

Washington University in St. Louis

Postdoc Peer Mentorship Handbook

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Purpose

Transitioning from a graduate student to a postdoc can be a daunting experience. In addition, every year more than half of the recruited postdocs in Washington University in St. Louis are international and a majority of them are coming to the USA for the first time in their life. The Postdoc Peer Mentorship Program (PPMP) is designed to provide comparatively newer postdocs (as mentees) with an opportunity to develop professional relationships with more experienced postdocs (mentors). This program aims to support the postdocs in their first or second year by providing one-on-one support and guidance as they acclimate to the University, St. Louis, and their academic role. These relationships are intended to develop confidence, gain new perspectives about both USA as a country and that of local St. Louis. The ultimate goal is to identify and nurture new talents and help them to build mentorship skills (through support, well-being, academic advice, cultural alignments etc.) to become leaders of tomorrow.

The PPMP is a self-sustained independent program where each year the current PPMP coordinators will select outstanding mentors (1-4) as the coordinators for the following year. This selection is based on current performance/feedback as a mentor and also on participation towards the mentorship certificate. The PPMP program will provide the coordinators with the opportunity to gain additional leadership skills in management, networking, and program development and transfer their skills to the new coordinators.

The Role of Coordinators

The Coordinators will oversee the application process by designing and distributing applications, reading through and matching mentees to mentors that they would most benefit from. Coordinators will be available to the mentors and the mentees for any additional information or help throughout the year. They will also organize at least two social events for the chance to meet other postdocs participating in the program).

The Role of a Peer Mentor

Peer mentors will support their mentee(s) as they progress through their postdoctoral training for a period of about 6 months. Mentors are expected to connect with their mentee at least once per month. Connections can be made virtually, in person, over text or email as communicated and preferred by the dyad.

Mentor-mentee pairs will be made based on the applications, which consider both the mentor and mentee's strengths, experiences, research focus, hobbies and desired focus for the PPMP relationship. As a peer mentorship program, mentors can provide support by listening to any problems that may arise and suggesting possible solutions, providing information for on campus resources, helping in networking with others around the campus or in the community, or other support that helps the mentee engage with learning and development opportunities.

It's important to remember that as a peer mentor, *you will not have all the answers*. We anticipate that mentors will use their experience at Washington University to share knowledge of the resources available to the mentee. This is particularly important when a mentee needs psychological support beyond what the peer mentor is comfortable or able to provide.

Requirements for the Mentorship Dyad

QUALIFICATIONS

To qualify as a mentor, you must be a current postdoc who has worked at Washington University in St Louis for at least 1 year at the time of application.

To qualify as a mentee, you must be a current Washington University in St Louis postdoc who has worked at the university for less than 1 year at the time of application. We will not accept applications from postdocs applying to WashU but not started yet (must provide a valid wustl email address).

COMMITMENT

Postdoc peer mentors and mentees are expected to commit to the program for at least 6 months. During that time, PPMP dyads are expected to connect at least once a month. Both parties are expected to coordinate regular meetings as needed. Meetings can take place in person or virtually.

AVAILABILITY

Peer mentors are expected to be available to their mentees during reasonable business hours, unless in the case of an emergency. Peer mentors are encouraged to provide an email address, office location, and phone number to facilitate communication with their mentee(s). The boundaries for phone calls can be set by each individual mentor.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Mentees are encouraged to approach peer mentors with any issues they would like to discuss, and these conversations will usually remain confidential. However, there may be occasions when a problem arises that the mentor is not equipped to deal with or is required to report. On such occasions, the peer mentor should discuss options with the mentee, such as consulting with PPMP Coordinator(s), the Postdoc Office Director, Ombuds office, mental health services, or a medical provider for additional advice. It is up to the mentee to decide if it is okay for the peer mentor to share any identifying or situational information with the person being consulted. Peer mentors should feel free to describe situations in a general manner to other peer mentors and to staff members with Occupational Health Services in order to get advice. **However, peer mentors must report any information regarding self-harm or harm to others, whether actual or potential, by the mentee; such reports must identify the mentee.** Peer mentors must also report any information received regarding sexual harassment, discriminatory harassment, or sexual violence; such reports can withhold the mentee's name. See university policies on Discrimination, Harassment and Abusive Conduct and other applicable policies for details (<https://hr.wustl.edu/policies/>). You may also consider using the Confidential Concern Reporting Portal (<https://secure.ethicspoint.com/domain/media/en/gui/57349/index.html>) and/or contacting the Ombuds for confidential support.

