

Mentoring Statement for the NACS Program

Faculty play a crucial role in graduate student development through mentoring. This is a multifaceted process involving more than teaching. Mentorship is a skill that is learned, practiced, and improved upon through training and experience over time.

Faculty who take a NACS student into their lab serve in a mentoring role rather than a programmatic advisor role (only providing guidance on academic progress). The ultimate goal of mentoring in the NACS program is to help develop and achieve our students' professional and academic career goals.

Mentor Selection and Funding

Mentor and Committee

Students who enter the NACS program have a mentor or two co-mentors already established at the time of admission. The student has typically identified the mentor(s) as a faculty of interest within the student's application to the program. Students usually remain with their mentor(s) throughout their graduate studies.

Occasionally a student will do a lab rotation in the first year when the student is interested in multiple mentors and those mentors are interested in having the applicant rotate in their labs. In these cases, the student selects one of the mentors at the end of the lab rotation.

Students may change mentors, and mentors may also reconsider whether or not to continue to act as the student's mentor. The procedures for changing mentors and dropping students are available in the NACS Graduate Handbook on the NACS website at [Forms and Resources | NACS | Neuroscience and Cognitive Science | University of Maryland \(umd.edu\)](#) .

Students work with a committee throughout their graduate studies. The committee members serve as additional mentors to the student, providing guidance and expertise on the student's research and career development. In the first semester, the student forms a committee, which includes an advisor, two additional faculty members, and one senior student. The senior student provides a designated peer mentoring mechanism in the first year; this relationship often continues informally until graduation. The senior student drops off after the first year and the committee grows to four members for the dissertation proposal and five members for the doctoral examination.

The student's mentor serves as the chair of the student's dissertation committee. Students generally defend their dissertation by the end of the fifth year in the program. The NACS Assistant Director contacts the student about required deadlines and forms, and schedules a meeting to go over the defense experience and provide an opportunity for the student to ask questions. Information about the dissertation and the dissertation defense is available in the NACS Graduate Handbook at [Forms and Resources | NACS | Neuroscience and Cognitive Science | University of Maryland \(umd.edu\)](#) .

Funding

Students are typically funded by a research assistantship appointment through the NACS program or through their mentor's grant in the first year in the program. Students are typically funded through their mentor's grant and/or teaching assistantships through the department of their mentor in years 2-5.

Statement of Mutual Expectations

At the beginning of each school year, mentors meet with their NACS students to complete a NACS Statement of Mutual Expectations (SME). The goal of these meetings is to enhance communication between mentors and their students, and to formalize and/or clarify their mutual expectations. This is an opportunity for the mentor to make their work expectations clear.

The completed SME is sent to the NACS office. We encourage mentors and students to meet in May to discuss how things went during the year. The NACS SME is available on the NACS website at [Forms and Resources | NACS | Neuroscience and Cognitive Science | University of Maryland \(umd.edu\)](#) .

Student Wellbeing and Mental Health

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Articulate a vision that addresses diversity, equity and inclusion of all in the research endeavor, at all stages of pipeline and preparation. This includes the mentor's own self-assessment and development of mentoring practices that encourage inclusiveness. Additionally, mentors should prepare mentees to carry this vision forward in future stages of their own professional development.

Leave of Absence

NACS students can consider taking a Leave of Absence for mental or physical health reasons. Students should contact the Graduate Director if interested in taking a Leave of Absence.

Disputes and Concerns

It is the policy of the NACS Program to administer standards of conduct in a fair, respectful, and equitable manner. We are also committed to serving as an advocate for, and resource to, student victims of crimes, harassment and other traumatic experiences. NACS has an established Grievance Policy and encourage students to refer to it when resolution of disputes and concerns arise. The Grievance Policy is located in the NACS Graduate Handbook, which is available on the NACS website at [Forms and Resources | NACS | Neuroscience and Cognitive Science | University of Maryland \(umd.edu\)](#) .

Mentor Responsibilities

Communicate Often and Clearly

Successful mentoring requires clear communication. Respond to student communication within 1-2 business days and provide feedback on research documents (e.g., posters, papers, analysis) within 1-2 weeks. Feedback includes both informative strengths and weaknesses, and provides formative guidance to moving forward.

Discuss with your student your expectations for their supervision of other students in your lab.

Have Regular Meetings

Regular meetings are important in the mentoring relationship. Meet with your students on an established, frequent schedule (e.g., once per week or other mutually agreeable interval) to discuss research, NACS milestones, and professional goals. Meet with your student and committee at least once every 12 months. Complete a Report of Committee Meeting form after each committee meeting, which includes a description of what was discussed at the committee meeting.

Be Respectful

Each mentoring relationship has its own unique properties. Recognize that “one size does not fit all.” Respect your student’s differences and adapt to their needs.

Be sensitive to the inherent power imbalance in the mentor-student relationship at all times. Treat students as junior scholars in the profession, not simply as lab technicians or staff. Involve your student in regular lab meetings/ journal clubs, and find ways to facilitate your student’s attendance at professional conferences, both financially and in terms of scheduling.

