



Physics

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

# Physics Mentorship Program

Student Handbook

# Welcome

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the Physics Mentorship Program. As a participant, you will have the chance to get acquainted with established physics graduates and learn from their experiences in the workforce and academia. Take full advantage of this opportunity to explore your career options and make connections with successful physicists!

Your success in this program depends on you. Once we have matched you with a mentor, it will be your responsibility to initiate contacts with your mentor and to keep us informed of your progress. We look forward to hearing from you as the program progresses. If you have any questions or feedback, please let us know. We are happy to invite you to take part in this year's mentorship program and we wish you much success in the months to come.

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# Physics Mentorship Program Handbook for Students

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# Physics Mentorship Program

3rd and 4th year undergraduate students in Physics Major, Specialist and Joint Specialist programs at the University of Toronto St. George Campus are encouraged to join this valuable program as the advice and help of a mentor can be of great benefit as Physics students prepare to make their way into the working world or move into graduate work. Likewise, mentors have the chance to find out about the current crop of students, and discover more about the hottest and emerging research areas at the Department.



This handbook should help with ideas and scenarios for a successful mentoring experience. It will also help you to develop networking and communication skills that will be invaluable to you after graduation.

The handbook is organized into five sections. The first section is a preview of what happens before you contact your mentor. The second section outlines the crucial elements of corresponding and meeting with your mentor. The third section discusses things you should do after (or in between) meetings. Section four provides a helpful checklist to verify what you have learned in this handbook. Finally, the fifth section is an appendix of useful questions and tips to help you through the program.

Most students are nervous about initiating contact with their mentor. It can be overwhelming to make the initial connections but it is never as difficult as it seems at the time. Just remember that your mentor agreed to be matched with you and is looking forward to working with you. If you can do this, it will make it easier for you to take the initiative and let you get the most out of this mentorship experience.

Keep in mind, as well, that this is a unique opportunity to learn more about careers that may interest you. It also gives you a chance to learn what "real world" work or graduate school has to offer.

Please keep in mind that in addition to learning about a field you are interested in pursuing in your future career, this program is also meant to expose you to areas that you may not have yet

considered, but which you may find useful and educational. The opportunity is yours to encourage your mentor to share his/her knowledge with you. Who knows? Your mentor's expertise in a related field may spark your interest in a career that you had not previously considered or knew much about.

### **Program requirements for students**

Below are the necessary steps required for participation in the Mentorship Program.

Introductory e-mail to your mentor	Within two weeks of being notified of your mentor's name and e-mail address in <b>Late-September</b>
Attend launch reception A social event for this year's mentors and mentees	<b>October</b> <i>(will most likely held virtually this year)</i>
Ongoing meetings with your mentor	<b>October – March</b>
Attend Optional January Event	<b>January</b>
End of Year Event	<b>March</b>
Complete program evaluation survey	<b>April</b>

## **Section #1: Fundamentals**

### **On being a student mentee**

A relationship is not a relationship if it doesn't benefit everyone involved. This is true of all kinds of relationships, which includes mentoring relationships as well. Be considerate, then, of the following issues; some of what may seem informal to you may be very formal to your mentor.

**Meetings:** Between October and March, you are expected to participate in four meetings with your mentor. Of course, additional contacts will be necessary to arrange the meetings and to follow up afterwards (this is explained in further detail below). It is your responsibility to initiate contact in setting up these meetings, to know where and when the meeting is taking place, and to arrive punctually. If you are located in a different geographical location than your mentor, and face to face meetings are not possible, you may use online methods of communication such as Skype or email to connect with your mentor. *\* Due to COVID-19 all meetings can be virtual until face to face meetings are safe and possible again*

**Courtesy:** Your mentor is giving his/her personal time to participate in this program and should be appreciated as such. Mentors who participate do so on a voluntary basis, out of interest in you as students and out of their own generosity.

**Confidentiality:** You and your mentor are responsible for identifying and observing areas of confidentiality. Possible areas of confidentiality include personal and privileged industry information.

**Professionalism:** As the program progresses, you will become better acquainted with your mentor. This is a great thing, and we encourage you to feel comfortable speaking with and

interacting with your mentor; however, this comfort must always be tempered with appropriate standards of professionalism. That applies not only to communications, but also to your progress reports and to your feedback in the program evaluation survey at the end of the program.

