

**Diverse Populations, Information, & Library Education:
A Guide to Successful Mentoring Relationships**



**University of Maryland
College of Information Studies**

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	1
Introduction	2
Purpose of this Guide.....	4
Mentoring Matching Process.....	5
Mentor Characteristics	6
Mentor Responsibilities	8
Mentee Characteristics.....	10
Mentee Responsibilities	13
Mentoring Activities	14
Resources Used to Create this Guide	16
Project Principal Investigators	17
Participating Mentoring Organizations.....	18

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Introduction

To meet the needs of a truly multicultural society, librarians need to be culturally aware of and prepared to provide inclusive information services for populations that are diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, ability, language, literacy, socio-economic background, education, national origin, and other factors. It is imperative that library and information schools prepare future librarians who are ready to design, develop, provide, and integrate information services, resources, outreach, and technologies that serve members of a variety of populations. The Diverse Populations, Information, & Library Education program was created to bridge knowledge gaps related to diversity for students enrolled in the Library and Information Studies (LIS) program in the College of Information Studies at University of Maryland.

Students enrolled in this unique program will earn Master's degrees in Library Science with a concentration in Information and Diverse Populations. Upon completion of their studies, it is expected that students will be prepared to:

- Serve as culturally aware information professionals who are prepared to work with populations that are diverse in terms of gender, ability, language, literacy, socio-economic background, age and other factors;
- Understand the issues related to providing inclusive information services to different populations in a range of settings;
- Anticipate challenges in providing inclusive information services;
- Identify best practices in inclusive information services;
- Analyze how best to design, develop, and provide information services, resources and technologies that serve diverse populations;

- Integrate inclusive information practices with other practices of an information organization;
- Conduct research about information and diverse populations; and
- Understand the ethical responsibilities of information professionals as they relate to service to diverse populations.

Purpose of this Guide

The Guide to Successful Mentoring Relationships is designed to assist student participants (mentees) and the professionals (mentors) who will advise them in planning and implementing suggested mentoring activities. Specifically, this document will:

- Describe the mentoring matching process;
- Describe the roles of mentors and mentees;
- Define characteristics necessary for a positive mentoring relationship; and
- Explain activities that will be completed over the course of the mentoring process.

Mentoring Matching Process

Mentees were placed with specific mentoring organizations through the process illustrated below.



Mentor Characteristics

Mentors for the Diverse Populations, Information, & Library Education program are called upon to serve as role models and advisors for students enrolled in the program. In light of this, there are certain characteristics that are helpful for fostering a positive and productive relationship with your student mentee. Mentors should be:

1. *Proactive about helping the mentee to feel comfortable at the site.*

Because mentees are, essentially, visitors at the partner institution, they may be hesitant to express concerns or anxieties; mentors can be most helpful in sharing background information about the site early in the mentoring relationship that will educate the mentee on the history, culture, and services offered at the site

2. *Professional and approachable.*

Mentors should possess a demeanor that projects knowledge and confidence as well as a willingness to openly share this knowledge with the mentee.

3. *Willing to answer questions.*

Mentees will likely seek answers to a variety of questions and may also need instruction about how to conduct specific tasks. Mentors must be capable of patiently fielding these inquiries, answering questions (or finding answers and relaying the information), and determining if additional questions may exist.

4. *Willing to listen.*

While mentors are called upon to be useful resources who answer myriad questions, they must also be able to note when it is appropriate to simply act as a sounding board for the mentee's concerns or frustrations.

5. *Able to provide constructive feedback.*

Mentors must be willing to observe their mentee's behaviors and share information that will assist in the individual's professional growth. A mentor must have the ability to notice and comment upon positive traits that should be encouraged and negative traits that need to be improved upon.

6. *Role models.*

Mentors are expected to consistently model behaviors that are ethically and professionally sound that mentees may emulate when they enter into the career field.

Mentor Responsibilities

Library and information studies mentoring programs have a threefold aim of (1) supporting professional development, (2) assisting future information professionals in becoming familiar with programs and services within information organizations, and (3) opening the channels of communication between information specialists at different levels. Mentors who participate in the Diverse Populations, Information and Library Education program are committing to professional service activities that will benefit both the students with whom they come into contact and themselves. Mentor responsibilities include:

- Meeting at least once per month with their mentee (ideally, these meetings should take place in a face to face setting but may take place virtually through the Blackboard¹ site dedicated to the program);
- Maintaining records of activities or discussion notes for meetings with the mentee;
- Assisting the mentee in creating and articulating concrete objectives and activities related to the mentoring process;
- Assisting the mentee with understanding policies and procedures related to professional methods of information provision in general and the institution or organization specifically.
- Encouraging the mentee to reflect on his/her experiences and perception of knowledge gained through the program of study and mentoring activities.
- Sharing information about best practices for creating programs and services that are inclusive of a variety of cultures who access information organizations;

¹ Blackboard is an online learning management system that provides platforms for users to interact via multiple means. It is accessed at: <http://www.towson.edu/blackboard/>.

