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 of the mentorship, but if they have a significant time constraint during the month of March (i.e., they are out of town for a week), they should communicate that in their initial email.

• Respond to your student with basic information about yourself, your career, and your company. Mentors should take the lead in scheduling the day of job shadowing so that your work schedule can be accommodated. Provide two or three dates 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.

• Provide details about what to expect. If your company has a dress code or your day includes anything that requires special clothing (such as closed-toe shoes for a visit to a job site), communicate this information to the student. Also provide a schedule, including what time to show up, whether they will need to prepare questions for informational interviews, or any 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.

BEFORE THE MENTORING SESSION

The IIDA Student Mentoring Program allows students the opportunity to shadow a design professional for a day and practice 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.

Prepare for the Mentoring Session

You’ve heard from your student, and you’ve confirmed the date of the mentoring session. Now, you’ll want to make sure that the experience is a positive one for both of you. While it can sound simple to just have a student shadow you for a workday, it is important to make sure that the student has plenty to do, which means scheduling activities for them during times you may need privacy to complete work or hold a confidential meeting. During their mentoring session, your student can:

• Sit in on staff meetings
• Observe a client interaction or presentation
• Visit a job site or factory
• Set up 15-minute informational interviews with various staff members
• Tour the office and/or immediate neighborhood, if appropriate
• Have lunch with a small group of staff members
• Review the organization’s mission statement, organizational charts, and marketing materials
• View the firm’s project portfolio
• Research and discuss current trends or key issues in the profession
• Complete a small task or assist with a project
Students also appreciate the opportunity to have one-on-one time with their mentor to discuss their career path. 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
- Interview tips or a mock interview
- Portfolio or resume review

**DURING AND AFTER THE MENTORING SESSION**

The day has arrived. Here are a few more tips to help you make the most of the mentoring experience:

- Introduce the student to your colleagues. Provide the student with a space where they can store their personal belongings. Point out bathrooms, breakrooms, the water cooler, etc.
- Provide the student with an overview of the day and details they might need about the itinerary.
- Be clear about ground rules, particularly if the student will sit in on client calls or other meetings. The student is there to listen and learn, not necessarily participate unless you want them to.
- Schedule one-on-one time. Your student will want to learn more about what you do and your career path. Build in some time—maybe over lunch or coffee—to talk with your student.
- Have a back-up plan if your schedule changes. If you need to take an unexpected call or send a few important emails, revisit the list above and make sure you have a few alternative activities for your student.

**Continuing the Mentor/Mentee Relationship**

After a successful day of job shadowing, 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 mentor:

- Set up once-a-month or once-a-quarter coffees or lunches with the student to discuss their career goals.
- Invite the student to attend a local IIDA event with you.
- 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.