**Dress Code:** If you are invited to meet with your mentor at his or her place of business, you are expected to dress in appropriate business attire unless otherwise arranged with mentors. If you are unsure of the dress code for a particular office, feel free to ask your mentor what is appropriate (that is part of what he/she is there for).

**Evaluation:** In the spring, you and your mentor will be asked to complete a short program evaluation to provide feedback and suggestions. Results will be used to improve the program for next year.

***Questions or concerns:***

The Mentorship Office takes an active interest in all mentor/student relationships. We are available to answer any questions you may have regarding the program at any stage. Similarly, we encourage you to let us know of any issues or concerns that may arise so that they can be addressed quickly, ensuring a satisfying experience for both parties. If either you or your mentor feels that the mentor/student relationship is not benefiting either party, please contact the Mentorship Office.

**The basic expectations for student mentees:**

- Come to the meetings prepared! Rewarding mentorship experiences happen when students have questions in mind or activities to suggest when meeting mentors. The handbook includes some questions you can ask and some ideas for activities to get you started.
- Know what you would like to learn and know what kind of mentoring you want from your mentor, then ask for both. A mentor cannot provide helpful information or create the kind of mentoring experience you want if he/she does not know what would be helpful to you.
- **DO NOT** ask your mentor for a job or a graduate position; this is not the purpose of this program.
- Many mentors are alumni of the department. Remember that you are in effect a representative of the department, and act accordingly.
- And finally, please note that in the event that you have not made the effort to contact your mentor within two weeks of receiving his/her contact, you will lose your right to participate and your mentor will be matched with someone else. It will be your responsibility to manage your time and follow through on the initial e-mail or phone call to introduce yourself.

## The mentor's role

### Your mentor can:

- Share his/her knowledge about your career or research area of interest.
- Offer you other kinds of help, such as advice on where and how to find the answers that he/she cannot give you
- Recommend other people who might be able to help you.

### Section #2: Before the initial contact

#### **Read this handbook**

Familiarize yourself with the aims and objectives of this program. They are often the same aims and objectives that you will need to be successful in the workplace or in graduate school. But remember this program cannot get you a job or into research. It can, however, give you the skills you need to find your way on your own.

#### **Make your first impression a good impression**

You don't get a second chance to make a good first impression. When meeting your mentor for the first time, you should be dressed in appropriate business (or business casual) attire. Not sure what business attire is? Contact the Mentorship Office for suggestions. Make eye contact and shake hands when introducing yourself. Similarly, when sending the first e-mail to your mentor, be professional in your spelling, composition and phrasing. Typical text or e-mail slang and abbreviations are not acceptable. Also, don't forget to be assertive and considerate, and always be honest by the way you approach your mentor.

#### **Establish specific goals**

Make sure you have a clear and specific idea of what you want to achieve before you contact your mentor. We have suggested some questions in the handbook to help you get started on this.

#### **Respect your mentor's time and schedule**

Your mentor is giving his/her personal time to help you. It's important to show your understanding and appreciation by using this time effectively and being conscientious about your correspondence. As well,

- Be willing to tell them about yourself, i.e. your current coursework, extra-curricular activities, hobbies, etc.
- If you are making a phone call, manage your time so that you are able to sit in one place and focus on the conversation. Do not call on your cell phone while running to and from classes or while in the car/bus/bike.
- Make phone calls during regular business hours (9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday to Friday), unless otherwise specified by your mentor.
- Allow your mentor enough time to respond to e-mail or voicemail before following up.

**Establish rapport**

Be prepared to tell him/her about who you are. Be similarly ready to find out who they are, what their Physics experiences were like and answer any questions they might have about current undergraduate courses in the department or about U of T in general. (If you don't know the answer, find out and get back to him/her. Don't make things up.) Allow your mentor's responses to guide the tone and nature of future meetings, e-mails, and/or phone calls.

**Ask questions**

Show a sincere interest in what your mentor has to share with you and offer your supportive comments on what you are hearing. Don't forget to draw your mentor out with open-ended questions that get you closer to finding out what you are looking for.

