

# **Mentor Handbook**

## **Student Mentorship Program**

July 2013

### **Introduction**

Although Student Mentorship Program (SMP) has undergone various changes over the initial years, one thing that has remained consistent is the emphasis on mentoring. Mentoring is at the heart of SMP. The team of mentors has large number of people who have different kinds of roles and responsibilities in IIT and outside. While we may differ in our work and duties, the one role, responsibility and commitment that all of us share is to serve as mentors to first year students. This mentor handbook is designed to give mentors a better idea about mentoring.

The idea behind this document is to make the reader aware of some of the conventional modus operandi of mentoring. Nowhere do we claim that the code of conduct laid down in the same is 'THE' perfect way to go about it. There are variations in this common law, so to speak, which one learns with experience. And this learning is entirely up to you. But still, we intend to make certain basic tenets of mentorship, that we have gained through our past experiences with mentoring, are passed on to you, in a clear and distilled manner, so that you are able to grasp and implement them as you go down the road of mentoring.

## Who is a Mentor?

- A knowledgeable and experienced guide who teaches (and learns) through a commitment to the mutual growth of both mentee and mentor.
- A caring, thoughtful, and humane facilitator who provides access to people, places, experiences, and resources outside the mentee’s routine environment.
- A trusted ally, or advocate, who works with (not for) the mentee and on behalf of the mentee’s best interests and goals.

**Whatever role the mentor may take, his principal goal is to invite and nurture the “total autonomy, freedom, and development of those he mentors.”**

## Dos & Don’ts

There is a very fine line when you are dealing with something as delicate as mentoring. In order to highlight the same, here are some analogies to make the subtleties crystal clear in your minds.

EFFECTIVE	INEFFECTIVE
<b>Advisor</b> Sounding board, facilitator	<b>Rescuer</b> Problem fixer, assumes responsibility
<b>Protector</b> Supports, is a safety net	<b>Bodyguard</b> Fights mentee’s battles, overprotective
<b>Coach</b> Provides structure, gives feedback and direction	<b>Svengali</b> Dictates, controls learning
<b>Diamond Cutter</b> Suggests, polishes rough edges	<b>Mechanic</b> Wants a quick-fix, insensitive to self-esteem
<b>Broker</b> Identifies resources, develops	<b>Buck passer</b> Abdicates, doesn’t follow-up
<b>Challenger</b> Positively provokes, pushes toward highest standards	<b>Adversary</b> Pushes too far too soon, always plays devil’s advocate
<b>Clarifier</b> Teaches professional values	<b>Minesweeper</b> Removes obstacles so mentee doesn’t have to deal with them
<b>Affirmer</b> Gives needed support, enhances self-esteem	<b>Smother</b> Gives too much feedback, discounts mentee’s feelings or concerns

## Effective Skills

- **Know How to listen** - Fully participate in a conversation by being an active listener and utilizing some simple counseling skills such as reflecting, encouraging and asking questions. Be aware of how your body language can affect a conversation.
- **Observe** – Try to understand what the mentee is actually saying: how they are thinking and approaching the topic, instead of focusing on how you are perceiving the conversation. Be aware of how the mentee is presenting the message or ideas through his/her body language and unspoken words.
- **Communicate** - Be very clear in your presentation of facts and opinions. Communicate with them in ways that they will understand. Exemplify things to bring about clarity of thought.
- **Ask open-ended questions** – Avoid asking a question with an objective Yes/No answer, which limits the scope of conversation. For example, compare two questions:
  1. “Are you studying for the minors?”; Possible Answer: Yes/No.
  2. “How is your preparation for your minors going?” Possible Answer: State + Reason(s)  
A descriptive answer is more revealing, and hence, more helpful.
- **Attend and respond to both issue & response (behavioral trends)** - Often there are two things going on at once – there is an issue, and the person develops some kind of response to that issue. Consider this: “I’m so mad about my MAL test!”  
Possible Issue: Performance in the test; Response: A feeling of anger  
So, don’t only cater to the issue of improvement in his/her performance, but also his ability to handle such crisis situations.
- **Facilitate but don’t spoon-feed** - It’s easy to want to try to solve things for people, but that’s not really as helpful as it might seem. Focus on showing him the right approach to a problem, rather than leading him to the solution.
- **Know your resources** - You are not a trained counselor. Don’t expect yourself to be. But know your resources (Mentorship Committee, Counselor, Course Advisor, Dean of Students Office, etc.) and help people make use of those individuals and services. It’s OK to say, “I don’t know” as long as you get the information for the person.  
Statements such as “I am certainly willing to help you with your academic work but feel I am perhaps not the best person to assist you with these difficulties”, “I’m sure it is in your best interests to get this kind of help from someone who has more experience in this situation. I can only guess at ways of handling it”, “Talking to someone at SCS may help you solve this problem” can be helpful