PUBLICITY

The Washington University Postdoc Society (WUPS) hosts the Postdoc Peer Mentorship Program home page, which introduces the program and includes a PDF of this handbook. The Office of Postdoctoral Affairs (OPA) and WUPS will help advertise the program as needed (initiated by the PPMP coordinators).

Mentoring Certificate

Fullfillment of the requirements below will earn the mentor a certificate issued by the OPA.

Recipients of the certificate will receive a badge which can be displayed in an email signature or LinkedIn profiles and listed on CVs.

Requirements for mentorship certificate:

- Meet with mentee at least once per month for 6 months.
- Complete survey at the end of the program.
- The mentee must also fill out an end-of-program survey confirming that they met with the mentor and were satisfied with the effort put into the relationship.

Mentors who complete the certificate will be eligible for a prize which will be decided based upon the mentee's survey responses about their experience and their feedback about the mentor's skills.

Recommended CV Formatting for Mentors

We suggest that you list your role as a mentor as a university service.

(YEAR). Mentor, Postdoctoral Peer Mentorship Program. Washington University in St. Louis, St. Louis, MO.

Certificate

We suggest you document this as an academic honor.

(YEAR). Leadership Certificate/Credential. Washington University in St. Louis, St. Louis, MO.

Selection of coordinators

Anyone who has served as a mentor may apply to be a PPMP coordinator for the following year, although preference will be given to those who have completed the certificate. The coordinator(s) of the program is (are) selected by the current PPMP coordinator(s) with support from the Postdoc Office Director and is welcome to take over the peer-mentorship program for the following year. The new PPMP coordinators will be guided by the current coordinators after taking over the charge.

Meeting Guidance

First Meeting

We recommend that mentors reach out to their assigned mentee within 72 hours of receiving the match. In your first conversation, it can be helpful to cover the following topics:

- Preferred name or nickname and pronunciation
- Preferred pronouns
- Office location
- Preferred method of contact and frequency
- Reason for joining the PPMP program (e.g., any specific goals or concerns)
- Individual or career development plan
- Set expectations to learn from each other

Follow Up Meetings

We recommend that mentors provide support for mentees to enroll in the postdoc leadership certificate/credential program. In addition, we encourage mentors to help mentees get connected with local activities, resources or communities of personal interest. Topics that you may want to discuss:

- Imposter syndrome
- PI/Mentor relationships
- Peer/lab relationships
- Career and professional development
- Importance of leadership and teamwork in the success
- Mentorship techniques
- Networking
- Progress towards career and research goals
- Challenges such as work-life balance or handling of the career gap especially for a woman researcher
- Hobbies

Resources

- [Washington University Mental Health Resources and Employee Assistance Program](#)
- [Washington University Discrimination and Harrassment Resources](#)
- [Career Development Resources](#)
- [Postdoc Career Development](#)
- [The Writing Center](#)
- [The Teaching Center](#)
- [Public Speaking Support](#)
- [Office of the Ombuds](#)
- [Occupational Health](#)
- [WUPS Washington University Postdoc Society](#)
- [Postdoc Resources](#)
- [Washu Toastmasters](#)
- [Inprint](#)

Resources on Mentor-Trainee Relationships From the PERCSS Reference Library

- [A Guide to Training and Mentoring in the Intramural Research Program, National Institute of Health \(NIH\)](#)
- [Mentoring International Postdocs, Office of Research Integrity \(ORI\)](#)
- [Mentoring at WashU School of Medicine](#)
- [Responsible Conduct of Research Program - Mentoring Module, Columbia University](#)
- [Research Mentoring, Office of Research Integrity \(ORI\)](#)

Suggested coursework to improve skills regarding mentoring, communication, and anti-discrimination.

- [Postdoc Academy: Succeeding as a Postdoc](#)
- [Postdoc Academy Learning Session \(PALS\)-](#) (Discussion section for Succeeding as a Postdoc course). scheduled for January 2023
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I) Series: [Diversity 1.0- Awareness](#), [Diversity 2.0- Understanding](#), [Diversity 3.0-Commitment](#), [Diversity 4.0- Action accessible through WASHU Learn@work](#)

- Mentorship Training for Postdocs through the postdoc office or Entering Mentoring Course listed under Biology in UCollege
- [Safe Zones Training by Dr. Anna Shabsin or through https://thesafezoneproject.com/](https://thesafezoneproject.com/), we will try to organize 2-3 of these through the year for postdocs participating in the PPMP, details to follow via e-mail
- [Elective DE&I Training](#)- offered through the School of Medicine DE&I office (on the Medical Campus).
- [Elective Learning Session through The Academy](#)-
- [Leadership Management in Action Program \(L-MAP\)](#)- offered through the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs. 12-week course, offered one or twice a year (usually in fall and/or spring)

