

Building and maintaining healthy mentor/mentee relationships

What roles do mentorship relationships play in professional development of PhD students?

“Mentors can help PhD students identify research directions at which theyll most likely succeed, based on their familiarity with the nature of open questions in the field, and give guidance on the challenges of balancing research and coursework obligations.”

“Mentorship relationships provide holistic coaching and professional guidance to Ph.D.students with respect to general work and life skills, beyond traditional academic, thesis-based research advising.”

“Mentors not only oversee the conduct of research and offer guidance regarding research but also develops a personal interest in the development of the researcher by offering encouragement in difficult times, helping him gain credit for his work, arrange meetings benefitting his career and also giving him valuable advice through the researchers career. All of these contribute to the professional development of a PhD student.”

What do the mentee and mentor gain from the relationship?

“The mentees obviously gain from all the advice, guidance and opportunities coming from their mentors. The mentors mostly extend their professional network and possibly gain from the research input from the mentee toward a common research project if that is part of the relationship.”

Describe a situation in which the interests of the mentor and mentee are aligned.

"The mentor wants to work closely with the mentee and follow a straightforward plan. The mentee wants a lot of guidance in their starting research. In this case both of them will be happy to meet multiple times to discuss and work through the project."

"In most cases, the interests of the mentor and mentee should be aligned. If the mentee is succeeding, the mentor is also succeeding. To give a specific example, a mentee and mentor are both interested in the mentee publishing work."

Are publications helpful for a student intending to work in industry?

Describe a situation in which the interests of the mentor and mentee are conflicting

"A mentee may desire autonomy and independence, but his or her mentor may want to provide extra guidance to speed up the student's research or steer the student in a particular direction."

"Some Assistant Professors might tend to guide students to keep conducting research after graduation, since students could be good cooperators. However, sometimes students want to work in industry after graduation and there would be a conflict of interest."

Should you tell your thesis adviser if your future career plans are starting to move towards getting an industry job?

How are mentorship relationships initiated? E.g., how do you find a thesis adviser?

"In my personal experience, relationships are often initiated by being proactive and seeking out the company/advice of others. Successful relationships are maintained when they are clearly mutually beneficial to all involved (i.e., the incentives of participants are aligned)."

"By taking courses or listening to seminar talks of faculty. Or by requesting appointment with faculty to talk about research interests, advising styles and so on. Or talking with the faculty's students."

“A foundation for a relationship would be an area of research in which both mentee and mentor are interested. Since the area of interest of the mentors are usually transparent to the mentee while the interests of the possible mentees are not obvious to the possible mentors, I believe the responsibility lies with the mentee to find an appropriate mentor.”

Collaboration: What are the advantages and disadvantages of building a mentorship relationship with a researcher who is not a Statistician?

"Having a non-statistician mentor could be advantageous if you are looking to work in an adjacent field like electrical engineering/computerscience or survey methodology or something. They could offer encouragement and advice like a mentor who is a statistician. However they may not be able to suggest an appropriate research direction in statistics. If you were looking for a job as a statistician, they may not be able to help you meet people who would offer you jobs either, unless they are closely aligned with people in statistics."

Describe a way in which a mentorship relationship can turn unhealthy. What warning signs should one look for? What actions can one take?

“An example is when a student follows the instruction of his/her mentor for so long but can not derive any result. The student can become shy and anxiety that he/she may afraid to meet with the mentor to talk about the research process. This kind of unhealthy relationship can be seen if the student does not contact his/her advisor for a long time without any prior announcement. One of the solutions can be taken is to talk with the advisor honestly about the research and find a way to solve it.”

“Maybe when professor is on a sabbatical leave, his/her mentee could only get limited advice. Warning signs might be that mentor and mentee seldom set up a meeting. Possible action for mentee could be like trying to stay connection with mentor, or seeking for a co-advisor.”

“A mentorship relationship can turn unhealthy if one or both parties become too dependent on the other. Some warning signs could be over-communicating or feeling like progress cannot be made without the others help or input. Both the mentor and mentee should set clear boundaries for what their relationship will be, both personally and professionally.”