

## Tips for Student Mentees: How to Find a Mentor

Most often, mentoring relationships develop organically out of previously-established interpersonal relationships (think: a professor you visit regularly for office hours or an older peer within a student organization with whom you interact frequently). But it is also possible to seek out a formal mentoring relationship. Before you do, spend some time thinking about the skills, knowledge, and abilities that you are looking for in a mentor. Following are some criteria to consider:

- **Age** – Is it important for your mentor to be close to you in age, early career, or a more seasoned professional? The answer to this question will very much depend on your goals for the relationship. For example, if your goals are related to developing a personal network at Wake Forest, it may be more appropriate for you to seek out a peer mentor. On the other hand, if your goals are related to your future career goals, it may be more appropriate for you to seek out someone who is in the early stages of his career or a seasoned professional as a mentor.
- **Common Interests** – Is it important that your mentor like all of the same things that you do, such as sports, music, books, travel, or academic pursuits? Sometimes having common interests is a good way to build rapport in a new relationship as it provides some immediate topics of conversation and a stable of activities to pursue together. However, a mentor who has different interests than your own gives you the opportunity to develop new interests and to explore topics and events that you may not otherwise have been exposed to previously.
- **Experiences** – What types of experiences do you want your mentor to have had? For example, is it important that your mentor went to Wake Forest? Is it important that your mentor is or was a member of the same social organization that you are? Is it important that your mentor is well-traveled? Is it important that your mentor belongs to certain professional organizations?
- **Gender/Race** – Is it important for your mentor to be the same gender or race as you, or is it important for your mentor to be of a different gender or race? Similarities in these areas can provide the perspective of “someone like me” who may have experienced similar issues, challenges, and opportunities. Differences in these areas, on the other hand, can provide a valuable diversity of perspectives and may open your eyes to different views of the world.
- **Personality Traits** – You may decide that you are looking for a particular “type” of person as your mentor. For example, the following are some personality traits you might decide are important for a mentor to possess: friendliness, detail-oriented, goal-oriented, entrepreneurial, a “people person,” a “go-getter.” Some of these traits will become evident when you talk to your potential mentor, and some you can find out by talking to other people. Ask your friends, “What’s this person like?”
- **Recommendations from Others** – How important is it that other people recommend this person as a mentor? Sometimes this is the best way to find a mentor; ask your peers, professors, or others who they would recommend as a mentor for you. And ask them why; their reasons for recommending someone may provide you with valuable insight into areas of growth for you.
- **Willingness to Mentor Me** – Do not overlook this important criteria! Mentoring is a relationship that is built over time. If a mentor simply is not interested, or not willing to make that commitment to you, then you *do not* want that person as a mentor. Do not try to force a relationship where one should not be. This may be the *most* important criteria on the list: someone who is willing and interested in supporting your growth and development.

After you have created a list of criteria, think about whom you already know who might serve as a potential mentor. Is there a faculty or staff person with whom you have built a connection? Perhaps another student has provided you with effective guidance and advice in the past. Or, you may have gotten to know individuals outside of the University, so-called “adult fans” who have shown an interest in you and your development. Make a list of these individuals and compare them to your list of criteria. Does anyone particularly stand out?

Bear in mind, not everyone is going to be a “match” on every one of your desired criteria. Again, **the most important qualification of a mentor is someone who has the time, the interest, and the willingness to build a mentoring relationship with you.**

You might use a chart like the one below to determine the criteria that is most important to you and brainstorm potential mentors or [mentoring programs](#) that might be a good fit for you. Then, cross-reference your desired criteria with potential mentor/program options.

	<b>Potential Mentor Name 1:</b>	<b>Potential Mentor Name 2:</b>	<b>Potential Mentor Name 3:</b>	<b>Potential Mentor Name 4</b>
<b>Age:</b>				
<b>Common Interests:</b>				
<b>Experiences:</b>				
<b>Gender/Race Preference:</b>				
<b>Personality Traits:</b>				
<b>Others?</b>				
<b>Willingness to Mentor Me</b>				

After you have narrowed your list of potential mentors, it is important to reach out and to assess the other person’s interest. Talk about your goals and explain why you want to be in a mentoring relationship. Express your interest and the qualities that you are looking for in a mentor, and then ask the person if they would be interested and willing and would have the time to serve as your mentor.

If the answer is no, thank the potential mentor for his candor, and move on to the next person on the list. He is not saying no because he does not like you, but because he does not feel that he has the time or ability to commit to this relationship. If the answer is yes, then it’s time to enter the beginning phase of the mentoring relationship.