

Student Mentoring

Mentoring is vital to graduate students' success, and The Department of English is committed to cultivating a culture of mentoring in graduate education at Northeastern University.

What is a Mentor?

Mentoring involves a constellation of activities that go beyond advising or guiding incoming students through a project. Your mentor will serve as your friend and guide throughout your graduate career at Northeastern. They will provide both professional and personal advice about transitioning into and out of graduate school. Your mentors are your

- Adviser
 - Good mentors take seriously the responsibility to share knowledge with their mentees, not only within their area of expertise, but also with regard to their professional trajectory and experience.
- Supporter/Friend
 - Providing emotional and moral support to graduate students in addition to supporting their intellectual and professional development is one of the hallmarks of good mentors.

Difference Between an Adviser and Mentor

While there is quite a bit of overlap, advisers and mentors can serve different functions for students during their graduate education. At Northeastern, advisers are faculty members who provide direction on course selection, departmental requirements, and might direct a dissertation or thesis. Mentors, on the other hand, are student colleagues who can speak to many issues differently than advisers. They are your fellow graduate students, who have been in the department for a while, have learned to navigate the space and will help you do the same. They will

- invite you to coffee or outings away from the office for informal discussions and warm you up to the department
- introduce you to faculty and other graduate students in the department
- help you interpret program guidelines and the Graduate School's policies and procedures
- be in touch with you at least once a month

Advice for Mentors

(The following sections have been adapted from The Harriet W. Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning, Brown University)

- Getting to know your mentee involves dedicating time to learning more about them by asking questions and practicing **active listening**.
- **Effective communication** requires being honest about what you can and cannot provide for a mentee. One person may not be well-positioned to fill all functions; however, it is important for a mentor to actively connect a mentee with other possible mentors to fill possible gaps.
- All types of mentoring contribute to mentee confidence and the achievement of career goals. Because women and graduate students from historically underrepresented groups tend to receive less instrumental and sponsorship-based mentoring, connecting mentees with a variety of **support structures** can contribute to their success (Curtin, Malley, & Stewart, 2016).

Mentoring Across Differences

- **Advice for mentees:** Before beginning a mentoring relationship, it is helpful to identify how important it is to have a same-identity mentor for you. For example, research indicates that same-identity mentors may offer the best psychosocial support (Ortiz-Walters & Gilson, 2005), but many successful cross-race mentoring relationships are between those who agree on the same preference for how to deal with the question of race, i.e., whether to sublimate or engage the role of racial differences in the relationship (Thomas, 1993). If it is important for you to have a same-identity mentor and that opportunity is not available in your department, we will try to connect you with graduate students and faculty in affinity groups on campus.
- **Advice for mentors:** When giving constructive feedback to a mentee, it is important to avoid messages that convey a lack of confidence in their abilities. Packard (2015, p. 102) suggests framing feedback in a constructive manner like “I am going to give you this feedback because I take you seriously.” It is also important to note that many mentoring relationships serve as counterspaces to the inequalities that people from underrepresented groups face in academia. If you are a mentor from a historically underrepresented group, you might find that students disproportionately seek your mentorship. In a recent blogpost, a faculty member highlights The Unseen Labor of Mentoring and offers guidance on self-care and how to professionally bring attention to the support you are providing to mentees.

- **Antiracism and anti-discrimination**

EGSA is committed to antiracism and anti-discrimination, both as a scholarly praxis and in our day-to-day lives. If any faculty member within the English Department treats you in a racist or otherwise discriminatory way, EGSA is ready to help you. You can also reach out to Graduate Student Welfare and Advocacy Group (GSWAG), a group devoted to graduate student welfare and advocacy. If you are uncomfortable with reaching out to members within your department, Northeastern also provides the following services:

- ❖ Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion
<https://provost.northeastern.edu/oidi/about/>
- ❖ LGBTQA Center <https://studentlife.northeastern.edu/lgbtqa/>
- ❖ Office of Global Services <https://international.northeastern.edu/ogs/>
- ❖ Disability Resource Center <http://www.northeastern.edu/drc/>
- ❖ Title IX Reporting Options: Report gender or sexual discrimination and other forms of discrimination here:
<https://www.northeastern.edu/ouec/reporting-options>
- ❖ In 2018, the EGSA created the Statement Supporting Transgender Student Rights. Read the statement here: <https://cssh.northeastern.edu/english/graduate/egsa>
- ❖ Group Counseling at Northeastern University Health And Counseling: Offers multiple forms of group counseling (now via Zoom during COVID-19)
<https://www.northeastern.edu/uhrs/counseling-services/group-counseling>
Northeastern University Health And Counseling 24/7 Mental Health Support:
877.233.9477 (in the U.S.), +1.781.457.7777 (outside the U.S.)

Checklist for Mentors

- ☐ Reach out to your mentees before the semester begins
 - ☐ Introduce yourself and your area of expertise/research
 - ☐ Ask about your mentee's background and research interest
 - ☐ Ask which courses they are taking and if they have any questions regarding course registration

 - ☐ Reach out to your mentees once the semester starts
 - ☐ If you can, invite your mentee to coffee or outings away from the office for informal discussions and warm them up to the department
 - ☐ introduce your mentee to faculty and other graduate students in the department

 - ☐ Answer your mentee's questions, if they have any. They can be about
 - ☐ Library resources (Snell, Boston Public Library, Houghton, or Massachusetts Historical Society, etc.)
 - ☐ Conference proposals (NEMLA, MLA, or Graduate Conferences and Symposiums)
 - ☐ Applying for on-campus jobs
 - ☐ Publications (Journal Articles, Book Chapters, blogs, or op-eds)
 - ☐ Departmental policies (registering for courses outside the dept.)
 - ☐ Campus resources (for LGBTQ+, BIPOC, or International students)
- Remember, no question is too small.
-
- ☐ Check-in with them once every month till both of you decide it's okay for you not to.
-
- ☐ Tell them about the important deadlines if you can (for instance, annual review form).