Respect your student’s independence and autonomy, and be mindful of your student’s academic time demands outside the lab (e.g., TA = 20hr/week; co-mentorship; NACS seminars).

When you are on leave or sabbatical, be mindful that it might impact your student’s progress. Develop an appropriate plan/course of action for who will mentor your student in your absence and discuss the plan with your student.

Know Your Student

Be familiar with your student’s goals, as well as educational experiences and preferences on mentoring. A student’s goals may differ in important ways from your own. Have your student’s best interests at heart and provide support during challenging times.

Be mindful of and open to having conversations about challenges related to diversity (linguistic/cultural background, under-representation, citizenship status, learning differences, etc.).

Students may need or profit from mentorship other than from you or the committee. Facilitate outside mentoring when applicable.

Encourage your student to apply for funding and training opportunities for themselves.

Be Familiar with Program Requirements

Have a basic knowledge of the program requirements (e.g., NACS Graduate Handbook) and provide guidance on written documents and oral presentations.

Take the time to complete required NACS forms fully so that there is clear communication between you and your student.

Facilitate Preparation of Publications

Articulate a goal to publish at least 1-2 papers with your student. Facilitate preparation of these papers and offer clear policy and guidance. In the NACS program it is conventional for papers to have multiple authors. At the earliest point possible in the research publication process, have clear discussion with your student on how authorship should be determined and the basis for it.

Support End of Degree Goals

Be open to learning about and discussing possible alternative career paths of interest to your student.

Alert students to funding and training opportunities that would further the student’s career progress. Provide assistance as appropriate in preparation of such applications and provide letters of support in a timely fashion.

Share information about your faculty duties beyond research (such as teaching, reviewing/editing, professional service, supervision/directing a lab or research assistants, applying for and managing grants, outreach, and participating in professional conferences or organizations). As appropriate, discuss your own career trajectory and how you have overcome barriers or challenges.

Student Responsibilities

Communicate Often and Clearly

Successful mentoring requires clear and open communication by both mentor and student. Respond to mentor communication within 1-2 business days, and provide mentors with documents that require feedback in advance of deadlines (e.g., two weeks before major meetings or benchmarks).

Keep your mentor apprised of difficulties or barriers that may affect your performance or progress in the program. As appropriate, discuss your responsibilities and time demands outside the lab that may impact expectations and progress.

Mistakes are a normal part of the research process. Be open with your mentor when errors are made.

Address any issues that arise with respect to your mentoring relationships as soon as possible with your mentor, or your committee, or NACS leadership (e.g., Director of Graduate Studies).

Have Regular Meetings

Meet with your mentor regularly (e.g., once per week or other mutually agreeable interval) to discuss research, the next steps/milestones in your training, and professional goals.

Meet with your mentor and committee at least once every 12 months. Bring a Report of Committee Meeting form to your committee meeting for your advisor to complete and your committee to sign. Complete a Graduate Outcomes Assessment (GOA) form before each annual committee meeting and milestone meeting and give it to your advisor to review and sign.

Be Respectful

Respond to feedback from your mentor and committee in a constructive manner and with an open mind. Listen carefully to your mentor's suggestions and welcome new challenges

Respect your mentor's time, research, and professional goals. Come prepared to your meetings (bring the required forms, questions, data analysis, preliminary results, summary of your progress).

Know Your Mentor

Be aware of your mentor's leadership style and additional duties. Be mindful of your mentor's expectations; Ask questions if you do not understand the expectations.

Recognize that no single mentor is likely to provide all of your mentoring needs: Seek mentors for different aspects of your training and career goals.

Gain practice in grantsmanship and if possible, apply for grants to alleviate financial obligations of your mentor/home department and to contribute to your professional development.

Be Familiar with Program Requirements

Learn the requirements for the NACS program and discuss them with your mentor. The requirements can be found in the NACS Graduate Handbook, which is available on the NACS website at [Forms and Resources | NACS | Neuroscience and Cognitive Science | University of Maryland \(umd.edu\)](#).

Work toward Publication

Work toward presenting your research at lab meetings, NACS events, national conferences, and publishing your work during your graduate studies.

Communicate End of Degree Goals

Open up to your mentor about your career aspirations. Ask your mentor to provide feedback and support letters in your preparation of applications for training opportunities.

Additional information and reading material for both mentors and students

National Research Mentoring Network (NRMN)

[NRMN – National Research Mentoring Network \(nrmnet.net\)](#)

National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity (NCFDD)

[Faculty Diversity](#)

Sign in under the University of Maryland

Culturally aware mentorship: Lasting impacts of a novel intervention on academic administrators and faculty

[Culturally aware mentorship: Lasting impacts of a novel intervention on academic administrators and faculty - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)

Advisor, Teacher, Role Model, Friend: On Being a Mentor to Students in Science and Engineering

[Advisor, Teacher, Role Model, Friend: On Being a Mentor to Students in Science and Engineering | The National Academies Press](#)

Nature's Guide to Mentors

[Nature's guide for mentors | Nature](#)

The Science of Effective Mentoring in STEMM

[The Science of Effective Mentorship in STEMM | The National Academies Press](#)