## **Inter-Personnel Skill Set**

- **Availability** – Be present. Literally. Lend a personal touch. You can either cut a phone and message the guy or you can pick up and apologize for being busy. Makes a difference in the perception.
- **Taking Initiatives** – It's not always the case where mentees are open and forthcoming with their problems. Especially in the beginning, it is your mandate to take so that extra mile to make and maintain contact.
- **Self-disclosure** - Use it as long as it's helpful to the person and not just a story. "I was in a similar situation and I did this which helped," vs. "I was in that situation, too, and it sucked and no one helped me and blah, blah, blah." How helpful was that? Not at all!
- **Being an example** – Your mentees will observe you closely. Your role is one responsibility; make good decisions in what you say and how you act when you're interacting with them. Always remember that whether or not you are actively participating in a mentoring activity at the moment, you are constantly representing the program as a whole.
- **Confidentiality** - A bond of trust is formed when a student comes to share something with you. It is important that you give them your attention and ensure them that what they tell you is kept in confidence. If a student discusses with you a situation that could result in self-harm or harm to others, it is your responsibility to report that information immediately to the appropriate persons.
- **Feedback** - Show tolerance for mistakes and give feedback that is clear, concise, constructive and which also builds confidence. Have the patience to realize that adapting to college lifestyle and the academic requirements takes time.
- **Forget your personal bias** – While giving any advice to mentee regarding different opportunities and programs on campus, try to give unbiased opinions. Think about something you are involved in or something you did that has helped to shape your experiences. Think about how you found out about this opportunity. Now think about what would have happened if someone had discouraged you from taking this opportunity - what might have you missed out on? Each mentee is an individual, and although something may not have been a topic of interest for us, do not discourage your mentees from experiencing new opportunities based on your personal bias.
- **Be genuine in your efforts to build relationships** - Although it can be awkward at first, reach out to your mentees. Be genuine in your efforts in getting to know them. Mentees will have a hard time trusting you as a mentor if they do not feel a real connection.

## Healthy Practices

- Establish a positive, personal relationship with your mentee(s).
  - Avoid acting as if you were nothing more than a professional service provider “I’m here to do my job as a mentor. I’m not here to be your friend!” Make a proactive effort to act as a guide, a “coach,” and an ally and advocate.
  - Trust and respect must be established because you do not have to be best to their problem, they just need someone to listen and provide support in order to figure it out.
- Help your mentee(s) to develop life skills (FUNDAE).
  - When and where appropriate, emphasize life-management skills, such as decision-making, goal setting, time management, dealing with conflict, values clarification, and skills for coping with stress and fear.
  - Everyone holds particular preconceptions and stereotypes about one’s own interests. Take special care that you are not (intentionally or unintentionally) promoting your own views and values at the expense of your mentees’ viewpoints.
- Assist mentee(s) in accessing academic resources and other relevant information.
  - If your mentee(s) needs some help with academics, assist him/her in learning how to access and use available resources e.g. tell him how to use google to learn something, if extra classes are available in that course, motivate him to go there.
  - If there is some serious issue, get in touch with Mentorship Committee (MRC).
- Keep a track of your mentee(s) performance.
  - Be informed about the mentee’s preparation about an activity, say minor exams in a comprehensive manner. Know his weak points in terms of preparedness, and have a gist of his subject wise knowledge and preparation plans.
  - Know your mentee’s result. That does not mean that you should note down his marks and memorize them. But know the important parts like sudden decrements or increments and how to reduce or encourage them through your feedback.
- Attend Mentor Training Programs and respond to MRC mails in time
  - Mentor trainings will be designed such that you learn, both from the MRC, as well as your fellow mentors, who will bring diverse experiences to the table.
  - Correspondence with MRC and its group activities, not only help in keeping track of the current activities, it also helps in enhancement of learning through fellow ideators.

## **Initial Interactions**

You should make a sincere effort to communicate with your mentees with an open heart and an open mind. But having an open heart and open mind does not guarantee that your mentee will return your good intentions with the same feelings or with gratitude. Some important things that should be done are -

- Give your contact details to the mentees and get them to write your details.
- Take their contact details and keep a safe record.
- Tell them about yourself and some of your good experiences at IITD.
- Ask them about their school/coaching institute experiences to get a friendly atmosphere.
- Let them know that they can approach you on campus anytime convenient to both of you. If possible, decide a common time for regular meetings.

You will find that it's a lot easier to mentor some students than others. There will be differences in personality, attitudes and values. Sometimes these differences will be obstacles and will seem to get in the way in connecting with a student. But it's vital to remember that just as often, these differences will be an opportunity to learn about others and about you.

