

What makes a Good Mentor?

ACU undergraduate researchers were asked “What makes a good mentor?” Here are some of their responses.

I think a good mentor is an individual who is committed to the educational process, and is willing to sacrifice his or her time, energy and resources to help others pursue knowledge and make new discoveries.

A mentor that encourages you to make the research project your own. A good mentor sets the student on the right path to asking the right questions and finding possible answers.

The first thing I think of is patience. Labwork is hard, and when you just start, you make a lot of stupid mistakes. It's very discouraging until you get the hang of it. Having a patient research mentor that encourages you and is able to shake off mistakes is hugely important, especially when you just start. If my mentor hadn't been as patient with me when I just started, I doubt I would have stuck around and gotten to experience how great research can be.

Now that I am officially away from ACU and in graduate school at a large public institution I realize how amazing the undergraduate experience at ACU is. My research mentor was passionate about her field of study but even more so, she was passionate about helping me to grow. I believe that a good research mentor is one who sees beyond the academic material to the people it is important for. Their work is driven by a desire to understand the world to better serve it as Christ has called us to. In this, they invest in the work but also keep family and faith a priority. Whoever they mentor naturally becomes apart of their family and faith journey, which naturally instills passion for the research.

A good research mentor is someone who makes communication clear on the steps to completing the research study.

Someone who is willing to take the time to not only invest in your learning ventures but also our life! I can without a doubt say my mentor is like my second mom on campus. She let's me do things on my own and make my own mistakes, but then corrects me with constructive direction. She always challenges me to do my best and to teach beyond what is asked!

There are dozens of things that make a research mentor good, but they share a common theme of involving the student at every step of the research, including (and especially) things outside the scope of their classes. For me, at least, this was a chance to start learning several skills ordinarily reserved for graduate students. A good research mentor can help simplify these concepts for an undergraduate with less experience.

Guiding me to the answers instead of telling me the answers. Allowing me to work independently.

Someone you know you can depend on in hard times in your research and they are able to guide you.

I think that good mentors take time to ask their students questions and then push back on their answers. Rarely do undergraduate students get the chance to defend opinions to an expert in the field; research mentorships provide that opportunity.

A good mentor is willing to spend time with his or her student researchers, allowing them to experience all aspects of a project, when it is practical of course.

A good research mentor understands how much the student knows and let's the student know that it's okay that they don't understand everything (e.g., not understanding statistics because they haven't taken that grad class, etc.).

Other important qualities include:

- patience
- clear communication
- punctuality/showing up to scheduled meetings
- friendly attitude
- confidence in student

Letting the students take the reins and only acting as a guide. A good mentor also helps students understand not only each step of the research process, but also WHY you take certain steps depending on the type of research you are doing (e.g. why do you use Chi Square instead of Spearman correlation, etc.).

A good research mentor is specific. They ask specific questions about the direction of the student's work and the methods the student will be using. The good mentor does not accept vague or general responses from the student but rather pushes the student to be as detailed as possible. Often as a student, I think I know what I mean, but my ideas have not been fully developed. By pressing me to be specific and detailed, my mentors have challenged me to develop my ideas and research into higher quality work. Of course, in order to press me for specifics and details, my mentors have been willing to set aside intentional time to focus on me and the research. Focusing for me and my mentor was especially easier when we met at a location besides the mentor's office.

I believe a good research mentor is one who will keep a student accountable on deadlines and one who sets goals for the student. It is easy to think you have all the time in the world before something has to be done and turned in, but that is not the case. It is critical to also have short discussion meetings. I also believe it is important for the research mentor to show love to the student and invite him or her to educational events that could enhance their imagination individualized to their discipline.