

M.M.P.

Minority Mentor Program



PennState Law | University Park, PA

Tips for Student Mentees

About the Minority Mentor Program

The Minority Mentor Program (MMP) began with a matching seed grant from the Office Educational Equity of Penn State University and now operates as an independent program at Penn State Law. The mission of the MMP aims to foster support and mentorship to minority law students by “matching” them with an “internal” faculty or senior administrator and an alum. Alumni mentors are minority professionals in the legal field and can help mentees achieve academic success and emotional well-being for the duration of the students’ law school journey. Additionally, the mentorship program continues to provide invaluable support after students enter the legal profession.

Role and Responsibilities of a Mentee

To have the relationship you want with your mentors, much depends on you. You should take the initiative to build a relationship with each of your mentors. We understand if this may not come naturally to you, just know that it does not come naturally to most. The MMP is here to support you through exactly these types of uncertain situations, but we can only help if we know you are struggling. The first year of law school can be especially challenging and therefore building a strong mentoring relationship from the beginning is important to achieve academic success and to ease your transition.

Learn About Your Mentor

Gather information about your mentors’ background, experiences and areas of expertise. Check LinkedIn or their online employee bio if available and find out about their practices and specialties. By understanding your mentors’ background, you will gain a better idea of which areas each of your mentors can help you with in your education and career plans.

Maintain Clear Communication & Ask for Feedback

Expect to drive the mentoring relationship and be prepared to ask for what you need when you need it. Early in the mentorship, determine the best time and way to contact your Mentor. Always give your Mentor a few days to respond before trying to reach them through another method. Practice asking for specific feedback which can contribute to your self-awareness and help you reach the next level.

Be Authentic and Challenge Yourself

Share your own background and history. Your willingness to be vulnerable and honest is key to your growth and development. Talk about your goals and what you hope to achieve in your career. Mentors can create strategies for your future success. Listen carefully when your mentors offer to share their experiences. Mentors are there to help you navigate challenges and celebrate successes. Expect your Mentor to challenge you with questions and opportunities that might take you beyond your comfort zone.

Engage and Prepare for Mentor Meetings

Talk with your mentor about how often they would like to connect and their preferred method. Create an agenda for each meeting with your Mentor and be fully present during your conversations. The mentor relationship works best if there is a commitment to ongoing sharing, authentic conversation, and relationship building. Let your Mentor know as soon as possible if you need to reschedule your meeting.

Topics to Discuss with your Mentor

Minority law students benefit from mentors who can provide academic and emotional support and career advice. Internal mentors can also help fill a gap for students who are the first in their family to go to law school. In the past, dialogue between mentees and mentors have included advice on careers and networking, challenges related to COVID-19 and racial trauma, transitioning to law school, achieving academic success, how to navigate microaggressions, communicating with professors, and difficult topics in the classroom.

Expect a Two-Way Learning Relationship

Your Mentor may learn from your experiences just as you will learn from theirs. Take time to discover common interests besides a legal career and always assume positive intent with your Mentor. Communication is essential to the relationship you are building.

If you have any questions, need ideas, or if there is anything I can do to help, please do not hesitate to contact Dr. Wende' Ferguson (she/her), Associate Dean for Diversity Equity and Inclusion and Assistant Dean for Student Services, at wpf5069@psu.edu.