Thank you for volunteering to participate as a mentor in the IIDA Student Mentoring Program. We appreciate your willingness to share your time and professional insight with an interior design student who is eager to learn more about their chosen career path. Even with most offices shifting to a new normal and work-from-home, it is still possible to engage with your mentee in a meaningful way.

Setting up a virtual mentoring session (or sessions) requires some planning to ensure a positive experience for both you and your student.

BEFORE THE MENTORING SESSION

The IIDA Student Mentoring Program allows students the opportunity to learn from industry professionals in addition to practicing important “soft skills,” such as industry etiquette. Both you and your student have received an email pairing you with one another. As part of the learning process, it is the student’s responsibility to initiate communication with you via email. If you have not heard from your student within a week of receiving the pairing email, please contact students@iida.org.

Communicating with Your Student

- Your student’s initial email will provide basic information about who they are. They should allow you to choose the date (or dates) of the mentorship, but if they have any time constraints (i.e., they have online classes to attend), they should communicate that information in their initial email to you.
- Respond to your student with basic information about yourself, your career, and your company. Mentors should take the lead in scheduling the virtual mentoring session so that your work schedule can be accommodated. Provide two or three dates and time slots for the student to choose from. If you have more than one student, you can choose to schedule them on the same day or separately. Consider the length of time you’d like to meet with your student that works for your schedule and provides them opportunity for unique insights; if your schedule allows, it might be beneficial to schedule multiple shorter check-ins, as opposed to a single conversation slot for virtual mentoring.
- Provide details about what to expect. Be sure to send a calendar invitation with the webinar/online meeting instructions (Zoom, GotoMeeting etc.). Also provide an agenda, including a general outline of the session and whether they should prepare questions for informational interviews or exercises you would like the student to complete before or during the mentoring session. Try to provide these details a week before the mentoring session.

Prepare for the Mentoring Session

You’ve heard from your student, and you’ve confirmed the date and set up of the virtual mentoring session. Now, you’ll want to make sure that the experience is a positive one for both of you. Students also appreciate the opportunity to have one-on-one time with their mentor to discuss their career paths. Here are some topics to get the conversation going:

- Your student’s senior capstone design project or thesis paper
- Job search tools
- Your career path and why you chose interior design
- The skills that helped you become a successful entry-level designer
- The new skills that you’re seeing needed with extended work-from-home scenarios
- Interview tips or a mock interview
- Portfolio or resume review
- Positive steps the student should take if they’re graduating during a recession
Continuing the Mentor/Mentee Relationship

After a successful virtual mentoring session, there may be an opportunity to continue mentoring the student. Deciding whether to be a mentor will depend on your willingness to commit your time and energy, but it is often a rewarding experience for both mentor and mentee. It’s also important to understand that mentoring can take many forms. Here are a few ideas if you are interested in being a long-term mentor:

- Set up once-a-month or once-a-quarter virtual coffees or lunches with the student to discuss their career goals.
- Invite the student to watch an IIDA webinar and discuss it together after.
- Tell the student to contact you via email or phone with career questions.
- Inform the students of internship opportunities at your firm or company.
- Offer to present to the student’s interior design class or IIDA Campus Center.

QUESTIONS?
Contact students@iida.org

LOOKING FOR MORE?

Ask your student to develop a personal branding statement. Personal branding is important for up-and-coming designers who want to set themselves apart. Ask your student to think about their strengths as a designer and a professional, including:

- What value do they provide to an employer?
- What is unique about the value they provide?
- Who benefits from their unique skillset and why?

Use this article to learn more about crafting personal brand statements.