clear about your expectations and your boundaries.**
   Set up ground rules and communicate them.

8. **Avoid being overwhelmed by your student’s problems.**
   Remain calm and dispassionate to help the student solve her problems.

9. **Respect confidentiality.**
   Good friends do.

10. **If the relationship seems to stall, don’t give up! Be persistent, but don’t spam.**
    Contact the program director, Barbara Ruel at ruelb@rpi.edu, or her student assistant, Chelsea Wilson, at chelseawilsonrpi@gmail.com if problems or concerns arise.

Source: Mentoring Myths and Tips
Nancy Henry, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
SUGGESTIONS FOR YOUR FIRST COMMUNICATION

1. Write out a list of things you want to talk about. This will help you to think ahead about questions you may be asked.

2. Contact your mentee by email, IM, letter, or phone after you receive your match information and have read through this list.

3. Explain why you feel the Mentor Program is helpful and why you decided to be a mentor.

4. Share some of your positive experiences and funny stories. Please refrain from sharing scary stories!

5. Put yourself in her shoes; recall your own first days and first year at R.P.I.

6. Don’t push! If she’s not responding, ask her to suggest another time that might be more convenient for you to talk.

7. Ask if she has any questions or concerns.

8. Find out if she needs help deciding what to bring to campus.

10. If you want to, offer to help her move in if your move-in plans coincide with hers. (First year students can move in by Tuesday, August 21. Continuing students can move-in beginning Wednesday, August 22 and dining halls open with breakfast on Thursday, August 23.)

11. Ask what classes she’s scheduled to take and ask her if she has any questions about them.

12. If you’re planning to be on campus, make plans to meet each other at one of the welcome receptions during Navigating Rensselaer & Beyond (on Friday, August 24 or Saturday, August 25) or the Ice Cream Social on Thursday, September 6. Arrange a convenient location where you and she can meet to walk to the “social” together. (Hundreds attend the ice cream social, making it very difficult to find each other if you don’t plan to come with each other.)

13. Ask her about her family and how they feel about her leaving. Ask her how she feels about leaving her family. Tell her how you and your family survived.

14. Offer to speak to her parents to see if they have any questions. (They may want to know: Is the campus safe? What does she need to bring? Should we visit?)

15. Be friendly, outgoing, and assuring.

16. Offer to contact her again before she leaves for campus to answer any last minute questions.
QUESTIONS YOUR MENTEE MAY ASK

1. How are the courses structured?
2. How competitive are students?
3. How much homework can I expect?
4. How difficult are the courses?
5. How much free time will I have?
6. Is it hard to get help with difficult subjects?
7. How easy is it to get in touch with professors or get help from professors?
8. Do you live on campus or off?
9. How is the social life?
10. How safe is the campus?
11. What do you do for fun on weekends?
12. How is the food?
13. How do you like having a roommate?
14. What do you like best about Rensselaer?
Agenda for First Mentoring Session

DATE:________________________  TIME:_____________________________
Location:___________________  What to bring:______________________

Purpose

To introduce ourselves; allow us to get to know each other; both parties gain new perspectives.

Desired outcomes

1. Establish my mentee’s expectations for this session.

2. Establish what her academic and non-academic goals are for the coming year.

3. Discuss our class schedules. Arrange frequency for meeting to ensure that her goals will be met.

4. Schedule first face-to-face meeting. (Could be at a Navigating Rensselaer and Beyond Reception on Friday, August 24, noon to 2 p.m. or on Saturday, August 25, 2 to 4 p.m., or at the Ice Cream Social & Resource Fair, Thursday, September 6, 7 to 9:00 p.m. All three events are in the Russell Sage Dining Hall, second floor.)

5. Share any knowledge, information, and insights that may be relevant to the needs my mentee identifies during this conversation.

Agenda items:

1.

2.

3.

4.

Follow-up Items:
**SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES AND TIMELINE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contact your mentee by text, Facebook, telephone, or snail mail. Stay in</td>
<td>July 1 to August 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>touch over the summer &amp;/or meet face-to-face once you’re on campus.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Go to Navigating Rensselaer &amp; Beyond Reception</td>
<td>August 24 or 25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide pointers about campus computing system</td>
<td>August 27 to 31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Help her buy books or loan her your old ones</td>
<td>August 27 to 31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accompany her to the Activities Fair, Armory</td>
<td>August 30, 6 to 9 PM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Invite her to the Ice Cream Social, RSDH, 2nd floor</td>
<td>September 6, 7 to 9 PM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discuss adding or dropping courses</td>
<td>Month of September</td>
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<tr>
<td>Call or text your mentee after her first test</td>
<td>Evening of first test</td>
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<tr>
<td>Go with her to “Registration and Beyond!,” RSDH, 2nd floor</td>
<td>October 10, 7 to 9 PM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Invite her to Oktoberfest, RSDH, 2nd floor</td>
<td>October 30, 7 to 9 PM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Invite her to the Mentor Program Thanksgiving Dinner and Panel of</td>
<td>November 9, 5 to 8 PM</td>
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<td>Professionals, RSDH, 2nd floor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Invite her to Destressing, Health Care Event, Warren Hall Lounge</td>
<td>December 4, 7:30 to 9 PM</td>
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<td>Schedule Finals Week study breaks</td>
<td>December 12-18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Invite her to Big Red Freakout! <em>(Buy tix early)</em></td>
<td>February ? ($5 with your ID)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Invite her to Valentine’s Day Mentor Event, RSDH, 2nd floor</td>
<td>February 13, 8 to 9:30 PM</td>
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<td>Invite her to become a mentor to a first-year student</td>
<td>April 2 or 3: mentor training</td>
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<tr>
<td>Invite her to help out with <strong>Design Your Future Day</strong></td>
<td>April 20, 9 AM to 3 PM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Schedule Finals Week study breaks</td>
<td>May 13-17</td>
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<td>Offer to meet for a meal – on or off-campus</td>
<td>Any time</td>
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<td>Offer to shop together (take the CDTA bus; it’s free)</td>
<td>Any time</td>
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<td>Ask her if she’d like to go with you to a club meeting or work out at</td>
<td>Any time</td>
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<tr>
<td>the Mueller Fitness Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ask her if she wants you to go to a club meeting in which she has an</td>
<td>Any time</td>
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<td>interest in which you may not be a member, or arrange for a friend of</td>
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<td>yours who is a member to go with her</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have a women’s movie or t.v. night (can do with other mentor/mentee</td>
<td>Any time</td>
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<td>pairs)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Invite her to go with you to an RPI athletics event</td>
<td>Any time</td>
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