A Few Ideas for Activities

Sports (watching)

- Go to a [Cardinals game](#) (tickets available throughout the season, late March/early April to late September/early October. Look for discounted tickets throughout the year!)
- Go to a [Blues game](#) (season is ~October to April)
- Go to a soccer game at the new [City Park stadium](#)! First season in 2023
- Go to a [St Louis Battle Hawks](#) XFL football game

Sports (doing)

- Go ice skating during the winter at [Steinberg Rink](#) in Forest Park (~November-February, cash only, ATM available)
- Go [canoeing/kayaking](#) on one of the many rivers near STL
- Standup paddle boarding or paddle boats in Forest park at the [Boathouse](#)
- Climbing at [Upper Limits/Climb So iLL](#)
- [Hiking](#)

Culture

- Watch a musical in the [MUNY](#) (some free seats available, season ~June-August)
- Go see the latest exhibit at the [Art Museum](#) in Forest Park (free entrance to most exhibits)
- [History Museum in Forest Park](#) (Free entrance)
- [St. Louis Symphony Orchestra](#) (season ~October-May, tickets as low as \$15.00), the Orchestra usually also plays a free concert in Forest Park, near the Art Museum just before the start of the season (~September)
- [Fox Theatre](#): plays, musicals, concerts, orchestras
- Go to a concert, e.g. check ticket master for who is coming to STL. Some venues are The [Pageant](#) (Delmar Hall), St Louis Music Park, [Hollywood Casino Amphitheatre](#)
- Check out a comedy show at [Helium Comedy Club](#), [The Funny Bone](#), [The Improv Shop](#)
- Go visit the [Arch](#) (you can take a ride up to the top!)
- Holiday Festivities
 - [Mardi Gras](#) in Soulard neighborhood
 - St Patrick's Day Parades ([Downtown](#) and [Dogtown](#))
 - Christmas themed pop up bars

Transportation

- [Parking on campus](#)
- Help with [Metro U-Pass](#) set-up
- Bike buying options, check out [ST. Louis BWORKS](#), a local non-profit, who get bike donations, which they refurb and sell to fund their kids' classes

Misc

- Visit the [City Museum in downtown St. Louis](#) (offers group/night rates)
- Visit [St. Louis Science Center](#) and [planetarium](#) (free admission) and/or go see an IMAX show
- Visit the [Anheuser-Busch Brewery](#) and tour the brewery
- Take a trip out to [Eckert's Orchard](#) in Illinois for apple & pumpkin picking, hayrides, pig races, and more (Fruit picking season ~April-October)
- Go to [Botanical garden](#) during spring to enjoy new blossoms and winter for orchid show (discounted price for Missouri residents)
- Go to the [zoo](#) (free!) and take the Metro there, using the event as an intro to the Metro system
- [Six Flags](#)
- [Grants Farm](#)
- [Union station](#): the aquarium, ferris wheel, ropes course
- [Great Forest Park Balloon Race](#) (usually in September)
- [Central West End Halloween](#)
- Go bowling and play pool at [Saratoga Lanes](#) – it's cheap, fun, and off-campus!
- Surprise mentees with a care package
- Go out to lunch or coffee or drinks off-campus to take a study break in the middle of the semester
- Have a game night party – Texas Hold 'Em, Trivial Pursuit, Twister, charades, or other board games etc.
- Have an informal get-together featuring international cuisine, in which peer mentors introduce international students to etiquette and protocol at American universities (e.g. how to address professors, how to compose emails, etc.)
- Go out for a treat after a difficult exam, paper or grant etc.

A Few Ideas for Mentors to Develop the PPMP

- Create a welcome packet for incoming students. A list of frequently used grocery stores (esp. [international options](#)), salons, mechanics, dentists, etc. can prove invaluable information for incoming students, most of whom are new to the area. This can be especially helpful for international students.
- Create a reading list of articles, books, podcasts or movies on leadership, career development, mentorship or other topic
- Develop an outcomes survey for the PPMP to document impact of the program. Consider publishing with your mentee!

APPENDIX

Table 1. PPMP Coordinators

Name/Year	Role	Contact
Peter Myers, PhD	Founding Coordinator	petersmyers@wustl.edu
Catherine Hoyt, PhD, OTD	Founding Coordinator	hoytcr@wustl.edu
Ankan Bhadra, PhD	Coordinator (2021-2023)	ankan@wustl.edu
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