



Mentoring Guide

All You Need to Know about Being an
NIU Student-Alumni Mentor



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NIU Student-Alumni Mentoring: An Introduction

What is an NIU mentor?

As an NIU mentor, you are a guide, friend, and resource who shares your educational and professional experience to help pave the way for students to succeed at NIU and beyond. An NIU mentor derives satisfaction from helping NIU students fulfill their potential.

As a mentor, you play several roles, including:

Motivator: Express belief and confidence in the mentee's abilities and encourage the mentee to try new things.

Resource: Teach and advise the mentee about making professional contacts and introduce the mentee to new people, places, or ideas.

Supporter: Encourage open and honest dialogue. Listen and respond to the needs of the mentee.

Coach: Help the mentee develop, and work to achieve, realistic and meaningful goals.

The Mentoring Relationship

For mentoring to be successful there must be a reciprocal, comfortable relationship between the mentor and mentee. Both parties must work at the relationship to make it successful by being open-minded and respectful and by keeping to the expectations they have set for the relationship. Ideally, the mentoring relationship will be a mutually beneficial one; as the mentor learns from the mentee and the mentee from the mentor.

“My mentor is amazing. Not only is he full of stories and advice, he's incredibly encouraging. I feel like he truly believes in me and would like nothing more than to see me succeed.”

“The most rewarding aspect of mentoring has been making a meaningful connection with my mentee and feeling that I have made a positive impact.”

The Mentoring Experience: Benefits and Expectations for the Mentor

How will I benefit as a mentor?

We believe that mentoring will be a positive and enriching experience for you.

Specifically, we hope you will:

- Refine your coaching and mentoring skills
- Develop meaningful connections with students
- Learn about the NIU of today and the next generation
- Experience a reconnection with NIU
- Expand your professional network

What is expected of me as a mentor?

Our mentors say that one of the best aspects of volunteering with NIU mentoring is that it is flexible. You and the mentee can decide how the relationship will work.

We do, however, have some minimal expectations of our mentors:

- Spend at least two hours per month building the mentoring relationship.
- Set expectations with your student regarding how and when you will contact each other.
- Help your student identify and set goals, track progress, and make changes.
- Approach the mentoring relationship with an open mind, professionalism, and respect.
- Support your student's professional and personal development.
- Respond to all communications in a timely manner.
- Maintain and model professional behavior. Define professional behavior if needed.
- Communicate problems with the mentoring relationship to program staff.

What is not expected of me as a mentor?

- To offer jobs or internships to your mentee
- To have all the answers for your mentee
- To initiate all contact with your mentee

“I enjoy making new contacts with current students and helping them answer some of the key questions they have about majors, career fields, and what growing up is like.”

“The most rewarding aspects of mentoring are informing my mentees of the benefits of public service, becoming acquainted with them on a personal level, and maintaining contact after mentoring ends.”

The Mentoring Experience: Benefits and Expectation for the Mentee

How will the mentee benefit?

Following are some general ways we hope the students will benefit from being in a mentoring relationship:

- Building a professional network
- Developing and enhancing professional and communication skills
- Connecting academics and career
- Receiving recommendations about experiences and courses that would be of the greatest benefit
- Exploring new ideas and areas of interest
- Gaining exposure to career options, advice, and job search tips

What is expected of the mentee?

Before a student can search for a mentor, he or she must attend a mandatory orientation in which the student is asked to think about what he or she wants out of a mentoring relationship.

Students are also informed of our expectations, which include:

- Spending at least two hours per month building the mentoring relationship
- Making the first contact with the selected mentor and responding to all communication
- Setting specific goals for the mentoring relationship with the mentor
- Agreeing and committing to expectations and goals set with the mentor
- Being appropriate in their requests of their mentor—in particular, NOT asking for a job or sponsorship
- Approaching the mentoring relationship with an open mind, professionalism, and respect
- Being receptive to suggestions and feedback
- Communicating problems with the mentoring relationship to NIU Student-Alumni Mentor Program staff

“The best part of having a mentor was hearing about different career paths, being introduced to other professionals in my field, and getting feedback on interviews and accepting an offer.”

