Alumni Mentor Program
Guide for Mentees

Kansas State
College of Engineering
Choosing to participate in the College of Engineering Alumni Mentor Program is a great step toward career success. As with most things in life, you will get out of this professional mentorship what you put into it. This guide provides general guidelines for making the most of your experience with your mentor.

Congratulations!

The College of Engineering Alumni Mentor Program was established to help engineering alumni from K-State stay connected and facilitate student/alumni relations.

Mentor program contact:

Sujatha Prakash  
Program Coordinator  
785-532-3958  
coementor@k-state.edu

QUICK TIP #1  Be ready to work at the relationship.

Good mentoring relationships don’t just happen; they take work. It takes time and effort to get to know each other and build trust.
Connect with your mentor. Initiate contact with him or her at least once per month.

2. Respond to your mentor’s communications in a timely manner (typically within 24 hours, unless more or less urgency is indicated).

3. Set aside time in your schedule to meet with your mentor, and defer to his or her schedule whenever possible.

4. Use your mentor’s time well — be prepared for meetings and ask questions.

5. Thank your mentor often. This person is volunteering time to help you.

6. Contact Sujatha Prakash (coementor@k-state.edu or 785-532-3958) with questions or concerns.

General guidelines

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QUICK TIP #2 Be open-minded and willing to learn.

No matter who it is, your mentor has experience and expertise to share with you. You and your mentor may have a lot in common or very little. Regardless, if you remain open-minded and want to learn, you will grow and become a better professional as a result.
**How to get started**

**Step 1: Introduce yourself.**

Take a minute to introduce yourself to your mentor via email. Share why you decided to join the program and what you hope to gain from this experience.

**Step 2: Set expectations.**

In order to have a successful relationship, it’s important to clearly communicate your expectations. Mentees should express what they want to gain from working with their mentor. Define your preferred communication: in-person meetings, phone calls, video chats, emails? Discuss methods you will use and how often you want to communicate.

**Step 3: Schedule your first meeting.**

Your first meeting is an opportunity for you to get to know each other.

*Soon:* The sooner you can meet the better — within two to three weeks of your initial contact. *Method and Location:* A phone call or video chat is ideal. If you and your mentor choose to meet in person, choose a meeting site that is comfortable, neutral and in a public area — coffee shop, restaurant or in the Student Union are good options. *Get to know each other:* Mentors should share their professional and personal backgrounds. Mentees should be prepared to ask questions, listen and share their personal stories, too.

**Step 4: Set your second meeting.**

Always leave a meeting knowing when you plan to meet next.

If you have questions or concerns, you are encouraged to contact Sujatha Prakash at 785-532-3958 or coementor@k-state.edu for assistance.
Below are suggested questions to ask your mentor during your first meeting or over the course of a few meetings.

- For what company do you or did you most recently work and for how long?
- How large is the company, what type of product or service does it provide and what area/region does it serve?
- What is/was your role within the company?
- What are the major responsibilities of your current, or most recent, position?
- What does a typical day look like for you?
- What are the most satisfying aspects of your work?
- What are the most dissatisfying aspects of the work and is this typical of the field?
- What is one of the most challenging situations you have had to resolve in your work?
- What is the toughest decision you have had to make?
- Describe the culture of your workplace.
- What experiences or opportunities did you have in college or earlier in life that had the most significant impact on your life and/or career?

Quick Tip #3

Be forward-thinking.

Talk to your mentor about where you are presently but focus your energy on building for the future. Define your goals for the semester, year, graduation or early-career. In conversation with your mentor, determine the skills sets, knowledge and abilities you need to acquire in order to achieve these goals.
Talking points for future meetings

Read through the lists below to identify questions that appeal to you and use them as jumping-off points for further conversation.

1. Career exploration
   - ☐ How can I make use of internships to help decide my career path?
   - ☐ What did you like most/least about the different professional positions you have held over the course of your career?
   - ☐ Which career fields do you see growing and which do you see shrinking?
   - ☐ What are your goals and values, and how do they fit with the career path you have chosen?

2. Extracurricular involvement
   - ☐ What clubs might be helpful to my professional development?
   - ☐ How soon should I start seeking out leadership opportunities?

3. Applying for jobs
   - ☐ What is an effective format for organizing my resume?
   - ☐ How can I accentuate my best skills and experiences on my resume and cover letter?
   - ☐ How can I make my resume and cover letter stand out?

4. Interviewing skills
   - ☐ What are qualities you look for in candidates you’ve interviewed?
   - ☐ How does my body language affect someone else’s perception of me?
   - ☐ Would you share some examples of questions that are good to ask employers during an interview?
   - ☐ How do I sell my capabilities effectively during an interview?

5. Internship search
   - ☐ Which companies will give me the best chance to learn more about the industry?
   - ☐ What should I be doing now to make myself appealing to companies who hire interns?
   - ☐ What is expected of interns at your company?

