



The Mentor Program:

GUIDELINES FOR MENTORS

PROGRAM SUMMARY

Created by Irving B. Harris in 1988, the Mentor Program is unique among leading public policy graduate schools and is part of the Harris School's Center for Policy Practice (CPP), which seeks to build bridges between students' classroom experience and the policy experience of the real world. The program matches public policy graduate students in one-on-one relationships with leading policy professionals. Through these interactions, students learn how their quantitative and analytical skills form the basis of understanding the nature of social problems and the impact of public policy.

Students are better able to channel their aspirations and interest into definable career goals through the advice, experience, and insight of their mentors while simultaneously building a professional network. Mentors find the program to be a rewarding opportunity to meet young, up and coming professionals in their fields and assist them in their career growth.

Approximately 100 volunteer mentors participate in this program. They are experienced and interested in public policy issues, and are prominent individuals in a wide range of government, nonprofit, and private organizations and agencies, which include:

- Local, state, and federal officials, both elected and appointed
- Corporate executives in financial service, legal, management, and environmental consulting companies
- Directors and senior officials of nonprofit organizations, museums, and research institutions

Students enrolled in the Harris School's two-year Master of Public Policy (MPP) program are eligible to participate. While the student-mentor pairings are assigned for one academic year at a time, often these exchanges lead to a project or some continuing association. Whatever the exchange, most students and mentors find the interactions worthwhile and enjoyable.

EXPECTATIONS FOR MENTORS

The Mentor Program is very flexible and the nature of the mentor experience varies from one relationship to the next. The time and effort expended by students and mentors differs, as do the types of activities in which mentors and students engage. However, the Harris School expects both student and mentor participants to actively engage with one another.

Mentors are not expected to provide internships or jobs for their student mentees, and students are instructed not to ask for such opportunities. However, students who know their mentors well sometimes ask them to serve as references in their job searches.

Time Commitment

Typically, a mentor meets periodically with his or her student mentee to discuss issues about policy matters, career paths, skill development, setting goals, and networking. The specific amount of time a mentor commits varies considerably. It depends to some extent on the relationship established between mentor and student, as well as matched interest areas and career paths. We encourage mentors to meet with their students at least once a quarter, or three times during the academic year.

Communication

Mentors and students often ask who is responsible for initiating communication. Students are always responsible for initiating contact with mentors. Mentors who have not been contacted by a student October 31st should contact Kathi Marshall (773.834.2196 or kathim@uchicago.edu). She can facilitate communication or assign a new mentee.

Upon initial conversation, mentors and students should establish the means and method of future contact, including amount of communication expected and the anticipated frequency of meetings. By structuring expectations at the beginning of the year, students feel that mentors are more approachable and interested and therefore tend to be more communicative.

Types of Meetings: School-Sponsored and Individually Arranged

Mentors can arrange to meet students in their office or anywhere else that is convenient for both individuals. While the types of interactions are determined by the mentor and student, we encourage mentors to take students with them to activities that expose students to other professionals in the field and allow for networking opportunities.

In addition, the Harris School provides some opportunities for mentors and students to meet. Each fall, the School hosts an annual Mentor Dinner at a downtown Chicago location where mentors and students are introduced. All mentors are strongly encouraged to attend. The Harris School also offers a wide variety of events throughout the academic year to which mentors and students are invited.

MENTOR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENGAGING IN THE PROGRAM

Mentors currently participating in the program are in the best position to offer advice and thoughts about what it really means to be a mentor. Below are tips, comments, and suggestions about the program and for engaging with students.

- Reciprocal learning often occurs between students and mentors; it is an exciting and valuable component of the program.
- Being a mentor often means being a “sounding board” for students, ranging from topics in academic to occupations, and personal life.
- It is truly rewarding to help an international student become acquainted with American life and the city of Chicago.
- Open your network to connect students with other colleagues for informational interviews.
- Consider being open to other students in the program contacting you for informational interviews.
- Host an event for several mentors and students – this group exchange can lead to wonderful policy conversation.
- Face to face meetings with your student mentee are often the most valuable.

CONTACT INFORMATION

For questions, please contact:

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