

Academic Mentoring Program

The Role of an Academic Mentor

The Center for Integrative Genomics (CIG) at the University of Lausanne (UNIL) offers an academic mentoring program to its PhD students. The academic mentoring program is one arm of a two-tier mentoring scheme, in which students receive guidance from both a research mentor and an academic mentor. The research mentor is the thesis advisor. The academic mentor is an interested, and impartial, faculty member chosen to provide diversity in the student's education.

The role of a CIG academic mentor is fourfold:

1. To provide graduate students with the unique experience of having close contact with a senior member of the scientific community. Young scientists often seek out the advice and counsel of senior scientists. These interactions can have an enormous impact on students during the course of their graduate studies and can influence their careers for years to come. One role for the academic mentor is therefore to offer students advice, perspective, and the benefits of their personal experience in the profession.

2. To provide graduate students with a faculty member whose primary concern is their academic development. One role for the academic mentor is to ensure that their protégé's academic development proceeds satisfactorily. This role may take several forms. For example, academic mentors can provide advice concerning the selection of doctoral courses to meet the credit requirements of the UNIL Faculty of Biology and Medicine doctoral school. Additionally, by providing guidance at key stages in the academic process (e.g., demi-thèse exams), and by serving on the thesis committee of their protégé (see below), academic mentors can ensure that the academic needs of the student are being properly assessed and met.

3. To provide graduate students with a letter of reference. As CIG doctoral students complete their studies, they will undoubtedly require letters of reference to secure future positions such as postdoctoral positions. The academic mentoring program provides CIG students with the added advantage of close contact with both an academic and research mentor, who can provide letters of support on their behalf.

4. To act as a conduit. The mentor–protégé relationship is built on trust, and as a result conversations between students and their mentors are confidential. Nonetheless, the academic mentors are in a unique position to evaluate protégé progress. Therefore, if agreeable to the student, the mentor can relay any difficulties and concerns the student may have to interested parties.

To satisfy this role, the following criteria have been established for the mentoring program:

- (a) Faculty are asked to nominate themselves as candidates for academic mentors.
- (b) Students will learn about the program upon their arrival and will have three months to identify a mentor. Potential mentors are informed of new arrivals. Both students and mentors are involved in the selection process.
- (c) Students and mentors should consider the value added to the academic mentoring relationship if students select mentors who work in different fields or on different floors of the Génopode building as such relationships will provide (i) diversity in the student's doctoral experience and (ii) provide a mechanism for interchange within the building.
- (d) In general, each mentor will be assigned at most one protégé per academic year and no more than three total.
- (e) "Formal" meetings between the mentor and protégé will be at least twice a year.
- (f) If agreeable to all involved, mentors are encouraged to sit in on thesis committee meetings of their protégé (e.g., demi-thèse exam).
- (g) Annually, the academic mentor will prepare a brief report on the protégé and the mentoring process.
- (h) At the behest of either the student or mentor, student-mentor relationships can be changed.