

U-M SCHOOL FOR ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

Formal Mentorship Program

Mentor Handbook
Fall 2025 - Winter 2026

Program Description

The purpose of the Formal Mentorship Program is to connect students with members of our alumni community and the Dean's External Advisory Board, who can coach them on career goals, advancement strategies, and networking. This program also aims to help students enhance their personal and professional skills. Research shows that students who had a mentor during their academic journey are more likely to thrive after college and excel in their careers.

Interested 2nd-year Master's students, 3rd-year Master's students, PhD students, and first-generation college students are eligible to apply for this program. Mentors and mentees are matched by SEAS staff for 1-on-1 mentorship for the academic year. Staff work diligently to align students' professional interests with mentors who have experience in relevant fields. Students and mentors can connect through email, phone, video chat, in-person meetings (if possible), or whichever method is most convenient.

Program Goals for Mentors

- Engage with a current SEAS student and share your professional experiences.
- Build a supportive and encouraging mentor relationship.
- Support a student's personal and professional trajectory by offering guidance into achieving career goals.
- Provide insights into industry trends and job market expectations.
- Further grow your connection with the SEAS community.

Program Goals for Students

- Build a professional relationship with a member of the SEAS alumni community.
- Identify specific career goals and develop a plan to achieve them.
- Improve key professional skills such as networking, communication, and leadership.
- Seek advice on enhancing your resume, cover letter, and LinkedIn profile.
- Gain a better understanding of potential career paths in your field of interest, as well as explore alternative career paths and hear new perspectives about the environmental and sustainability field.

What Defines a Great Mentor?

A SEAS mentor guides and advises their mentee by sharing their own knowledge and expertise. A mentor will leverage their own experiences to help the mentee improve their professional and personal skills through thoughtful and effective coaching.

A great mentor will...

- Provide honest insight about the mentee's career field of interest
- Discuss topics candidly
- Remain encouraging throughout the process
- Be communicative and respond to their mentee's messages and questions in a timely manner

Mentors are **not expected** to be available for their mentee's at any time of day, offer a job, or initiate each conversation.

Program Components and Key Dates

- Early August: Student application opens
- Late August: Mentor and mentee pairing process handled by SEAS staff
- Early September: Program orientation for student mentees
- Early September: Mentor-mentee introductions are made by SEAS staff via email
- Early October: Deadline for initial meeting for mentors and mentees
- October - April: Mentors and mentees meet 4+ times from introduction to graduation (via phone, video chat, or in-person if possible).
- January: Mid-year check-in for mentors and mentees by SEAS staff
- May: End of year feedback survey

Sample Monthly Timeline of Mentee/Mentor Interaction

October

- Have an initial meeting (can be zoom, phone, or in-person) with your mentee. In this meeting, it is important to discuss expectations, goals, and communication preferences of the mentorship experience
- Learn about your mentee's background, experience and career goals
- Review and refinement of the mentee's resume
- Review your mentee's student groups, volunteering and other campus activities

November/December

- Work with your mentee to cultivate sources for informational interviewing
- Strategize about connecting with employers and alumni during winter break and early in the winter semester
- Discuss how to best take advantage of the SEAS in-person and virtual career fairs taking place during the winter term
- Work with your mentee to develop a networking strategy
- Discuss the timeframe of job postings for different career fields

January/February

- Share real world advice about what to expect after graduating and what you wish you knew at the time
- Develop job search timeline and strategies
- Discuss how to take full advantage of spring break by networking and interviewing with employers and alumni

March

- Conduct a mock interview with your mentee and provide feedback
- Discuss salary negotiation and what the mentee should expect in their sector of interest and location
- Talk about how you will continue to stay connected after the school year

Career Resources Available to Students through SEAS and U-M

- A “Career Services Coordinator” is assigned to each SEAS specialization/major via the [SEAS Career Services Office](#). These coordinators provide support related to job searching, employment data, resumes/cover letters, mental health resources, etc.
- Career Fairs:
 - [On Campus Green Career Fair: January 31, 2024](#) (organized by SEAS)
 - [Virtual Green Career Fair: February 21, 2024](#) (organized by SEAS)
 - [University-wide career fairs](#) (organized by University Career Center)
- [University Career Center](#)
 - A university-wide system that provides similar, but less specialized, guidance for students.
- The SEAS Student + Alumni Virtual Coffee Chat program take place Feb-March and are a great opportunity to develop multiple connections in short order.
- The annual Career Trek: an immersive two-day experience in a rotating city around the country (in 2024, it will be in Washington D.C.) where local alumni volunteer for panels on different industries, lead round tables, and participate in other networking events.

