

Graduate Christian Fellowship (GCF) Mentor Program Guide

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1. My Story:

At Johns Hopkins, there is a deep social gap between undergrads and grad student despite the Homewood Campus' ratio of nearly 1:3 between grad students and undergrads. The lack of voluntary interaction between the two categories of students bothered me. As a new graduate student who previously attended Iowa State University, I was surprised at how little the undergraduates asked grads for help and how walled-off the grads were from getting to know undergraduates, even those who shared their Christian faith. Having been informally mentored by a few graduate students while I was an undergrad, I wanted to help the two worlds of grads and undergrads converge for unity for Christ.

I started this venture by surveying the InterVarsity group that had the most undergraduate members: Hopkins Christian Fellowship (HCF). I had met one of their staff members at a combined fellowship prayer meeting, and she had agreed to let me come to one of their meetings and pass out a paper survey. After polling students to see if they even wanted to interact with graduate students, nearly 50% (~18 out of 40 students) responded that they did want to know Christian grad students. From there, nearly 60% of the group was interested in the idea of being mentored by a Christian grad student.

I then asked the graduate Christian community for volunteers to be mentors. I sent emails to Graduate Christian Fellowship (GCF) and asked grad students in other Christian groups to consider mentoring. The response was slow coming, but eventually I had six mentors ready to help.

I went back to HCF and allowed undergrads to sign up, indicating their interest in being matched with a grad student mentor. I did my best to match mentees with mentors in the same discipline and paired them up via email. Also via email I shared what was expected. From there I let the program take off, occasionally asking one of the mentors how things were going but not making any check-ups by email as to not overwhelm them. So far things seem to be going well.

2. Inspiration:

As a new grad student, I firmly believe that the best resource for undergrads is graduate students. I probably would not have decided to attend grad school without the academic and emotional support I received from a graduate student who encouraged me to have confidence and to serve God through my studies. Grad students are the academic role models for undergrads, and that can be either positive or negative; graduate students who make no time for others and do not conduct themselves in a Christ-like manner pass down a strong deleterious message to undergrads that they put their work above God. This can be so powerful that it may prevent Christian graduate students from pursuing advanced degrees. Although I had a wonderful informal graduate student mentor during my first years of college, I also experienced being led by demanding, uncaring, selfish grad students whose sour attitudes and godless outlook on earning their degree nearly stopped me from choosing to continue my education. Without the encouragement of Christian mentors who took the time to advise me and befriend me, I do not think I could have put my faith in God to carry me through grad school.

Mentoring from graduate students offers undergraduates not only a means of help for grad school preparation, but also for establishing a trusted relationship that can build confidence in a younger student.

3. What the program is about:

To increase the undergraduate-graduate interaction and to give undergraduates a Christian perspective about their future, the graduate Christian fellowship has started a mentoring program for students in the undergraduate Christian fellowship. This mentoring program is conducted almost exclusively through email and offers undergrads a chance to ask all sorts of questions about graduate school and careers to graduate students. Along with advice for how to apply and prepare for grad school, the mentors also provide spiritual support. The undergrad students are encouraged to ask their mentors about anything related to graduate school or getting a job or how they keep their Christian faith throughout their years in college. The graduate student mentors are encouraged to also tell about themselves and how they decided to go to graduate school and to connect their mentee to other grad students who can also help them with specific questions or share their grad school experiences. The mentors and mentees email each other approximately weekly. There are no requirements for meeting up or any mandatory activities.

4. Duties of the program manager:

The mentoring program is rather simple, and not too much is needed to keep it running since the GCF members who volunteer as mentors are responsible to their mentees to keep in contact. Here are things a few ideas to get a program started:

- Find graduate students in the GCF to mentor (send emails, ask people). Explain that mentoring is important for undergrads and how they can make a difference by sending weekly emails to their mentee.
- In September, coordinate an undergraduate Christian organization and ask to visit one of their group meetings to announce the mentoring program. Briefly explain its goals and the benefits it has for undergrads. Pass around a sheet for undergraduate members to sign up to request a mentor.
- Coordinate with the leader of the graduate Student fellowship to put together a "About Grad School" workshop held by the Christian graduate students for undergrads who will be applying for grad school.
- Pair-up the undergrad students with grad students through email after having a list of undergraduates and grads. Also send out an email to all mentors explaining the goals of the program and what is expected of them and suggestions for how to mentor as well as who to contact if they have trouble contacting their mentee. Send out an email to the mentees saying the goals of the program, what is expected of them, and who to contact if they are having trouble contacting their mentor.
- Keep in touch with the leaders of both the GCF and the undergraduate Christian fellowship to let them know how things go after a few months.
- At the end of the summer, send out a simple survey to the current mentors and mentees to ask them what they got out of the program, how it can be improved, etc

5. Example email to be sent to the undergrad Christian fellowship leader asking if you can come to their meeting to announce the mentor program (after you've discussed the idea with them):

Hi (name of leader),

I was glad to discuss the mentor program with you on (date you spoke with them). I am excited about starting the program and I would like to come to one of your meetings to tell your students about the program and pass around a sign-in sheet.

I so far have (number) Christian graduate student mentors who are ready to advise undergrad students. So now I would like to pair up these (number) mentors with mentees while I work on gathering more grad students for mentors. What would be the best way for me to go about finding the mentees - should I come make another announcement at the meeting with papers (asking for name, email, year, major) asking for students to commit to being mentored, or would you like for me to do this another way? Let me know what works best for you.

