



International Association for Society and Natural Resources

Preparing to be a mentor

(adapted from the Rackham Graduate School at the University of Michigan)

You were mentored in some fashion as a graduate mentee or young professional, so you may find it a useful starting point to think about those days and how you felt about your mentoring. Consider these questions:

- What kind of mentoring did you have?
- What did you like and dislike about the mentoring you received?
- How well did your mentor(s) help you progress through your graduate program?
- How well did your mentor(s) prepare you for your career?
- What did you not receive in the way of mentoring that would have been helpful to you?

Thinking about these points can help you develop a vision of the kind of mentor you want to be, and the most effective ways you can mentor mentees inside and outside your discipline.

In the companion mentoring guide for mentees, we suggest that they undertake a critical self-appraisal before they meet with faculty. Below are some points we recommend they consider. We share a modified version of this listing as possible topics for your first meeting.

- Find out about the mentee's previous educational experiences and why s/he decided to go to graduate school or pursue their profession. What does the mentee hope to achieve in the next few years?
- Discuss your research projects and how they complement or diverge from the mentee's interests.
- Offer suggestions about trainings, skills, etc. that the mentee might consider.
- Refer the mentee to other people whom s/he should meet in order to begin developing professional networks.

You and your mentee need to communicate clearly from the start about your respective roles and responsibilities. Some people find it helpful to put such arrangements in writing, while recognizing that circumstances and needs can change. Here are a few areas you may want to discuss.

- **Goals:** Ask mentees to develop and share with you a work plan that includes short-term and long-term goals as well as the timeframe for reaching those goals. Make sure the mentee's work plan is feasible.
- **Meetings:** Tell mentees how frequently you will be able to meet with them, and that it is their responsibility to arrange and take the lead in these meetings. Let them know if you have a busy travel schedule, are about to take a sabbatical, or will be assuming an administrative position.
- **Thresholds:** Be explicit about the kinds of issues you feel require a face-to-face meeting. Also let mentees know if they may contact you at home, and under what circumstances, and ask them their preferences as well.
- **Assessments:** Discuss how often you will give them an assessment of their general progress, and let them know what type of feedback they can expect from you.
- **Publishing and Presenting:** Share your expectations regarding when and where you would like to see the mentee give research presentations. Explain the standards and norms for authorship credit in your field, and the extent to which you can assist them with preparing work for submission to journals and conferences.

The hallmark of a successful mentoring relationship is a shared understanding of expectations and responsibilities. These create the framework for the relationship, and they are largely established in the early meetings with a mentee. A relatively modest investment in those meetings can yield great dividends.