Initial Conversation

The initial conversation between the SEAS mentor and mentee is a great way to get to know each other and discuss what the mentee hopes to achieve throughout the year. Additionally, this is a great opportunity for both parties to exchange SEAS/SNRE/SNR stories and share their experiences during school.

Suggestions to help frame the initial conversation...

- Discuss expectations and goals for the year - utilize the monthly timeline as a framework for what should be accomplished and when
- Discuss communication preferences here forward
- Review the mentee's resume and provide feedback - give suggestions for clubs or memberships the mentee could be part of during their last year at SEAS
- Decide on the next meeting time and discuss topics of conversation for the next session

Resources if a Student needs Support for Personal Matters

- If a student is struggling with mental health issues, issues at their home, financial issues, etc., please direct them to the Nick King, SEAS Director of Student Development and Support Services: neking@umich.edu

Insight for Mentoring International Students

- *Navigating the Visa Process: What Should Students Know in Advance?*
 - The U.S. visa process is complex and approval isn't guaranteed. Students must maintain valid visa status by keeping it current and renewing or adjusting it before it expires.
 - They can apply for a new status while their current one is still valid.
 - Staying in status is essential for remaining in the U.S. legally, so careful planning is key.
- *Applying for Jobs as an International Student*
 - International students face a longer, more complex job search process and must adjust to a new culture, language, and academic environment.
 - Starting early—ideally the semester before graduation—is critical for success.
 - Applying broadly, even to hundreds of positions, increases the chances of finding opportunities.
 - While rejections are common, many employers do sponsor international candidates; persistence and a proactive approach are essential.

- *University Resources for International Students*
 - [Interstride](#), offers a platform rich with job postings tailored to international students. Handshake is another excellent tool; by optimizing your profile, you increase the chances of recruiters reaching out to you directly.
 - The [University Career Center](#) also provides comprehensive services, from resume building to interview preparation.
 - The [SEAS Career Services](#) and Development and Alumni Relations teams are vital resources—students can actively engage with these services and stay informed. While the process may require additional effort, it is achievable with persistence and determination.

List of Mentorship Strategies and Best Practices

- Have a clear understanding of your mentees goals for the program. They may need to give additional thought as to what they really need from you to help themselves grow.
- Conduct your conversations with energy and optimism.
- Once you have established a relationship, attempt to determine the professional strengths and weaknesses of your mentee. There may be some areas, outside of their stated goals, where they may need some help.
 - Example: after several meetings it becomes clear that a mentee has a concern about public speaking. Several options are then suggested that could strengthen this skill.
- Be aware of your mentee's general stress or anxiety levels as driven by coursework, deadlines, job searches, etc. Support and encouragement are important. Letting your mentee know that they are not alone in their concerns can be helpful.
- Use examples from your own professional experience regarding challenges or problems you have faced and how they were resolved. Sometimes your mentee may feel that they are the only one facing a particular problem, and when you share your experiences, it provides encouragement and strengthens the relationship.
- Come up with topics and activities to use as a starting point in conversations. For example:
 - Have your mentee devise a list of their personal priority attributes that they'd like to emphasize in their job search (i.e. take into consideration where they want

to be in 5 years, project areas they are interested in, skills they have/would like to have, and work locations)

- Help guide students in exploring what type of employers they would like to work with. By providing a list of potential employers, you may be able to help students explore careers that they had not previously considered.
 - For a helpful list of employers, [click here to view the 2022 SEAS employment report on our website.](#)
- Suggest to your mentee that they create a “project management” approach to their job searches, starting with a detailed timeline and key tasks.