

ALUMNI CAREERS MENTORING GUIDANCE FOR MENTEES

Background

The Alumni Mentoring Network is a great way for UCL students and alumni to find out more about career sectors that interest them from the hundreds of UCL alumni who have volunteered to act as careers mentors. Mentors can help you find out more about the realities of working in specific jobs, recruitment processes and offer advice about marketing yourself effectively. They have sometimes been able to help students arrange work experience or shadowing and refer them to other industry contacts for additional insights. Your relationship could be a single exchange of communication or something more involved. Either way you both have UCL in common which means they are not complete strangers, and the fact they are on the alumni mentoring website means they want to help.

The database

You can search the database for profiles of alumni mentors who have specific experience that might help you in your job search. For example:

- Alumni who previously studied in your department or subject;
- Who have experience of particular industry sectors e.g. journalism or finance;
- Who have lived and worked in specific countries and cities.

You can then request a mentor by clicking on the 'request mentor' button on the profile of a potential mentor and a message is automatically sent.

Instructions on how to search are:

- Go to <https://uclalumnicomunity.org>.
- Select 'Mentoring' on the left hand side menu then 'Find a mentor'.
- In the 'Mentoring' box at the top middle of the page under the first profile select 'SEE ALL' in light blue font.
- The menu of filter options then appears on the right hand side e.g. select UCL department or the degrees.
- Select 'Get Involved' and choose the options you want under 'Offering Help' and 'Seeking Help' to find mentors who are willing to provide specific support, such as acting as a mentor or even if they're willing to introduce you to other connections within their organisation.

Contacting mentors

It's important to think carefully about what you are looking to gain from the mentoring contact and how best to make use of their valuable time. The initial email approach is very important as alumni are generally busy professionals.

Try and do some background research on the mentor's role and organisation beforehand so you can pinpoint gaps in your knowledge. Ensure that your requests are personalised to the mentor requesting specific information. Keep them concise and try not to offer too much personal information about yourself at the initial contact stage (this can always be supplied in any follow-up communication). Remember that productive mentoring relationships are generally long-term so try not to be too short-sighted in the initial request. A good first impression at an early stage in the relationship could potentially open doors to face-to-face meetings and potentially much more.

Examples of Contact emails

The following initial contact email request is unlikely to illicit a response because the student did not seem to have done any research for themselves and the request is extremely generic:

Dear XXX My name is XXX and I am currently in my final year of a degree in XX. I am hoping to obtain some experience in or outside the UK related to the field of XXX and was wondering whether you would be able to provide me with any advice or information that I might find useful in order to secure a relevant placement. Kind regards XX

The following initial contact email request is better because it is researched, with a specific question focus and concisely written:

Dear XXX, I found your details on the UCL alumni mentoring database and hope you don't mind me contacting you. I am currently completing an MSc in XX here at UCL with a strong interest in pursuing a career within the X sector and wondered whether I could ask you a few questions by way of advice. The specific questions I have are as follows:

- *What would you say are the most likely entry level points in the industry for someone with a relevant postgraduate qualification? Would it be possible to learn more about how you first gained entry to the sector?*
- *Are there any specific publications, websites or agencies through which organisations in the sector typically use to publicise vacancies. In your experience are most vacancies publically advertised or obtained through other channels e.g. personal referrals, internships etc.?*

I appreciate that writing email responses can be time-consuming so if you feel it would be easier to discuss these points over the phone, then I can be contacted on X at any time.

Warmest regards (Your name)

Questions you might ask

Only you know what information you need to fill the gaps in your knowledge, but here are a few ideas. For a more detailed list of questions, refer to our help sheet: 'How to find out more about a job'.

- Describe a typical day. Do the days vary?
- Describe the most rewarding aspects of the job?
- What do you like most/least?
- What was the recruitment process for your job?
- What skills do you have that make you good at this job/do you use a lot in this job?
- How is your performance at work assessed?
- Which parts of the field are expanding and likely to offer opportunities in the future?
- What advice would you give me for an effective job search in this sector? What techniques worked for you?
- Where are vacancies advertised?
- Are there particular recruitment agencies I could sign up with?
- Are there any professional journals in the field that I should read or professional bodies that might be helpful in providing information?
- Would you be willing to give some brief feedback on my CV?

An example of a mentee's experience of using the Mentoring system

'The thought of speaking with recent graduates and seasoned professionals in my field piqued my interest and encouraged me to utilise the Alumni Mentoring programme resource. Navigating the database was easy enough and after a few hours of reading profiles, I had a shortlist of three people to contact. I was interested in learning more about management consulting, full cycle project management within international development and logistics. I knew very little about logistics as a career and was keen to find out more. The former two fields I knew quite well, but wanted to learn more about them in a UK context.

I sent brief, clear emails to each person. I introduced myself and requested a short phone call or café meeting at their convenience. One of the three got back to me and a few weeks later I met my management consulting mentor for a quick sushi lunch. I had prepared a list of questions, but the conversation flowed naturally and I acquired all my answers largely unprompted. My queries were around the sector's corporate culture, breakdown of daily tasks, technical versus general experience and – of course – pay. My mentor and I stayed in touch for a little while, exchanging emails, and I feel I could contact him today if I had a further questions.'

Top tips for using mentees successfully

- Mentors are busy people and it may be that they do not respond immediately. If this is the case, review your email message to ensure it is appropriate given the guidelines above. If you feel your initial contact was appropriate, you may want to send a follow-up email after a week or so has elapsed to ensure they received the original request. If there is still no response, contact the alumni relations team for more guidance as it may be the mentor's contact details have changed or they want to withdraw from the mentor database.
- Mentors give up their time willingly as part of the mentoring process so please acknowledge and thank the mentor for taking the time to respond. Keep in touch with them and update them with your progress. You never know when they may hear of a relevant opportunity they could recommend you for.
- In some cases, a productive initial email contact can be followed up by a request for a telephone or face-to face meeting. These can be great ways of developing more fully the mentor-mentee relationship on both sides. Be mindful that the mentor is likely to be busy so be as accommodating as you can about arrangements that best suit the mentor.
- If you have found the mentoring relationship productive it can be useful to talk to others in the field. The alumni mentor may be in a position to suggest other referrals to continue your research. Get specific names and titles and ask if you can use your mentor's name when setting up any future contact.

Additional advice

- If you have any queries about how best to make use of alumni mentoring system, contact the UCL Careers Service to book a one-to-one appointment with a Careers Consultant who will be happy to help you with your concerns.
- You can find detail of how to book an appointment here: www.ucl.ac.uk/careers