Guidelines for the Mentor

INSIDE
- Mentoring: What’s the role of the peer mentor?
- Preparing to Be a Mentor
- First Contact Suggestions
- Questions Your Mentee May Ask
- Twelve Strategies for an Effective Mentoring Relationship
- Ten Tips for Effective Mentoring
- Agenda for First Mentoring Session
- Suggested Activities for Mentor and Mentee

OUR MISSION

The purpose of the Mentor Program is to help first-year students to make a smooth transition, to provide community among Rensselaer women students, and to engage students in developing lifelong learning skills and leadership for success in college and in the workplace. Pairing incoming women with upper class women students in a peer mentoring relationship provides community, support and networking opportunities across technical disciplines in which women are often an underrepresented minority.

Barbara Ruel
Program Director
Jonsson Engineering Center, Room 3004
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
110 8th Street
Troy, New York 12180-3590

Phone: 518-276-6203
Email: ruelb@rpi.edu
**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](http://www.coachingandmentoring.com)).

What do mentors do?
- Coach... by showing how to do a task or activity
- 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 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 you would do anyway, like shopping or go to the Bookstore.

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 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. (Phillips-Jone, Linda, “Mentor Tip of the Month: Mistakes Mentors Make,” [www.mentoringgroup.com](http://www.mentoringgroup.com))
PREPARING TO BE A SUCCESSFUL MENTOR

1. **Prepare for your first meeting/conversation.**
   a) Provide information about yourself.
   b) Prepare questions to learn about your mentee.
   c) Remember what it was like to start out at RPI

2. **Take the initiative. Stay committed.**
   a) Make the first contact and initiate subsequent contacts.
   b) Don’t cancel out making contact 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.
   c) 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.
   d) If your mentee misses an appointment, leave her a message that lets her know that you missed her, hope everything is alright and ask her to be in touch to reschedule.

3. **Be clear about purpose and boundaries.**
   a) 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. (Take the CDTA bus.)
   b) Refer your mentee to other campus resources for assistance with problems beyond your knowledge.
   c) 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.)
   a) Get to know each other (What does each enjoy doing in their 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?)
   b) Discuss goals and expectations for the coming year.
   c) 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.**
   a) 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.
   b) Arrange a meeting, cup of coffee, trip to bookstore, study time in Union, trip to WalMart or to Crossgates Mall.
   c) Determine what would be helpful to mentee.

7. **Focus on what you know.**
   a) Remember that you are a resource.
   b) Help your mentee to network and to develop other contacts and resources.
   c) Share knowledge from your experiences.
   d) 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, hang in there.**
    Contact the program director or mentor co-chairs if problems or concerns arise.

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

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 what your first days and first year was like for you.

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.

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, Plan to meet each other at either one of the welcome receptions during Navigating Rensselaer & Beyond (on August 24 or 25) or the Ice Cream Social on Wednesday, September 5. Arrange a convenient location where you can meet and walk to the social together. It will be too crowded to find each other once you’re at the event.

14. Ask her about her family and how they feel about her leaving, how she feels about leaving her family. Tell her how your family survived.

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

16. Be friendly, outgoing and assuring.

17. 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; get to know one another; both parties gain new perspectives.

Desired outcomes:

1. Establish with mentee her expectations for this session
2. Arrange how frequently we would like to meet. Discuss our class schedules.
3. Schedule our first face-to-face meeting. (Could be at a Navigating Rensselaer and Beyond Reception on Friday, August 24, noon to 2pm or Saturday, August 25, 2 to 4pm or at the Ice Cream Social, Wednesday, September 5, 8 to 9:30pm. All three events are in the Russell Sage Dining Hall, second floor.)
4. Share any knowledge, information and insights that may be relevant to the needs that my mentee identifies at this time.

Agenda items:

1.
2.
3.
4.

Follow-up Items:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES AND TIMELINE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Introduce yourself – telephone or correspond with your mentee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Greet mentee on move-in day (if possible)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Go to Navigating Rensselaer &amp; Beyond Reception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Help her buy books or loan her your old ones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Help familiarize her with campus computing system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Accompany her to the Activities Fair, Field House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Invite her to the Ice Cream Social, RSDH, 2nd floor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Discuss adding or dropping courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Call your mentee after her first test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Invite her to the Pumpkin Design Party, RSDH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Invite her to the Mentor Program Thanksgiving Dinner and Panel of Professionals, RSDH, 2nd floor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Invite her to the Holiday Party, RSDH, 2nd floor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Schedule Finals Week study breaks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Invite her to Big Red Freakout! <em>(Buy tix early)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Invite her to February Mentor Event, RSDH, 2nd floor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Invite her to become a mentor to a first-year student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Invite her to participate in Design Your Future Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Schedule Finals Week study breaks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Offer to meet for a meal – on or off-campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Offer to shop together (take the CDTA bus; it’s free)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Invite her to a meeting for a club you belong to or one that both of you are interested in joining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Have a women's movie or t.v. night (can do with other mentor/mentee pairs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Invite her to go with you to an RPI athletics event</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>