“It is great to know that we are offered this wide and great range of people who are willing to mentor us.”

How NIU Student-Alumni Mentoring Works

The Matching Process

Students register with the NIU Student-Alumni Mentoring Program at the beginning of each academic year and attend a mandatory orientation. After the orientation, students request a mentor. NIU Student-Alumni Mentor staff members do their best to match students with mentors based on similar career paths, interests, and availability.

Mentoring Sessions

Mentoring sessions run for six months for undergraduate and graduate students. At the end of the mentoring session, we formally release you so that you are able to work with another mentee (or mentees) and your mentee can work with a new mentor. One of the program's goals, however, is to develop on-going relationships, so we encourage you to continue your relationship on an informal basis.

You are in control!

- Choose the maximum number of mentees you want during any given session.
- Change the number of mentees you want to work with at any time.
- Take yourself in or out of the mentor pool at any time.

Once A Match Is Made

Initial Contact with Your Mentee

Students are expected to initiate contact with you once the match is made.

- We encourage students to send an introductory e-mail to the mentor, so please watch for his or her e-mail and respond in a timely manner.
- Sometimes, students are nervous or intimidated about reaching out, so if you don't hear from your mentee, please feel free to take the lead.
- If the student does not respond to your messages or you have any other problems, please contact the program staff.

“The most rewarding aspect of mentoring is the gratification I experience when mentees share their excitement from having learned or grown from our interaction.”

“The most rewarding aspect of mentoring was talking with my mentor about my future goals and expectations and having him speak frankly to me about what he likes and dislikes about his career.”

What should I expect of the first conversation?

We strongly suggest that you have an in-person conversation early in the relationship over the phone or via Skype. This personal interaction will go far in creating a connection and setting up a good foundation for your relationship.

Here are some guidelines for the conversation:

- Tell the mentee that you are excited about being his or her mentor! Sharing your enthusiasm will help reassure him or her that you are committed to making the relationship succeed.
- Build rapport with your mentee by asking questions about the mentee's background and experiences. Remember, you have NIU in common and that is a great place to start!
- At the beginning of the relationship it is important to talk about expectations and goals for the mentoring experience. Make sure to either start this dialogue in this first conversation or set up another time to do so. Please use our NIU Student-Alumni Mentor Program Agreement, which can be found at MyNIU.com.

Building the Mentoring Relationship

Every mentoring relationship is unique. In fact, there is so much to learn that there are entire books devoted to building mentoring relationships. Following are a few guidelines based on feedback we have received from our mentors that we hope will help you create a satisfying relationship with your mentee.

Set Goals with Your Mentee

Setting goals with your mentee at the beginning of the relationship is critical because it gives direction to the relationship and informs you about how you can help the mentee. See Appendices B and C for goal-setting help.

If your mentee doesn't know his or her goals, use the opportunity as your first mentoring moment. You can ask questions such as, "What made you sign up for the mentoring program?" or "What about my profile stood out to you?" or "What are your specific concerns and questions right now?" or "How can I help you?" Remember, goal setting can be a process, so make a point to check in and ask the mentee if his or her priorities are changing or evolving.

Set Expectations with Your Mentee

- Stick to the decisions you made with your mentee about how and when you will communicate with each other. Renegotiate as needed.
- If the mentee is unresponsive at any point in the relationship, initiate contact. Some students will be overwhelmed by how much they are doing and forget to contact you.
- If your mentee doesn't respond to you after multiple attempts, please contact the NIU Student-Alumni Mentor Program staff.

Get to Know Your Mentee

- Ask thoughtful questions about the mentee's interests, experiences, and background.
- Follow up on any important steps the student has taken, such as a job interview or a leadership experience, and ask what he or she learned.
- Be an active listener by feeding back what the mentee says. Avoid interrupting and show interest with your voice and posture.

