

Mentoring "Tips" from your BSC Colleagues

Set regular meeting times to talk about progress and any issues related to the project.

Meet frequently—especially early on. As the student gains experience, you likely will be able to meet less frequently.

While electronic communication is a good way to handle minor questions and issues, it should not replace face-to-face meetings.

Find a place to meet that is not distracting and noisy. Varying the meeting location may be appropriate and if the student is conducting their research off-campus, a meeting at that location should be considered.

Define clear expectations. If course credit and/or a grade is being given, agree upon what will be required (written record of this agreement is best).

At the beginning, work with the student to design a project that best suits their interests. If they've already agreed to work with you they already know some topic choices, but both of you need to design a project that will draw on the students' desires (what do they want to do, and what do they want to get out of this by the end?).

Carefully consider whether or not it is appropriate to mentor a student that wants to conduct work outside your area of expertise. This may be very appropriate in some disciplines, but in other disciplines it may adversely impact the mentor's ability to move their research program forward. Pre-tenure faculty need to be especially aware of the potential pitfalls of this, especially if their department promotion and tenure expectations include advancement of their research.

Don't assume your student understands everything you are saying (even if they are nodding their heads). Try to probe their level of understanding without making them feel like you think they don't know anything.

In some disciplines, peer mentoring can be facilitated by establishing a "research group" in which student participants are a "team" under a single umbrella, but with each student conducting their own project. An ideal group would consist of students at different stages of their research.

Be encouraging at all times—even when they make mistakes. Try not to show your frustration when your student breaks an expensive piece of equipment, blows the experiment, or fails to complete a critical step in the process.

Be friendly and helpful but don't really be a friend. You need to remain the authority and expert, but still need to be approachable.

Let your student know when you will or will not be available. It is important to be responsive to your student's needs, but it is not necessary to be available all the time. If you have significant commitments scheduled during the time when you are mentoring a student, tell your student up-front so that they can decide whether or not you will sufficiently available to meet their needs.

At the end of the experience, focus on the positive outcomes and forget about the things that did not work out.

Remember to encourage and support your student to disseminate the results of their research/scholarly/creative project at meetings, conferences, design competitions, art exhibits, performances, etc.

Consider showcasing your students' results within your department and academic building by hanging student posters and photographs (including photographs taken when they were presenting their research and/or creative activity). This can also be an effective recruitment tool by showing uninitiated students what their possibilities may be.