**Section #3:****The correspondence process****Stay organized**

Create a folder in your e-mail account dedicated to sent and received messages from your mentor. Be sure to save all correspondence with your mentor, as you may be asked to periodically forward your most recent exchanges. This will be part of the program evaluation, and may be requested from you at any time during the academic year.

**Touch base with us**

Let us know how your correspondence is going. We're interested in your experiences and any feedback you can provide to improve this program. Even comments that might seem insignificant to you might be very important to us.

**Things you can discuss with your mentor****In the early stages:**

- Discuss your background to find out if it fits with your career choice, e.g. do you require further education, and if so, what kind?
- Ask for advice on how you can market your skills/experience in your field of interest, e.g. what experiences should I emphasize when I am applying for a job?
- What words or ideas should I remember when I talk to people in this industry?
- Talk about the changing workplace: dress code, corporate culture, challenges in starting out, developing a career in the field.
- Ask for advice about graduate school application or academic careers, if you see this as a direction you want to go in. Learn the realities of building an academic career.

**Mid-way through the program:**

- Ask your mentor to describe how the actual workplace or graduate experience

- compared to his/her expectations as an undergraduate.
- Discuss how these expectations have changed and discuss how to deal with the transition from undergraduate to graduate school or the workplace.

**Toward the end of the year:**

- Ask for a critique of your résumé or grad school application.
- Arrange for any future follow-up.
- Ask for referrals and any recommended readings.
- Discover the workplace. If possible, arrange for a tour with your mentor.

**Some suggested topics for discussion with your mentor**

- How to prepare for the transition from student life to the work-world or grad school
- Finding out about your common interests and hobbies
- Asking about the important challenges in your mentor's professional life

**How to make your relationship a success**

Finally, these are a few tips that will make your mentorship long-lasting and interesting. Remember to:

- Relax and approach your mentor like a colleague. That way, you won't be intimidated and your mentor won't be on a pedestal.
- When making phone calls, don't be shy about voice mail and telephone answering machines! ALWAYS leave a message. How else will your mentor know you've been trying to contact him/her?
- Ask a lot of questions, that way you will get your answers.
- Establish an excellent reputation by sticking to your commitments, meeting your regular correspondence requirements and saying thank you, in person and with a thank you note, once the program is over.
- Be flexible – although your mentor may not match your career expectations exactly, he/she will be a good listener and a valuable source of advice and recommendations.

## Some 'extras'

Additional ideas for maximizing the mentor relationship:

- Always call or e-mail to convey your thanks within one business day of meeting with your mentor. Express your appreciation for their time and how the meeting has been a benefit to you.
- One of your three face-to-face meetings is meant to be a visit to your mentor's workplace. If this is possible, based on schedules and access, **you must advise the department** if this takes place (Contact details are on the last page of the handbook).
- e-mail an article that might be of interest to your mentor.
- Include in your e-mail messages any news of your most recent successes (on a mid-term exam, extra-curricular activity, etc.).
- At the conclusion of the program, send your mentor a formal letter of thanks or – better still – a handwritten thank-you card. This gesture reflects thoughtfulness and appreciation of your mentor's time, effort and willingness to help you out.

## Section #4: Handbook Checklist

### Thinking back on what you have read here

- What are you responsible for in the mentorship program?
- How should you prepare for your first contact with your mentor?
- How and when would you approach your mentor for a meeting?
- What kinds of things should you be concerned about during the early stages of the relationship?
- How will you follow-up with your mentor and touch base with us?
- What can you discuss with your mentor?
- How often will you keep in touch with your mentor?
- Describe some specific skills that will improve your mentor relationship?
- Where can you find help with the program if you need it?

## **Section #5: Appendices**

### **Appendix A: Suggested Questions you can ask your Mentor**

#### **Obtaining Employment & Advancement**

1. What are the most important skills someone should have to find success in this occupation?
2. What types of part-time, full-time or summer jobs should I be doing right now which may prepare me for this career path?
3. What avenues did you explore to find job openings in your field?
4. What kind of experience is needed to obtain an entry-level position in this profession?
5. How long should I expect to stay in an entry-level position?
6. What are the opportunities for advancement?
7. Is this type of work available on an international basis (without further training)?
8. In what ways did your education contribute to your career?
9. What academic courses do you find most relevant to your day-to-day work?
10. Is a post-graduate certificate or diploma necessary within this field?

