Graduate Student Mentoring Network

The Graduate Student Mentoring Network (GSMN), housed within the Graduate College, provides information on mentoring opportunities and resources, best practices and strategies to foster successful mentoring programs and relationships, and opportunities to recognize outstanding mentors and mentoring initiatives within Arizona State University.

The mentoring connection: Choosing a mentoring program

The Graduate College GSMN recognizes the importance of making the right connections. This document highlights the mentoring connection and best practices in the following:

- Selecting a mentoring structure that best fits your needs
- Choosing the right mentoring program within that structure
- Evaluating mentoring goals and outcomes

Mentoring structures

Various mentoring structures offer a variety of benefits, but generally designed to offer training and orientation to a subject or field, professional or personal role modeling, emotional or psychosocial support and community-building. A mentoring program may focus on any or all of these areas, but different types of structures may be better aligned to facilitate specific types of desired outcomes.

When selecting a mentoring program, it is important to consider the structure of it. Questions to keep in mind include the following:

- How do I learn best? Socially in groups or individually?
- What is the mentoring program designed to do?
- Would I benefit from participating in multiple mentoring programs with different structures and outcomes?

There are four common types of mentoring programs. While they may share common goals or outcomes, the variation in structure or teaching mode may appeal to students in different ways.

- **One-on-one (dyadic) mentoring**: the simplest mentoring structure, in which mentor and mentee work in a one-on-one relationship. One-on-one mentoring has the highest degree of direct involvement between mentor and mentee, and often emphasizes the fostering of personal relationships requiring high degrees of trust and disclosure between mentor and mentee. One-on-one mentoring is effective in exploring individual development, whether personal, academic, or professional.

- **Small-group mentoring**: a cohort-based program generally consists of one mentor/facilitator and a small group of 4 – 6 mentees who meet as a group. Mentors may meet individually with cohort members as well, but the focus of this mentoring structure is group exploration of issues or topics. It can also be used effectively in the workplace or at the program level as a means of providing
training or orientation to multiple new faculty or students simultaneously. By emphasizing communal learning or exploration, small-group mentoring can facilitate team-building and group affinity.

- **Peer mentoring**: in peer mentoring, both mentor and mentee are of the same group (undergraduate student to undergraduate student, graduate student to graduate student, and graduate student to undergraduate students, etc.) in which the mentor is more advanced in skill or experience and can provide guidance, but belongs to the same group. See the Graduate Student Mentoring Network homepage at https://graduate.asu.edu/shades for best practices for peer mentoring. Peer mentoring models such as the Graduate College’s SHADES multicultural mentoring program (https://graduate.asu.edu/shades) lend themselves to exploration of affinities or identities, social development or community involvement.

- **Faculty mentoring**: in a faculty mentoring relationship, there is generally a hierarchical distance between mentor and mentee. Faculty mentoring is a professional relationship, in which the faculty member assists the mentee through academic guidance or professional development. See the Graduate College Graduate Faculty Search page at https://graduate.asu.edu/graduate-faculty for more information on faculty mentoring.

Many successful mentoring programs employ a **multi-tiered model**. Peer mentoring programs, for instance, may employ a combination of one-on-one and small-group mentoring, either sequentially or simultaneously.

**Choosing the right mentoring programs**

With the wide variety of mentoring programs available, determining the best program to fit your needs can take effort. Finding the right mentoring program is a proven means of increasing the institutional affinity, academic performance, development of interpersonal competencies, and retention of students at the graduate level. Particularly for first-generation students and students from other underrepresented populations, mentoring is an excellent way to become more engaged with your department, college or community.

As you consider types of mentoring programs, ask yourself what you want to get out of the program:

- Am I looking for emotional or social support?
- Am I interested in connecting with people who share my interests?
- Am I looking to enhance specific skillsets or knowledge?
- Am I interested in exploring or fostering a part of my identity?

Mentoring programs are often aligned around one of three areas. Which program best meets your needs will be determined by the **focus** and **outcomes** you are looking for. Three common themes in mentoring programs include the following:

- **Proficiency-based mentoring**: these are organized around academic interest or aptitudes, with outcomes focused on academic development or improvement.
• Affinity-based mentoring: sometimes called interest-based mentoring, these allow participants to become more closely involved with or learn about a particular community and focus on social interaction and interpersonal development.

• Identity-based mentoring: most frequently employed as a means of providing interpersonal connection and identity development/exploration among members of underrepresented communities (for instance, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation/gender identity), the most immediate goal outcomes for these are social support and connection.

Evaluating mentoring goals and outcomes

As previously mentioned, mentoring provides support in respect to four primary outcome areas: training and orientation, role modeling, providing emotional support, and community building. It is important to keep these in mind as you enter a mentoring program.

As you consider what form of mentoring structure and program are right for you, consider the following:

• What kind of relationships do I want to develop through this program?
• Can my mentor help me reach my stated goals?

No mentoring program or style is right for everyone. Your answers to these questions can help guide you toward the mentoring program that is the best fit for you!

Finally, keep in mind that no matter your desired mentoring outcomes, the mentor/mentee relationship itself is integral to a successful mentoring partnership. It is important to identify and share clear goals with your prospective mentor. Some best practices for entering a mentoring partnership include:

• Having a clearly defined set of goals and expectations of the partnership written down prior to meeting with a prospective mentor.

• Creating a mentor-mentee contract that clearly articulates both your goals and expectations and those of your prospective mentor.

• Periodically review and, if necessary, revise your goals with your mentor to ensure the most productive, useful partnership possible. Our objectives and needs can evolve, and it is important that the mentoring relationship reflects this.

Additionally, consider the first meeting with a prospective mentor as an interview; as the mentoring relationship is often a close interpersonal one, it is important that both mentor and mentee are comfortable in the partnership. If a mentoring relationship is not meeting your desired goals, do not be afraid to address this with a mentor. As a final note, depending on your specific mentoring goals, you might consider working with multiple mentors.
References


