

# Peer Mentoring Handbook

## University of Louisville Graduate School

With a view to encouraging departments to develop and implement effective peer mentoring programs for graduate students, this handout highlights the benefits of peer mentoring and provides useful ideas/best practices, a sample peer mentoring contract, a few examples of peer mentoring at UofL, and a brief bibliography on peer mentoring.

### Why Peer Mentoring?

- Graduate students who have good mentors are more likely to remain in school until they graduate and are also more successful.
- While nothing can replace good faculty mentoring, peer mentoring can contribute to the retention and graduation of our students in a number of ways.
- Peer mentors can assist in the recruiting of students, simply by getting in touch with admitted students and answering questions about the program, the faculty, and the academic culture.
- A peer mentor can help an incoming student become established in the community (with advice on housing, shopping, finding campus health, childcare, leisure-time activities, etc.).
- A peer mentor can help students understand program expectations or policies.
- A peer mentor can accompany new students to events hosted by the department (whether academic, such as speaker events, or social).
- A peer mentor can help new students identify faculty whose interests might be aligned with theirs.
- A peer mentor can direct new students to campus resources (Writing Center, Delphi, Graduate School, PLAN events, Graduate Student Council, Multicultural Association of Graduate Students).
- A peer mentor can answer the questions new students sometimes feel are too small or silly to ask a faculty member.
- A peer mentor can continue to mentor students after they are no longer new, by providing advice about academic progress, projects and papers, comprehensive exams, and writing research proposals.

### Why Be a Peer Mentor?

- Peer mentors increase their own social and professional networks.
- Peer mentors increase their opportunities to collaborate with new students and with faculty who support the peer mentoring program.
- Peer mentors gain some important professional development opportunities as they attend meetings or workshops with their mentees.
- Peer mentors get the opportunity to develop mentoring skills that are essential in both academic and other careers.

## **What You Can Do for Your Graduate Program:**

- Establish a formal peer-mentoring program with clearly written expectations and guidelines, or
- Encourage the student organization in your department to develop a peer-mentoring program, providing them with necessary support.
- If you will use peer mentors as part of the recruitment process, encourage them to promote a positive image of the program and the university. Mentors should provide the assigned prospective /new student with information that will help them best learn about the program and the university.
- Help match current students with incoming students who have common interests or might work in the same lab or office.
- Make sure that both current students and incoming students are notified about the mentoring match and provide mentoring guidelines and resources.
- Implement the mentoring contract as you see fit. While a “contract” may seem overly official for a “peer” mentoring program, making good practices and expectations explicit can be useful for new students and also new mentors.
- Encourage new students to consult with their peer mentors on a regular basis in order to take advantage of the mentors’ experience and understanding of how to succeed in the program.
- Have some official meeting that brings all mentors and mentees together at the start of the fall semester.
- Encourage mentors and their mentees to socialize in addition to discussing academic issues; for instance, encourage them to meet over coffee/lunch, etc.
- Provide or suggest meeting places for mentors and mentees.
- Help establish appropriate boundaries for mentors and mentees (appropriate times to call, number of times pairs are expected to meet, need for confidentiality, etc.).
- Inform mentors about the peer mentoring workshops and resources provided by THE GRADUATE SCHOOL.

## Sample Mentoring Contract/Guidelines

Congratulations on joining the peer mentoring program. Your peer partnership will increase opportunities for professional development, community building, and sharing of knowledge, experience, and support. Please read the following guidelines and sign at the bottom of the page.

### Expectations for Mentors

- Meet with your mentee at least once a month.
- Be available via email with a 24 hour response window except on weekends.
- Attend an event sponsored by your department with your mentee.
- Share your experience about the program, courses, etc. (e.g., what to expect in the semesters/years ahead).
- Direct your mentee to the Director of Graduate Studies for answers to questions you can't answer.
- Adapt your support to the needs of your mentee, which may depend on academic, social, national and other backgrounds and prior experience.
- Support your mentee with developing community connections (introduce them to community channels such as student groups, clubs, churches, etc.).
- Work collaboratively on a project such as a presentation, a workshop, or a publication.
- Share ideas and resources about professional development.
- Check in on your mentee's morale and academic progress/goals.

