

Georg-August-Universität Göttingen

Short-term International Mentorship Programme

Promoting Gender Equality in Collaborative Research

Introduction

Today mentoring is applied by many organizations, business establishments and higher education institutions as a powerful tool for personnel development and professional advancement. Since the days of the Trojan War, many mentoring relationships were formed. Famous mentor/mentee pairs include: Socrates and Plato, Haydn and Beethoven, Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, Helmut Kohl and Angela Merkel, and last but not least Ernest Rutherford and Otto Hahn. As mentoring relationships work outside hierarchies and are handled transparently, clearly visible to the outside world, they contrast career advancement with nepotism and favoritism.

Generally in a mentoring relationship a more “senior” person who has garnered respect and an amount of prestige and power within her/his field, takes a “junior” person under the wing to teach, encourage and provide an extra push to ensure that junior individual’s success. The success of the junior person ultimately will reflect on the senior person, further adding to her/his progress and prestige. A mentor has generally moved beyond preoccupation with self to foster the growth of a developing professional.

There are several different mentoring models: The traditional one-to-one mentoring, peer mentoring, and group mentoring to name a few. The mentoring concept presented here introduces a new form of mentoring which is characterized by a strong orientation towards research.

Objective and Benefits

Studies have shown that one of the reasons for the persistent under-representation of women in higher positions is a reduced access to networks. The Short-term international mentorship programme is addressing this issue. It is tailored to the needs of young female researchers by giving them the opportunity to travel abroad and visit internationally renowned researchers. Mentees will gain international experience, broaden their professional knowledge and extend their professional network. Mentees will have the chance to present their research objectives and discuss career options in a different context. These on-site visits may serve to establish a mentoring relationship outlasting the initial stay providing valuable contacts and insights regarding further career planning under the guidance of an experienced leadership practitioner.

The institution’s effort supporting young female researchers will be made visible internationally, further enhancing the international network of the respective collaborative research unit. The mentoring scheme may also serve as a model for other institutions abroad, thus contributing further to the excellent reputation of German research institutions. Both, Mentors and Mentees will profit from their involvement, as it will provide new insights and perspectives, as well as an opportunity for self-reflection and development. Furthermore Mentors may gain personal satisfaction by sharing their experiences and giving advice to the young and talented.

Specifications of the Programme

Given that researchers today are already greatly involved in various time consuming administrative processes, committee work and other duties more or less related to their research, the programme has deliberately been set up with very lean structures. Participation and application procedures should not take up a lot of time, however, quality standards characterizing a distinguished scheme have to be met.

The programme is open to female doctoral students and postdocs as potential mentees from any collaborative research unit on Göttingen Research Campus. A mentor can either be proposed by a participating mentee or will be recruited by the programme manager and the mentee's supervisor in accordance with the mentee's requirements. The Mentoring relationship should not impose an additional burden on the participants, but is meant to provide promising opportunities for professional and personal development of both the mentee and the mentor. Upon return Mentees will be expected to prepare a written report and give a talk about their visit.

The successful mentoring relationship shall focus on the mentee's professional development and is built on mutual

- Confidentiality and trust
- Respect and honesty
- Engagement and commitment
- Lack of hierarchy and solidarity
- Openness for new ideas and the willingness to explore

It involves the concept of reciprocity and voluntary participation of both mentee and mentor. Furthermore, participation requires that everything discussed within the mentoring relationship shall be confidential unless otherwise specified at the time of discussion. All services within the mentoring relationship (mentors) shall be provided free of charge. The unique character of the mentoring relationship shall be respected and the relationship should be truly independent of vested interests.

Travel allowances for the planned visit can only be made as long as they have not been applied for elsewhere in the proposal. The programme is subject to the DFG Guidelines for the Allocation of Funds.

Application Procedure

Applications are possible at any time. Anyone interested in participating as Mentee should contact the programme manager via email or phone for an informal initial appointment. The application procedure involves filling in the application form and returning it together with an updated CV to the programme manager. A mentor can either be proposed by a participating mentee or will be recruited by the programme manager and the mentee's supervisor in accordance with the mentee's requirements.

Mentors will be informed about the scope of the programme by the programme manager before the mentee's visit. The mentee (together with her supervisor) and the mentor will define the general outline of the visit and the topics she would like to address. All issues regarding the planned research will be treated by the mentee and her supervisor. Travel details and travel will be handled in the respective research institution in accordance with the DFG guidelines for the allocation of Funds.

Future Plans

It is planned to implement this scheme campus-wide thus making it available to all female doctoral students and postdocs in collaborative research units. The establishment of a scientific advisory board supporting the programme and the mentees in more general way is planned for the near future. Potential members of the board shall be recruited from the pool of Principle Investigators in any collaborative research unit on campus.

STIM

Short-Term International Mentorship

It is also planned to establish an international symposium once a year to bring mentors together for an informal exchange of ideas and to discuss experiences with young researchers on campus.

Collaborations with initiatives on campus such as the programmes provided by graduate schools and other institutions as well as with national and international organizations and renowned research institutions are envisaged.