Thanks,

(name of program manager and phone number)

6. Example email to be sent out to the graduate Christian fellowship asking for mentors:

Hello fellow (graduate Christian fellowship name) members,

I am looking for grad students and post-docs who are willing to serve as mentors for undergraduate students in (name of undergraduate Christian fellowship). I coordinated with (name of undergraduate Christian fellowship) and there was a large want for graduate mentors for helping students with applying/preparing for grad school or career preparation. Now is the time to answer this need by sharing our experiences with younger students! All it takes is emailing your undergrad mentee weekly and praying for them.

Undergraduate students can benefit greatly from your guidance. Also, giving spiritual support for our undergrads is much needed. Through being a mentor you can pray for your mentee and help them view their future with their eyes on the Lord. Your advice and encouragement can go a long way.

So if you are interested in mentoring, please email me and let me know your field of study and if you are a grad students (PhD or masters) or Post-doc or another advanced degree-seeking student. Once I get a response from you I can go to (name of undergraduate Christian Fellowship) and start the mentor-mentee pair-up process.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me.

Thanks,

(name of mentor program coordinator)

7. Email to the mentors at the start of the program:

Hello grad student mentors,

Thanks for volunteering to be a mentor! I am so happy to know that there are grad students and post-docs who are willing to give up a little time to advise undergraduate students with a Christian perspective.

Most of you have received emails introducing you to your undergraduate mentor; for the few of you who have not, I will be emailing you about that later this week. If you have questions about that, just let me know. For those of you who have been paired up with a mentee, please email your mentee within a week. As a mentor it is recommended that you initiate communication with your mentee and tell them about yourself, both your academic side and your non-academic side (hobbies, interests, where you're from, etc.). Also, you can ask your mentee questions about themselves.

I have sent an email to the mentees explaining that weekly communication with their mentor is good. I would like for you guys to do the same for at least a month or so in order for you and your mentee to get to know each other. Also as I told them, on busy weeks its still good to drop a few lines to your mentee to let them know that you haven't forgotten about replying to their email. It is okay to meet up in person or with your mentee if both of you want to do that; likewise with calling/texting them - it is not required and it would be up to you and your mentee. If your mentee does not reply to any of your emails, you can let me know and I can ask Natalie to check up on them to see what's up.

Additionally, most mentor-mentee pairs do not have the same major. If you get questions about their major that you do not know the answer to, feel free to ask other GCF members to see what you can find out. Although you are paired with an undergraduate student, it does not mean that you can't refer them to another grad student or post-doc if they have questions about a topic that you don't know much about.

Also, although you are the mentor, things don't have to be just one-sided. If you want to tell your mentee about a challenge you are facing/had to face, or about any prayer requests you have, do so. But please avoid being cynical.

Finally, here are just some ideas if you and your mentee have trouble thinking of questions to ask each other:

- offer to give them a tour of your lab
- recommend some books/websites that may be helpful for them in their grad school search
- ask them about their undergraduate job/research experiences
- offer to help them find out information about the grad schools that they want to go to
- ask them if they have any prayer requests
- what it is like to be a Teaching Assistant (TA)
- ask them how their classes are going, if they feel "on track" for graduate school
- ask them about their career goals

- tell them about what inspired you to go to grad school
- recommend classes that may help prepare them for grad school
- tell them about your work dynamics with your research group/advisor
- tell them about what you do to upkeep your Christian faith (go to church, GCF events, etc.) and how you do that despite your busy academic life

Thanks, and God bless,

(name of mentoring program coordinator)

8. Email to the mentees at the start of the program:

Hello HCF mentees,

For most of you, you've already received an email from me introducing you to your grad student (or post-doc) mentor. For those few who haven't, I'm still getting your mentor lined up but it shouldn't be too long before you have one. As always, if you have questions about that process, just let me know.

I wanted to let you know that if you don't hear from your mentor within a week (if you have been assigned one already), you can let me know and I will try to contact them to see what's up. I am well aware that both the mentors and mentees often have busy schedules and that often school work/research takes first priority. However, I do wish to recommend that during busy weeks that you simply drop your mentor a few lines to let him or her know that you haven't fallen off the planet.

Most of the mentoring will be done through email, but its fine to meet up in person with your mentor if you both want to. There are no requirements for how often you communicate or how you communicate, but I simply request that you try to communicate at least weekly over the next month or so and then you can have a feel for how often to correspond. As for what to ask your mentors, feel free to ask them about how they decided to go to grad school and the application and decision process. You can also ask them about their labs/projects and classes, their lifestyle and workstyle, and what their plans are for the future. Additionally, I hope that you will feel comfortable addressing how being Christian has influenced their future plans and how it is a part of their lives.

Also, please feel free to tell your mentor about your studies and your goals and about you as a person. The mentoring isn't a one-sided give-take situation: you can also help your mentor by encouraging him or her in their studies and by praying for them.

I realize that most mentor-mentee pairs do not share the same major. Despite that, don't be afraid to ask your mentor questions about your field of study - you can always ask if they know someone in that field who can answer your question. Graduate Christian Fellowship is like a network - your mentor can use that network to get answers for you if he or she cannot provide the answers on their own.

I have cc'd (name of undergraduate fellowship leader) and (name of graduate fellowship leader) on this email so that they are in-the-know about the mentoring program.

Thanks for signing up!

(name of mentoring program manager)

9. Example email to pair-up a graduate student and an undergraduate student:

Hi (name of undergraduate student) and (name of graduate student),

You have been paired-up as a part of the mentor program between (name of graduate Christian fellowship) and (undergraduate Christian fellowship). (name of undergraduate) is a (year) in (major) who is involved in (name of undergraduate fellowship) and (name of grad student) is a (year/position in graduate program) in (major/program) who is involved in (name of graduate Christian fellowship).

It would be nice if you could email each other and say more about yourselves. If you have any questions about the mentor program feel free to contact me.

Have a nice evening,

(name of mentor program manager)