



Harvard First Generation Mentoring Program: Best Practices Guide

Freshman year can be a tough time for any college student: a period of transition, self-exploration, and differentiation from family. It can be difficult for first generation students to find support tailored to their unique circumstances. The First Generation Mentoring Program aims to provide first generation freshmen with context, guidance, and community to support their growth as first year Harvard students.

Program expectations

- Commit up to two hours per month to your mentee throughout freshman year
- Communication can be any combination of in person or virtual connection (like coffee, texting, phone, Skype, etc.)
- Offer consistent support and availability
- Participate in mentor conference calls and/or meetings at the beginning, middle, and end of freshman year, for sharing ideas and challenges
- Complete end of year program evaluation

Getting started

- Set up an introductory meeting within two weeks of your receiving mentoring match – if you are meeting in a public location, be sure your mentee knows how to identify you, and that you have exchanged contact information in case last minute problems arise.
- At your first meeting, talk about why you're involved with the First Gen program -- share openly, as you'll be setting the tone for communication within your relationship.
- Try to establish an informal, but mutually respectful, rapport.
- Learn about your mentee via open-ended questions (background, interests, fears, challenges). Allow lots of opportunity for questions and be sure you're both spending some time talking.
- Exchange complete contact information, including email and phone numbers, as well as getting your mentee's proctor's name (in case of emergency).
- At the end of this (and each) meeting, make a plan for your next contact; be sure you both have input about the type of meeting, the date, and the location (if in-person).
- Encourage your mentee to stay connected with First Gen Student Union, a first gen student group on campus that can provide them with additional resources and support during their time at Harvard.

Establishing a relationship

- Be proactive in scheduling contact and encourage your mentee to reach out as well.
- Remember what your mentee asks/talks about and follow-up later.



- Not all interaction needs to be formal - a text message to check in is often appreciated and can give you a sense of how things are going.
- Be aware of financial considerations for your mentee. For example, for in-person meetings, be willing to pay the bill. Meetings don't have to be pricey, though - coffee or tea is inexpensive, often easy to schedule, and can provide a space for good conversation.

How can I be most useful to my mentee?

- Be a good listener and make no assumptions - each mentee has a unique set of needs.
- Reinforce his/her sense of belonging in the Harvard community.
- Offer practical advice based on his/her questions and your own experience.
- Learn about and share the resources at Harvard, as applicable to your mentee's requests.
- Be consistently available and be a positive part of your mentee's life.
- Some mentors assist mentees in finding internships or summer job positions, whether it is helping to guide a mentee to job resources or connecting them with contacts. However, there is no obligation for a mentor to do so.

Where to find help/ get answers to questions

Define the nature of the question:

- Do you have questions about mentoring? Talk with other mentors in the program via the mentor list-serve
- Does your mentee have questions about resources? Refer to First Gen program materials and website; do some research for your mentee, s/he will find this helpful.
- There may be a time when a mentor has concerns about the mentee including the mental health and well-being of the mentee. The mentor should contact the Freshman Dean's Office at **617-495-1574** or fdo@fas.harvard.edu. The office is open Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm EST. Outside of these hours, contact Harvard University Police Department (HUPD): **617-495-1212**. A Resident Dean is always on call in case of emergencies, so HUPD will contact the appropriate Resident Dean. The FDO will take all concerns seriously, and bring in the appropriate experts to assist the student.

Dates to remember

- Find out your mentee's birthday, when mid-terms are, etc., and say hello around these dates. There is a calendar of important Harvard dates available in the mentor resources.
- Consider sending a care package during reading period.
- Always know when your last contact with your mentee was, so that you can track the dates and reach out if it has been more than several weeks since you last talked with each other.

What if my mentee and I lose contact?

- The best way to prevent losing contact is to begin by building a strong relationship - multiple contacts early in the year, along with an expectation that your mentee will reach out to you.
- Communication is key!! No matter the circumstances, try to be consistent in communicating.
- If your mentee seems unresponsive from the beginning of the program, email them to ask if they are still interested in the program - the answer might be “no,” and your mentee may be relieved that you asked.
- Sometimes events in a mentee's life can prevent them from engaging in the program. If your relationship is active but drops off, reach out to ask if everything is okay, what you can do to help and, if it seems appropriate, ask if they are still interested in the program.
- Be sure to let Rafael Burgos-Mirabal (leafar10@gmail.com) know about any lapse in your mentee's involvement in your relationship.