Mentoring Meeting Guide

This guide contains discussion points and questions that aim at helping students to independently review their project progress and overall professional development in preparation for the mentoring meeting. Should any of these aspects uncover potential problems, please bring them up in the discussion with your mentor.

Mentoring meetings should not focus on specific recent experiments, but rather on the overall status and direction of the project, professional development, working relationships, and mutual expectations. They should occur at least once a year, but the PhD program recommends that they occur more frequently at the start of the PhD to establish a trust-based and productive student-mentor relationship. Towards the end of the PhD, the student's professional development and interests should be discussed in light of the student's future career plans.

The specific questions or their order does not need to reflect the structure of the mentoring meeting. The PhD program recommends that all potentially problematic points are discussed and that an order is chosen that has the more open-ended discussion points last, provided that sufficient time is available.

Motivation/Independence

- Do you feel you are taking the initiative for your project?
- Are you sufficiently focused?
- Do you feel passionate and motivated?
- If not, what are the issues impairing your motivation in your opinion?
- What could be done by yourself, the PI, the PhD program or the institute to improve your motivation/independence?

Supervision

- Do you feel you have adequate supervision and mentoring?
- Are you meeting regularly enough with your supervisor?
- Do you discuss expectations? Are the expectations reasonable?
- Is your supervisor available?
- Are the interactions with your supervisor productive?
- Does your supervisor provide (or support you in getting) the necessary resources and/or expertise for your project? (including funding)
- How could the interactions with your supervisor be improved?

Lab/Group

- Do you contribute positively to the lab atmosphere and to the group?
- Do you feel your lab/team offers a positive environment for scientific discussions?

- Do you feel your colleagues support each other scientifically?
- Do you find the lab activities productive and advantageous for your development?
- What could be improved by you, the PI, the PhD program or the institute?

Managing stress and anxiety

- What in the past period went well, what did you enjoy?
- What did not work or had been difficult or stressful?
- How did you cope with difficult or stressful situations?
- Is there something that you could learn from these situations for the future?
- In general, do you know how to cope with difficult situations or stress?
- What would you need from the PI, the PhD program, or the institute to improve the situation?
- Are you aware of the options for professional counselling that are available on campus?

Professional development

- How you want to develop professionally? What are your career goals?
- Are you developing professional networks and contacts?
- Are you attending conferences?
- What do you need to do to get there?
- How can your supervisor support your professional development?
- How can the PhD program or the institute support your professional development?

Critical Thinking and Scientific literacy

- Are you actively participating in the activities offered by the PhD program and/or the institutes/campus?
- Do you feel you are expanding your scientific literacy (reading and/or attending seminars)?
- Do you feel you can critically assess your own project and other projects in related topics (publications/seminars)?
- Do you find the scientific environment on campus fosters the advancement of your scientific literacy? If not, why not and what can be improved?

Good Scientific Practice

- Are you contributing positively to your lab/peers/institute?
- Do you keep your lab book in one of the required formats and up to date?
- Are you aware of the standards in your field for scientific reporting, record keeping and data management?
- Are you aware of any misconduct or malpractice that needs to be addressed?

Science Communication

- Do you feel confident on how to deliver a scientific talk? To the lab? To the institute? At a conference?
- Do you feel confident about writing? A report? A paper? Your thesis?
- What needs to be done to improve your abilities and confidence regarding your communication skills?

For the Project, only the big(ger) picture should be considered. These points could guide an efficient review and planning process:

Project

- Do you think you have achieved your project-related goals (related to a time period)?
- Are there any difficulties and problems in reaching these goals? Which ones?
- If yes, how can these difficulties be addressed?
- How far along are you regarding the final goal?
- Is the final goal still important? Or should it be changed (scooped, new goal, new idea, etc.)?
- Is the time plan still realistic?
- Is the approach still valid (or did something else/better come up)?
- Do you feel you have mastered the necessary technical skills for your project?
- Are you thorough and systematic in your experiments?
- Are you keeping intelligible and comprehensive records?
- Are you able to troubleshoot and propose solutions and/or alternatives?
- Do you have all the resources (technical, human, financial)?
- What needs to be revised and/or changed? How could one do it?