

Mentorship Program of the International Society for the Study of Narrative A Few Recommendations for Mentors

The mentorship program is an initiative that seeks to connect graduate students, early career researchers and scholars who hold short-term appointments with senior researchers in order to encourage forms of communication, support, and professional opportunity and to promote the sharing and building of knowledge and skills, both for the mentee and the mentor. The idea for this was developed by members of the Graduate Student and Contingent Faculty Caucus, with the advice and support of the committee for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

General Information

Mentors and mentees will be asked to meet one-on-one digitally or, if possible, in person, at least two times in 2024 (we recommend not exceeding 50 minutes per meeting). These are the minimum requirements of the program. Beyond these requirements each pair is of course free to decide whether they have the time for more frequent meetings and written exchanges. A contact from the organizing committee will be available in case there are problems or questions.

While the ISSN conference may offer a great opportunity for a first meeting if both mentor and mentee attend, mentors and mentees are not required to participate in the annual conference of the Society to take part in the program. However, being a member of the International Society for the Study of Narrative is a prerequisite for taking part in the mentorship program. If you are not a member yet, you can find all the information on how to join the society here: <https://www.thenarrativesociety.org/become-a-member>

Our survey has shown that in the few cases where the mentor-mentee relationships did not go entirely smoothly, this was mainly because of issues with responsiveness. We ask that both mentors and mentees respond to each other's messages in a timely manner (within no more than two weeks) and give each other a brief heads-up if they feel they need to draw back from the exchange (we all know that sometimes commitments can stack up in unforeseen ways).

Mentors in particular should be mindful of the power differential inherent in the relationship, which operates even within a relatively informal setting such as this program. For example, our survey suggests that mentees can find it hard to gauge when it is okay to reach out to busy mentors. It is therefore important to explicitly discuss expectations about frequency of exchanges and preferred channels of communication in the first meeting (see below). Please also be careful with expressing opinions that can be understood as judgements of the mentee's academic progress. The mentoring program cannot replace a formal supervisory relationship, so please do not feel obliged to take on responsibilities normally associated with the role of a primary academic advisor.

A Few Ideas on How to Get the Mentorship Started

First contact

Please contact your mentee via email as soon as possible. We are asking you to contact them first as we have noticed that mentees often find this first step intimidating, making contact difficult to establish. Before the first meeting, please take some time to consider what kind of support you'd be willing to offer and how much time you will realistically be able to dedicate to this. Please also consider which of these areas you are most comfortable providing support in:

- Instrumental: advice on building disciplinary competency in narrative, navigating job or grant applications, publishing an article or monograph, etc.
- Psychosocial: encouragement and support, including advice on work-life balance and/or connection of social identity to the discipline and community
- Networking: advice on developing professional contacts, connections to potential collaborators, future referees, etc.

We will do our best to match the pairs according to the preferences given to these areas in our initial survey, but perfect matches are not always possible, and needs may change as the mentoring process develops.

First meeting

As you lay out expectations for your interactions, please be candid about the time and energy you have available to invest in this program. One valuable feature of the mentor/mentee relationship will fall under the arena of praxis: the manner in which you model professionalism – including appropriate boundaries – serves to enhance mutual respect, trust, and collegiality.

The aims of the first meeting are to get to know your mentee and to define together what you want to focus on during the mentorship period. It may be wise to limit the first meeting itself to a 50-minute call to avoid “zoom fatigue” if you are meeting online. This could be a good time to clarify practical expectations: establish when you will meet again and agree whether it is okay for the mentee to contact you by email in-between meetings.

We have suggested to the mentee that after the meeting they send you an email summing up the way of proceeding that you have agreed upon, just to make sure that you are both on the same page.

We wish you a rewarding experience. If you have any comments, suggestions or questions, please don't hesitate to contact us!

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