## **Getting to Know Your Mentees**

As you progress throughout the semester, use a variety of methods and activities to get to know your mentees and build relationships with them. A few ideas on fun (and often free) things to do with mentees:

- Choose a guest lecture or a seminar on some good topic and ask your mentees if they are interested in attending that with you.
- Take them to some good place around the college like Hauz Khas lake, Qutub Minar etc.
- Dance/play events are put on all the time all over campus, but it can be boring to go see one alone.
- Do community events together. It's an excellent way to build a closer relationship as well as help others. Contact the NSS executives for opportunities.
- Have a movie night in one of the hostel's common areas.
- Just bring board games for an old - fashioned game night.
- Talk to other mentors about what they are doing with their mentees, and plan to do things together.

## **Referring a Student to the Counselling Services**

**The most important thing to remember in any situation is that you're not a counselor. Know your limits; sometimes the best way you can help others is by referring them to someone else with more experience.**

Student mentors may, at times, recognize students who are in distress and struggling with personal and/or academic issues. Some mentees may approach you directly or you may notice that he/she is not as engaged in the mentoring program and college life as they were initially. It is appropriate in these cases to refer the student to see the Counsellor.

The Counselling Service provides voluntary, confidential, free, brief counseling for a variety of issues, including: decision-making, academic concerns, motivation, phase of life transition, family issues, socializing, relationships, sexuality, stress, anxiety, drug and alcohol use, bereavement, traumatic events, depression, mental health concerns and other concerns of a personal nature.

The suggestion to an individual to seek alternative help must be made in the context of your concern for the person's well-being. Remember that when a person is feeling discouraged, distressed or helpless what they want most is to feel understood and accepted. The first step is to acknowledge their concerns and normalize appropriate help seeking behavior- "I have found (or my friend has found)...helpful in this situation". Encourage them to go to see the Student Counsellor, using such language as; "Talking to a Student Counsellor may help you solve this problem".

### **FAQs**

- **How should I initiate contact with students, and how often?**

You are matched with a specific group of students. You can call them to ask when and if they would like to meet. At the first meeting you can discuss how often they would like to meet with you. You may suggest once a week, twice a month, etc. We encourage all mentors to check in with their students at least once in two weeks.

- **What type of advice should I be prepared to give to students?**

Students tend to ask about the difficulty levels of different courses, steps to get some clerical work done, extra activities to get involved in(perhaps things you might have done differently), how to deal with professors, etc. You may also be asked about the more personal side of the college experience, like how to manage stress, cope with problems related to hostels, balance other activities with academics, etc.

- **What do I do if the person I'm mentoring says that they think they are not able to cope up with things?**

Ask why! If it is something you or your friend has been through before, talk about your experience. Find out if it is actually related to academics or hostels, or if they are having emotional difficulty. In the latter case, a referral to counseling services may be the most appropriate response you can make.

- **What should I do if I find that I may not be the best mentor for an assigned mentee?**

If you feel as if you just don't click with a mentee, discuss the situation with a member from Mentorship Committee (MRC). Hopefully, you will get some idea as to who might better serve the student.

- **What type of support network is available if I find that I am being asked questions for which I don't have ready answers?**

If you find yourself confronted with issues beyond your time demands or expertise, whether personal or professional, you can always come to Mentorship Committee (MRC). For common department related issues, you can talk to your fellow mentors. For issues of a more personal nature, such as depression and anxiety, Mrs. Roopa Murghai in Student Counselling Services (SCS) is a great resource.

- **Where do I go for advice as a Mentor?**

Every mentor will attend Mentor Training Sessions organized by Mentorship Committee (MRC) which addresses the common issues that may arise and how to handle these situations. You will of course encounter some issues which fall outside the scope of training program. If you need advice on any such issue, feel free to contact the MRC.

- **For how long will I be expected to mentor?**

Officially a student mentor is assigned for one academic year. But this will undoubtedly vary among the students. You might stick with some mentees for their entire graduate career, while others might not ask for mentoring advice after their first year. But on a more practical note, a mentorship almost always results in a lasting friendship.



## **Note**

Mentoring does not necessarily mean that you must spend huge amounts of time with your mentee. What mentoring does mean is that you make every effort to ensure that every contact that you have with your mentees counts — that every interaction matters. It's the quality, not necessarily the quantity, of time that you spend with them.

We hope that you will welcome this challenge with the same kind of excitement, energy, maturity, and dedication that first brought you to SMP. As a Mentor, you now have the opportunity to carry on the legacy of SMP and to pass this legacy on to the next generation of students.