### Expectations for Mentees

- Meet with your mentor at least once a month.
- Respond to your mentor's emails promptly.
- View your mentor as your go-to person and bring your questions to the meetings.
- Take the initiative to set up some meetings and recommend places to meet.
- Share your own knowledge and experience with your mentor.
- Suggest ideas for collaborative projects.

We agree to take on these responsibilities to the best of our abilities and make the peer mentoring relationship mutually beneficial. We also agree to keep our conversations confidential.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Mentor  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Mentee  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Examples of Peer Mentoring at UofL**

### **English**

Every year, at the beginning of admissions/recruitment season, the DGS sends a call via EGO (English Graduate Organization) for doctoral students to be peer mentors for incoming doctoral students. The DGS explains in that call what is involved in peer mentoring. He/she also asks EGO officers to select a Peer Mentor Coordinator who pairs the volunteers up with individual prospective students and also helps organize the visitation day. Mentors' support for the visitation day includes everything from transport to touring campus to coming to the info meeting with the DGS and the party, etc. The Coordinator encourages mentors to email their mentees so that the mentees can ask any question of the mentors. If the prospective students end up coming to UofL, then the peer mentors remain with their mentees through the first year as a source of support (and sometimes informally thereafter). Mentors can volunteer two or more times if they like. Students who have been peer mentors always put it on their C.V.s and the DGS can highlight the student's service on their recommendation letters. Students have done a great job with this program.

### **Anatomical Sciences & Neurobiology**

All incoming students are mailed welcome information either in late May or early June. In the cover letter, they are provided with the name and contact information for a NeuroBuddy that has been assigned to them. The NeuroBuddies are chosen from amongst current graduate students; they are matched primarily by research interest, as determined by the Statement of Interests that are required with each application. Each incoming Ph.D. student is assigned to a different NeuroBuddy. Incoming Master's students are often assigned to the same NeuroBuddy (since it's a two-year program and the pool of potential Buddies is more limited). They are told in the letter to feel free to contact their NeuroBuddy with any questions that come up (and they do; although Buddies could also be asked to give them a welcome call and/or email, as some are foreign). During IPIBS orientation week, the department sets up an afternoon meeting with refreshments for the incoming students to meet their NeuroBuddies in person (most have already had lots of contact by that point). This meeting is always scheduled the day before the incoming students meet with their assigned faculty advisor to select their courses, so by that time they have received lots of advice on how to proceed. The meeting also helps the new students get input about the labs they are thinking about doing their rotations in. Once they are in a lab, the students tend to seek peer advice from the other students in the lab (if there are any, although sometimes it's their NeuroBuddy, as students are paired by research interest).

### **Social Work**

All prospective students are offered a brief mentoring opportunity. The department asks current students or alums to volunteer as mentors for a prospective student. When a prospective student requests to talk to a brief mentor, a number of characteristics such as interest, race, employment status, etc., are matched. Current students are also offered opportunity to talk to more advanced students as they decide on whether to specialize.

### **Clinical Psychology**

Based on the work of our amazing student representative from 2007-2008, we started a peer mentoring program for the first year clinical doctoral students. At some point in the first semester, you may begin to wonder why you signed up for this and how you are going to make it through four years of incessant learning, which is normal...or you may feel more confident, which is great (but unusual)! Either way, it may be helpful to have someone to consult with on a regular basis, a "go-to person," who can give you guidance from the student perspective on how to succeed in the program. We pair first-year students with more advanced students, either from their lab, or in a related area if there are no senior students in a given lab.

