Tips for Mentors and Program Directors

Pre-program

It's very helpful for mentors to get to know their interns before the internship begins.

- Connect with your mentee individually before the program starts, starting the month beforehand, perhaps sharing videos, articles, or news stories on the project to get them engaged.
- Consider setting up a "Get to know you" meeting on the first day of the internship, whether in person or remotely (see handout "Getting to know your mentor/mentee")
- Research shows that if a mentor engages with a student early in a program and a second mentor spends the same amount of time with them but engages later in the program, the student perceives that the "early mentor" was more engaged.
- Make sure that students have the hardware and software needed in advance.
- Read the Stanford U. handout on Supporting students in a virtual environment.
- Share your enthusiasm about the project and different ways of learning about it (news stories, videos, articles, share slides, tell stories or give background).

First Week

Provide structure, foster connections, and trouble-shoot technology.

- Provide structure. Prepare an initial document with a rough outline of the program agenda. It's okay if things change, just show what the plan is.
- Use tools to facilitate awkward conversations, working together on a document. Here are some templates:
  - Getting to know your mentor/mentee
  - Mentoring Agreement
  - Communication Plan
  - Discussing Expectations
- Discuss with your scholar the best way to communicate throughout the week (e.g. chat, email, etc). Consider using a chat function to communicate if your email inbox is too crowded. See some details at Tools for Communicating with Your Student Virtually.
- Involve the student in designing their project. Provide choices.

- Create clear project goals and a timeline together.
- Agree on regular meeting times.
- Discuss a work schedule, allowing for flexibility to the extent possible.
- Create a collaborative space to share documents in Google.
- Ask the student to track their efforts in a document or a paper notebook if that seems like a good idea.
- Include your intern in group meetings, project meetings, and lunches, and introduce them to colleagues, staff, and grad students.
- Acknowledge that they might have circumstances that make it difficult for them to concentrate for long stretches of time.
- Encourage them to take substantial breaks to eat & exercise, and to take care of their own mental health in this process.

Beyond the First Week

Check in frequently, create work chunks, foster connections.

- Break the work into smaller parts, with extension opportunities or change strategies if things go differently than anticipated. Be flexible about deadlines if possible.
- Meet frequently for short spells. Initially, this could be for 15 minutes each day in week one and two to check in on how work is going, whether they have questions, or they are struggling with something. Allow for more time or plan another meeting if more time is needed.
- Consider pairing the student with a grad student/near peer mentor for weekly check-ins.
- Encourage or set up student ‘lunch-hours’ with grad students or your research group.
- Show your intern an Individual Development Plan to start filling out, and then talk it over with them. It helps identify goals, assess skills and needed skills, and set milestones.

Successful ways to work with your scholar online

Students want to contribute. The happiest virtual interns are those who are busy and who feel part of a team (from the USGS document).

- Since your intern will not be working side-by-side with you in the office, create smaller benchmarks within the deadlines that you and your intern have set to provide additional structure.
- When leading up to a firm deadline, check-in to make sure your intern is on track.
- Be encouraging and offer constructive critiques of intern work along with compliments. The virtual internship may have a steeper learning curve than an in-person internship for students who are learning how to interact with mentors.
- Address problems quickly. If a virtual intern feels isolated, it may be easier to neglect the work. If things are starting to slide, schedule a conversation and give your intern an opportunity to talk.

Teaching through Technology

Engage students, focus on human contact, and teach through the screen, not to the screen.

- Welcome individuals to the meeting, using their names. They feel invisible. Respond and encourage their efforts; it's helpful if their contributions are acknowledged. Add personal touches and enthusiasm to messages.
- Set expectations on how often you will respond, and when, e.g. 24 hours, times you won't be replying. Be flexible about their work schedule as they may have other responsibilities.
- Establish netiquette rules together. Raise hands physically to speak. Give tips on their background or lighting.
- Start a tech help page or forum.
- At every video group meeting, expect to spend the first few minutes dealing with technology problems.
- Use a blend of synchronous and asynchronous learning: initial instruction and questions or discussion via video call and suggest a task or a step. Meet some hours later or a few days later to review the progress, with the opportunity for quick check-ins if the student is stuck.

- Prepare for technological glitches to happen with the video calls and other technology. Things may go wrong. What are the contingency plans if a student misses a training because of a poor internet connection?
- Some experts suggest keeping total Zoom/video meetings per day down to 1.5 - 2 hours per day if possible.
- Use pair work in breakout rooms. “Person A asks person B.”
- Give breaks. Be okay with silence.
- Focus more on human contact than content. Some content can be found online. As you get more comfortable it will get better...teaching through the screen and not to the screen. From Online Teaching (scroll down) video.
- Practice and model self-care - taking breaks. Ask the student if they are getting outside or other things that might be helpful.
- Be patient and compassionate with yourselves and with the students.

For Program Directors

- Spend most of the first meeting getting students used to the platform and promoting connection between people. Prepare a game or simple activity. Don’t expect to cover content.
- Provide structure. Prepare an initial document. It’s okay if things change, just let everyone know what the plan is. Show the summer or program plan.
- Provide expectations, including behavior. See participant code of conduct docs.
- Provide a weekly (or daily) message announcing what is going to happen. For a written message, you can use a template and adjust each time. Video messages are even better. Hearing the teacher’s voice or seeing their face makes a big difference. Include an encouraging note and acknowledge their efforts.
- Suggest your students form a group chat (on GroupMe, Slack, etc.). See Tools for Communicating with Your Student Virtually.
- Some program directors prompt them weekly with a fun question before the internship starts. Talk about their interests and what interests or matters to them.
- Make sure that students have the hardware and software needed in advance.
- Ensure that every student has a grad student, second mentor, or student liaison to check in with independently of their mentor about their project or other issues. Some program directors do this check in themselves.
- Read the Stanford U. handout Supporting students in a virtual environment and post it on your wall.
- Practice and model self-care - taking breaks. Ask students if they are getting outside or doing other things that might be helpful.