#### **Networking**

1. Who helped you to get into this field through networking or otherwise?
2. How important is it to know someone in the industry?
3. What professional associations or organizations are useful to belong to in this field?
4. What magazines, journals, web sites are important to read in this field?

#### **Corporate Culture & Expectations**

1. What do you do in a typical day?
2. What kind of a salary can I expect in an entry-level position?
3. What are some other jobs in your field that are similar to your own?
4. What terminology or ideas should I remember when I am applying for a job in this field?
5. What kind of corporate/company culture exists?
6. How many hours is the typical work week?
7. What type of supervision is typical in this career?
8. Do opportunities to work from a home-based office exist in this industry?

#### **Personal**

1. Who had the most significant impact on your choosing this career?
2. What are the things you find personally rewarding in your career?
3. What are the things you find frustrating or disappointing?
4. What extra-curricular activities should I pursue to help me prepare for this career area?
5. What kind of volunteer experience would be beneficial?
6. Why did you get into this field?
7. Is travel a component of the job?
8. How stressful is this occupation?
9. How do you personally balance home and work?
10. How do you make your commuting time most productive?
11. What was the most surprising part of your transition from university to work?
12. What do you see as the biggest challenges new graduates face when they enter your industry?

## Appendix B: Essentials of correspondence

The following are a few tips that will give your correspondence a professional and focused message. If you take the time to carefully consider these points, you will be on your way to preparing for your mentorship experience.

### Essential #1: *Etiquette*

The speed and convenience of electronic mail can often cause us to compromise the quality and care we would normally take in corresponding with business contacts. Many companies have taken measures to regulate poor e-mail etiquette and all companies can easily recover and read the messages sent and received by their employees. As such, here is some “Do” and “Don’t” advice:

- DO take the time to spell words completely and correctly. Use a spell-checker.
- DO remember that your e-mails are just as much a reflection of you and your sincerity as your handshake and attire in a job interview would be. This includes everything from the type of address you use to the content of the messages you send.
- DO consider setting up an account exclusively for academic and professional purposes, if you do not already have one; for example, try replacing your [sponge\\_bob\\_rulz@hotmail.com](mailto:sponge_bob_rulz@hotmail.com) with [firstname.lastname@utoronto.ca](mailto:firstname.lastname@utoronto.ca).
- DON’T use slang, abbreviations or common e-mail jargon (see below).
- DON’T send something to your mentor that you wouldn’t want their boss to read.

Unprofessional	Professional
<p>J</p> <p>Whassup? How R U. Thx 4 showing me around your office... btw, i've been meaning to ask you how much money you make. ;-)</p> <p>And if you can let me know how to get hooked up with a job at your office.</p> <p>L8R, G-dawg</p>	<p>Dear Joanne</p> <p>I want to thank you for taking the time to show me around your office yesterday. It was great to meet your colleagues and see the way your team works together.</p> <p>I recently read an interesting article in the Globe about search firms and was curious to learn about how you came to work at your current employer. Did you seek out this particular position, or was it recommended? Is ‘head-hunting’ a common phenomenon in your line of work?</p> <p>Thank you, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.</p> <p>Best wishes, Greg</p>

**Essential #2: How to write a thank-you letter**

Take a moment to think about and write a thank-you letter to your mentor.

Remember to:

- Be sincere
- Get the spelling of the mentor's name, title and address correct
- Include specific details about your last correspondence/conversation or about your mentor's interests
- If you are thanking him/her for a meeting or tour of their office, send it out within a week of meeting your mentor
- Be sure to highlight something specific that you enjoyed or learned from the exchange/meeting
- Finish it off on a positive note with a suggestion that you will contact them soon
- When in doubt, don't hesitate to e-mail the text of your letter to [mentorship@physics.utoronto.ca](mailto:mentorship@physics.utoronto.ca) for editing or suggestions

**Essential #3: Leaving voicemail messages**

Remember to:

- Clearly state your name and the name of the person who the message is for.
- Briefly outline details/reason for your call
- If you are originating the call, tell the person how much you are looking forward to hearing from them soon
- If you are returning the call, tell them that you will try to get back to them soon
- Leave a phone number for the person to call you at his/her convenience
- Say thank you

**If you have any questions, please call or email:**

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