## A Brief Peer Mentoring Bibliography

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- What skills do I need to develop in order to achieve my goals/objectives?
- What aspects of graduate life have been challenging for me so far?
- What kinds of research or creative projects do I want to work on?
- Have I ever had a class, worked on a project, attended a workshop, presentation or conference, or even had a conversation with someone that I found exciting, intriguing, or inspiring?
- What do I hope to gain from the peer mentoring program?
- How can my mentor best meet my needs?

## Sample Goal Setting Worksheet

Goal setting can be a central aspect of mentoring. Some mentors and mentees find it helpful to develop a “work plan” that includes short-term and long-term goals or objectives, and a timeframe for reaching them. A sample goal setting worksheet is included below. However, depending on the mentee’s organizational tendencies, such structure may feel forced or may not be a useful tool. Do whatever feels comfortable, and feel free to adapt these worksheets to best meet your needs.

Whether or not a mentee’s goals are formalized in writing, pairs can use their meetings as an opportunity to discuss the mentee’s progress toward goals, how these goals may have changed since the last meeting, and what steps the mentee has taken (even small ones) toward achieving these goals. Don’t forget to discuss and celebrate your achievements, no matter how small!

**Goals for the week of \_\_\_\_\_:**

Progress:

**Goals for the month of \_\_\_\_\_:**

Progress:

**Goals for \_\_\_\_\_ semester:**

Progress:

**Goals for the year \_\_\_\_\_:**

Progress:

## **Academic or Professional “Things To Do” for Mentors and Mentees**

- Develop goals for the first year or the length of the program
- Discuss tacit expectations about departmental involvement
- Review resources for additional funding
- Attend PLAN workshops together
- Discuss advisor and committee selection
- Discuss ways to manage time
- Discuss how to best study and stay organized
- Find a study place/time together
- Write for a conference or publication
- Attend university events or conferences together
- Apply for a grant
- Build and cultivate a professional network at UofL and beyond
- Develop a list of resources/people to assist you (subject librarian, writing center, etc.)
- Introduce mentee to important people
- Schedule time to meet with each other
- Share where resources are kept
- Walk through the IRB process
- Share tips for being successful
- Start a writing group – edit and proofread each other’s papers
- Create a “journal club” to encourage submission to journals or reading of journals to keep current in the literature

## Local “Things To Do” for Mentors and Mentees

- Visit “Dog Hill” in Cherokee Park
- Walk along Waterfront Park
- Watch the sunset at Iroquois Park
- Take kids to the playground at Waterfront Park or McDonalds on campus
- Visit Louisville original restaurants
- “Trolley Hop” on the first or last Friday of the month
- Attend a Sunday concert at Cherokee Park
- Buy local food at Grey Street Farmer’s Market
- Check out the art at the St. James Art Fair
- Pet the animals at the State Fair
- Go to an academic student organization meeting together
- Hear some great music at Headliners or Havana Rhumba
- Bask in the culture at Shakespeare in the Park
- Dance to some music at Waterfront Wednesdays
- Listen to local radio station WFPK – and get on their listserv!
- Catch a Louisville Bats game
- Attend Worldfest to learn about other cultures all in one place
- Visit the International Center
- Take a cruise on the Louisville Bell
- Follow the Bourbon Trail
- See the horses at Churchill Downs – especially Dawn or Dusk at the Downs
- Learn some history at the Churchill Downs Kentucky Derby Museum
- Get scared on a Ghost Walk
- Take a road trip to Nashville, Bardstown, or Chicago
- Explore Mammoth Caves near Bowling Green, Kentucky
- Take a ride at King’s Island in Cincinnati, OH
- Visit the aquarium or levy in Newport
- Grab some food, buy some clothes, or just window shop along Bardstown Road, Frankfort Avenue, or Market Street
- Tour Cave Hill Cemetery
- Go on a “Pizza Tour” – discover the best pizza in town!
- Eat a “Hot Brown” at The Brown Hotel
- Find a Red Penguin at 21c Museum Hotel – while you’re there, check out the restrooms
- Hike at Bernheim
- See the Falls of the Ohio