“I try to ask the mentee exactly what they want to get out of the mentoring relationship. We try to share a little about each other's backgrounds and experiences.”

“It was through the questions that my mentor asked me that I was able to figure out where I fit into the whole business scheme. It was great to have someone in my life who I could talk openly with.”

“The most rewarding aspect of the mentoring experience was hearing my mentor’s personal story. I think the best advice I got was just hearing about the path she took. From that personal anecdote, I saw a lot of myself and realized which aspects of her journey might apply to me.”

“I liked getting feedback and frank answers from professionals who have gone through similar decisions before.”

Offer Options Versus Solutions

- Avoid giving quick solutions. Ask the mentee what he or she is thinking and help the mentee process ideas.
- Make suggestions of things the student might try. For example, “Have you looked into...” or “Something I found helpful when I was at NIU...” versus “You should...” or “You need to...”
- Remember that we are all human, and we don’t always take the advice we are given. Don’t get discouraged if your mentee does not heed your advice.

Share Your Story

- Telling your mentee about yourself and your experiences builds trust and rapport.
- Think about how you have learned from your mistakes and how your mentee can learn from them.
- Share your lessons learned during college and beyond with your mentee.

Be a Coach!

- Encourage your mentee to take risks. Students may need a little push, which will help them in the long run.
- Remember, students have much to learn from a professional like you—everything from how to dress to being on time.
- Don’t hesitate to give your mentee feedback if he or she is not acting in a professional manner. Your advice could make a huge difference for his or her first interview, job, and other life experiences.

What Not to Discuss

- Criticisms: Do not talk about other professionals or previous colleagues in a critical manner.
- Family/personal matters: This is a professional network; know the boundaries.
- Gossip: Don’t violate professional confidences or abuse inside information.

“I found similarities with my mentor, and it made me feel more secure that he felt like I did at some point and that it all works out in the end. It's okay to not know what you want to do sometimes.”

Coordinating Schedules

It may be difficult to find the time to talk or meet with your mentee, so schedule your next conversation at the end of each meeting. Keep the relationship a priority and ask your mentee to do the same.

How to Relate

- Ask about the mentee's NIU experience.
- Share what you might have done differently if you were a student again.
- Refer to the “Suggested Mentoring Activities” on the following page for some ideas of what to do together or talk about.

Suggested Mentoring Activities

You and your mentee may decide what you want to work on together from the onset. But, if you need some ideas about what to do with your mentee, the following list is a great place to start.

Career Conversations

- Discuss your educational background and the role of educational preparation in your field
- Share information about a current event or issue in your field
- Schedule a shadow visit, if appropriate

Job Search Process

- Critique the mentee's resume and/or cover letter
- Lead your mentee through a mock interview
- Offer guidance about where to look for jobs/internships in your field

Graduate School Consultations

- Share what you learned about navigating your graduate studies
- Discuss how you worked with your advisors
- Tell the mentee how you prepared for your transition from school to the professional world

Tell Your Story

- Share how you have balanced personal life and career
- Discuss what you would have done differently at NIU if you had to do it over
- Talk about how you have dealt with personal or professional challenges

Networking Pursuits

- Introduce your mentee to colleagues or other contacts
- Attend a professional association meeting or conference together
- Teach your mentee how to conduct an informational interview

“The most rewarding aspects of having a mentor have been his advice and critique of my resume, answering lots of questions, talking about internship searching and giving me advice about what classes to take.”

Thank You, NIU Student-Alumni Mentors!

We want to extend our deepest gratitude for your participation in the NIU Student-Alumni Mentoring Program. This program would not be possible without your commitment to NIU and your willingness to share your life and experience.

This guide will evolve with the NIU Student-Alumni Mentoring Program. As we work together throughout this year, we welcome your suggestions for improving our written materials as well as our program. Your participation in this process will help the NIU Student-Alumni Mentoring Program become a best practice model for NIU and other universities.

