Getting What You Need

Virginia Valian
Deputy Executive Officer, PhD Program in Psychology
Distinguished Professor
Hunter College and CUNY Graduate Center

What mentoring provides
• professionally useful information
• help accomplishing tasks and reaching goals
• psychosocial support
• advocacy

Different conceptions of mentoring (not all mutually exclusive)
• single mentor model – least advisable
• multiple (also called composite or mosaic) mentor – much better
• circle of advisors – even better
• workshops – organize them yourself

Circle of advisor model – call on different people for different needs
• no single person can provide all the information, constructive criticism, emotional support, and challenges that people need in order to become as effective as they can be in reaching their goals
• a circle of advisors changes as needs change; no one ever outgrows a need for advisors
• students can play an active role in determining what they need, given a possible menu
• students can work with their main advisor to think about who can fulfill their needs
• students can work with their main advisor to work out how to approach others who have useful information
• students can help and receive help from other students, friends, relatives, and so on

(Non-exhaustive) menu of student needs
• setting realistic goals and tracking progress
• developing a professional website
• setting strict privacy protections on social media
• composing a cover letter for independent study or internships
• approaching faculty for letters of recommendation
• anticipating problems and possible solutions
  • creating a go-to list for different problem types
• developing workshops for issues of general interest
• avoiding over- or underinvestment in any advisor
• analyzing one’s strengths and limitations
• developing sense of community
• working with individuals of different gender or ethnicity
• information about how higher education works
• constructive criticism of written work
• information about prizes, awards, fellowships, and other benefits you might be eligible for
• information about career trajectories
• suggestions for and information about further education (e.g., grad school) or training (e.g., helpful background course)
• speaking in public
• attending conferences
• performing research; working with a team
• sympathetic critiques of self-presentational style
• help with time-management and procrastination problems
• recommendation of specific courses of action for various problems
• challenges to do better
• reassurance that you can be successful when you doubt yourself
• information about how different people integrate work and personal lives
• help with personal problems (family, friends, money, love, substance abuse)
• advocacy
• allies for changes you would like to make