- Keeping channels of communication open between themselves and their assigned mentee;
- Providing constructive feedback to mentees on topics related to the mentee's development as an information specialist;
- Exposing mentees to strategies and opportunities for networking with other information professionals;
- Using feedback from mentees to evaluate and potentially alter their mentoring style.

Mentee Characteristics

Mentees have a main goal to learn about service provision to diverse information seekers. There are several characteristics that mentees should possess or strive to develop during the course of mentoring activities in order to maximize the opportunity to be mentored by individuals in the respective mentoring organizations. Mentees should be:

1. *Motivated and eager to learn.*

Mentees must exhibit a sincere desire to learn from the person selected as the mentor. Mentees should be proactive and take initiative to foster a working relationship with the mentor that will lead to achieving goals.

2. *Cognizant of time.*

Mentees must be aware and respectful of the time their mentors are devoting to helping them develop professional competence. The senior professional with whom they are placed likely has many demands on their time. Thus, it is important that mentees make extra efforts to arrive at scheduled appointments by or before the agreed upon meeting time. Mentees must also be willing to alter meeting times if the mentor's schedule changes unexpectedly.

3. *Able and willing to accept critique.*

The mentoring process necessarily involves mentors providing constructive feedback to mentees. Mentees must be able to receive this feedback without becoming defensive and use the information given to them in order to improve.

4. *Sincerely interested in being mentored.*

Your mentor will ask questions about your personal and professional life in an effort to get to know you as a whole person; do the same with your mentor. He or she also has a life outside of the institution and knowing something about it will likely result in increased positive communication.

5. *Respectful of the mentor.*

Mentors have been selected to help mentees better understand various aspects of building a career in information services. It is necessary that mentees show extreme respect in all interactions with mentors. Doing so conveys a sense of gratitude for the time and effort the mentor is committing to creating a pathway to success.

6. *Comfortable posing challenges to mentors.*

The mentor process should be considered an active rather than passive process. Thus, mentees should be willing to share concerns with their mentors. In the event that additional explanation or clarification is needed, mentees should approach their mentor with concerns and questions. Be proactive rather than reactive.

9. *Patient throughout the mentoring process.*

Time and effort are necessary requisites in a mentoring relationship. Mentees must persevere through any difficulties that arise during the learning process. A solid mentoring relationship takes time and effort by all involved in order to fully develop.

10. *Willing to take risks.*

Mentees should readily move beyond tasks that have been mastered and accept new and more challenging experiences. To do this, mentees must engage in perpetual self-assessment and seek out ways to acquire new skills.

Mentee Responsibilities

Mentees in the Diverse Populations, Information and Library Education program will have opportunities to interact with professionals in various information-provision organizations. In order to obtain the maximum benefit from interactions with mentors, mentees must commit to:

- Meeting at least once per month with their assigned mentor (ideally, these meetings should take place in a face to face setting but may take place virtually through the Blackboard site dedicated to the program);
- Keep records of activities or discussion notes for completed meetings with mentor;
- Articulating concrete objectives. Mentees must first create a vision of an ideal mentoring relationship then be willing to discuss and modify that vision with their assigned mentor;
- Participating in monthly activities (called mentoring circles) that bring all mentees together in a discussion and activity forum.
- Sharing the mentoring experience. Mentees are expected to draw upon their experiences to that they are able to serve as mentors in the future. In preparation for future mentorship, mentees are encouraged to use social media tools (such as Twitter, Facebook, and blogging sites) to describe the benefits and challenges of the mentoring process. Virtual sharing methods are intended to be descriptive and instructive about mentoring activities in general as opposed to negative and critical of specific individuals or organizations.

Mentoring Activities

Mentor/Mentee Interactions

Mentor/mentee teams are expected to meet face to face at least once per month at the mentor's work setting. The length of each meeting is determined by the mentor/mentee and based upon both individuals' schedules. The face to face meetings allow mentors from partner libraries to engage in informal discussions related to providing diverse services to underrepresented populations. These meetings also provide opportunities for formal discussions about various aspects of the overall operation of the institutions or organization.

Mentors and mentees may also communicate using a Web based method. To facilitate this, a collaboration area will be created using Blackboard. Mentors and mentees will have the ability to interact at any time by using the asynchronous discussion boards, synchronous chat rooms, and messaging functions offered through Blackboard. This hybrid form of mentoring allows the frequency and regularity of interaction to be increased and maintained.

Mentoring Circles

Mentees will participate in monthly group activities called mentoring circles which will bring together project principal investigators, mentees, and guest speakers (these individuals may be mentors or other distinguished speakers who work with diverse populations or experts in mentoring). Mentoring circles will be held in the College of Information Studies at the University of Maryland on the first Wednesday of every month from 12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. All sessions will be brownbag lunch meetings that follow a similar format. First, a guest speaker will present information related to a predetermined aspect of the mentoring process including challenges and opportunities related to

service provision to patrons from diverse backgrounds. Second, mentees will interact in small groups that will include one member of the project staff or a mentor. These small group interactions are intended to facilitate discussion about that day's presentation topic as well as allow participants to share various unique experiences that have taken place during mentoring activities.

Resources Used to Create this Guide

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