6. Job search
   - ☐ What do you see as strong companies who treat their employees well and why?
   - ☐ What things should I be looking for in order to understand a company’s culture?
   - ☐ What should I take into consideration when evaluating a job offer?

QUICK TIP #4

Be honest and real.

Your mentor will be better able to help you if you are open and honest about who you are and what you want professionally and personally from your life. Talk about your background, current status, hopes, fears and goals for the future, as they relate to your career aspirations.
7. Networking/connecting with other professionals
☐ What are some good ways to start a conversation with a professional I have just met?
☐ What is the best way to follow up on a conversation I had with another professional or recruiter?
☐ What is an “elevator pitch?” How do I create one?
☐ How can I use a LinkedIn account effectively?

8. Communicating in a professional way
☐ How can I appear confident without seeming overconfident?
☐ Based on my communication with you thus far, how can I improve?
☐ In what situations is it appropriate to send an email, rather than giving a phone call or sending a letter/note?
☐ What are some typical communication mistakes you see new professionals make?
☐ What tips would you give me on using technology appropriately in the workplace?

9. Transitioning from school to career
☐ How can I prepare myself for transition from the classroom to the workplace? How do I set realistic expectations?
☐ What are the best ways to “hit the ground running” in my career?
☐ What are some ineffective habits for the workplace that I may have developed in the classroom?

10. Moving up the corporate ladder
☐ What are the best ways to distinguish myself from other employees?
☐ How should I approach my work if I hope to become an executive some day?

11. Starting a new business or venture
☐ What factors do I need to consider before investing in a new business or venture?
☐ How can I differentiate my business?
☐ What are the most effective ways to market a new business?

12. Personal life experiences
☐ Which challenging situations in your life have facilitated the largest personal growth?
☐ Would you share an example of when you feel you failed and how you moved forward after that experience?

13. Advice for continuing education
☐ What is the best way to study for the GMAT/GRE exam?
☐ Do you recommend attending graduate school? If so, when do you feel is the best time to take advantage of this?

QUICK TIP #5 Be proactive and take initiative.

Mentoring should be an active and engaging experience for both student and mentor. Even though you are a student, you should take the lead in the relationship. Make sure you are in frequent contact with your mentor and that you are initiating most of that contact. Let your mentor know when you need help. Ask questions. Follow through on items the two of you discuss.
14. General topics
☐ How can I continue to learn every day, even outside of the classroom?
☐ What books do you recommend I read, either for knowledge or leisure?
☐ What are some strategies you use to help with time management?
☐ What methods are best for me to distinguish myself in the workforce?
☐ What suggestions do you have for managing stress?

QUICK TIP #6 Be prepared for your meetings.

Think about the topics you would like to discuss with your mentor ahead of time, write them down and possibly even email them to your mentor in advance of your meeting. The more you prepare, the more you will get out of meetings with your mentor.

Dos and Don’ts

DO
• Ask questions when you are unsure.
• Put time and effort into working with your mentor.
• Expect your mentor to be honest with you.
• Share your own feedback and ask for regular feedback from your mentor.
• Challenge yourself by working to improve your skill sets in areas in which you feel less comfortable.
• Use your mentor to build your own professional network.
• Get the most you can out of this experience.
• Treat your mentor and this relationship like you would a supervisor and job — with respect and a sense of responsibility and commitment.

DON’T
• Expect your mentor to be an expert in everything.
• Think that having a mentor entitles you to an internship or job.
• Be afraid to make mistakes — this is a learning experience.
• Fall into the “I’m busy” trap — regardless of how busy or challenged you are at the moment, you can make the time to stay in communication with your mentor.
• Judge your mentor based on her/his company or job title.
• Let embarrassment or fear of criticism keep you from working with your mentor.
Building a great career takes time, effort and a steady progression toward your goals. Your mentor will be skillful in helping you to create and evaluate potential goals, as well as provide an extra source of support and accountability. Use the worksheet below to get started and then discuss these goals with your mentor.

List one career, academic or personal goal you have for each of the following time frames:

This semester –

This year –

Two to five years from now –

Determine whether your goals are SMART (see list below), and if not, modify them to make them more reasonable to achieve.


**Measurable** – Ask yourself: How much? How many? How will I know when it is accomplished?

**Action-Oriented** – Ask yourself: How can the goal be accomplished? What action should be taken?

**Realistic** – Ask yourself: Am I willing and able to work toward this goal?

**Timely** – Ask yourself: When? What can I do today? Six weeks from now? Six months from now?

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**QUICK TIP #7** Be a good listener.

It is your mentor’s job to give you honest feedback and advice, some of which will be positive and some of which will be constructive. Rather than ignoring your mentor’s criticism or constructive feedback, or letting it make you feel bad, listen to what your mentor has to say and consider how you can use that information to improve yourself. Regardless of whether you choose to take your mentor’s advice, listening to what your mentor has to share with you is important.
This manual was adapted and modified to meet the needs of the College of Engineering Alumni Mentor Program courtesy of the Kansas State University College of Business Executive Mentor Program.

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