Contact Us

If you have any questions, please contact us at alumnimentoring@niu.edu or 815-753-1452.

“It’s been great being able to share my personal experiences as well as hear about student life and how much things have changed on campus. I really enjoy providing perspective and helping as much as possible by providing information and knowledge about my life after NIU.”

In preparing this mentoring guide, we have used material from sister institutions. We particularly acknowledge using material from the “Stanford University Mentoring Guide” and the University of Minnesota Alumni Association Mentoring Handbook.

Appendix A: Goals

Agree on goals: What do you hope to gain from the relationship?

What are the mentee's goals for this mentoring relationship? Is there any clarification needed?

What are the mentor's goals for this mentoring relationship?

What actions can you and your mentee take to achieve these goals? See Appendices B and C for goal-setting resources.

Values Clarification: The purpose of Values Clarification is to assist you in making the choices necessary to achieve your goals and dreams. When you are clear in your values, your day-to-day choices and life's work will become much more meaningful. You will spend less time on activities that take you further away from achieving your goals. In turn, you will spend more time on activities that bring you closer to having the life you want.

What results in life are essential for you to see yourself as a success? (be specific)

Describe the career of your dreams.

Describe the qualities and characteristics of the relationships you have or plan to develop (be certain to list qualities such as honest, fun, hard-working, etc.)

Describe your "best" future self.

Describe your ideal home/living environment.

What inspires you?

What do you dream or daydream about?

At the end of your life, what would you like people to say about you?

Appendix B: Goal Setting

Purpose of Goal Setting

Setting goals helps people strive to achieve. Although goal setting may be challenging, it is worthwhile.

The intention is to increase efficiency and effectiveness by specifying desired outcomes. Hellriegel, Slocu, and Woodman & Martens (1992) find goals to be important because they:

- Guide and direct behavior
- Provide clarity
- Reflect what the goal setters consider important
- Help improve performance
- Increase the motivation to succeed
- Instill pride and satisfaction in achievements
- Provide challenges and standards
- Bolster self-confidence and decrease negative attitude

SMART Goal-setting Model

The SMART guidelines can facilitate setting effective goals in traveling the road to success.

SMART means:

Specific: A goal of “graduating from college” is too general. Specify how this will be accomplished, e.g. “study more in order to receive better grades.”

Measurable: Establish criteria for how to achieve a goal. Measurable does not refer to a timeline; it means determining a way to measure your success in completing the long-range goal.

Action-oriented: Be proactive in taking action that will result in reaching the desired goal.

Realistic: Strive for attainable goals; consider the resources and constraints relative to the situation.

Timely: Allow reasonable time to complete each goal, but not so much time that you lose focus or motivation.

Appendix C: Goal Setting Worksheet

First, discuss the mentor's background. Then, discuss the student's major coursework and work experience to date.

Next, the mentee can indicate their level of interest in the following activities. Rate interest level as low (L), medium (M), or high (H).

Gain insight into mentor's academic experience	H	M	L
Introduction to colleagues or contacts	H	M	L
Attend a professional meeting or program with mentor	H	M	L
Critique mentee's resume/portfolio/CV	H	M	L
Develop interviewing or informational interview skills	H	M	L
Discuss how personal and professional life can fit together	H	M	L
Review of mentor's resume/CV	H	M	L
Process the decision to attend graduate school	H	M	L
Guidance on how to seek a job/internship in the field	H	M	L
Discuss how the mentor navigated graduate school/worked with advisors	H	M	L
Shadow mentor at workplace	H	M	L
Discuss working in academia vs. industry	H	M	L
Other _____	H	M	L

After completing the above, discuss ways that the mentor might be able to help the mentee with items rated high or medium interest.

Using the SMART model, determine two short-term goals and one long-term goal that the mentee wants to work on.