Mentorship Program of the International Society for the Study of Narrative
A Few Recommendations for Mentors

The mentorship program is an initiative that seeks to connect graduate students, early career researchers and scholars who hold short-term appointments with senior researchers in order to encourage forms of communication, support, and professional opportunity and to promote the sharing and building of knowledge and skills, both for the mentee and the mentor. The idea for this was developed by members of the Graduate Student and Contingent Faculty Caucus, with the advice and support of the committee for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

General Information
We envisage that mentors and mentees will meet digitally one-on-one for a 50-minute conversation at least two times in 2022: at least once leading up to or during the annual conference (June) and at least once after the conference. All mentees and mentors will be asked to fill in a short questionnaire on their experience by the end of November 2022. These are the minimum requirements of the program. Beyond these requirements each pair is of course free to decide whether they have the time for more frequent meetings and written exchanges. A contact from the DEI committee will be available in case there are problems or questions.

Mentors and mentees are not required to participate in the 2022 annual conference of the Society to take part in the program. However, being a member of the International Society for the Study of Narrative is a prerequisite for taking part in the mentorship program. If you are not currently a member yet, you can find all the information on how to join the society here: https://www.thenarrativesociety.org/become-a-member

Our November survey has shown that in the few cases where the mentor-mentee relationships did not go entirely smoothly, this was mainly because of issues with responsiveness. We ask that both mentors and mentees respond to each other’s messages in a timely manner (within no more than two weeks) and give each other a brief heads-up if they feel they need to draw back from the exchange (we all know that sometimes commitments can stack up in unforeseen ways). Mentors in particular should be mindful of the power differential inherent in the relationship, which operates even within a relatively informal setting such as this program. For example, our survey suggests that mentees can find it hard to gauge when it is okay to reach out to busy mentors. It is therefore important to explicitly discuss expectations about frequency of exchanges and preferred channels of communication in the first meeting (see below). Please also be careful with expressing opinions that can be understood as judgements of the mentee’s academic progress. We would like to remind that the mentoring program cannot replace a formal supervisory relationship, so do not feel obliged to take on responsibilities normally associated with the role of a primary academic advisor.
A Few Ideas on How to Get the Mentorship Started

First contact
Your mentee will contact you via email with a short description of their research interests and their reasons for taking part in the program. We have encouraged them, in the guidelines for mentees, to be specific about their hopes for the program and to suggest some topics for discussion at the first meeting. This is also meant to give you time to consider, before the first meeting, what kind of support you’d be willing to offer and how much time you will realistically be able to dedicate to this. Please consider which of these areas you are most comfortable providing support in. Please note that we do our best to match the pairs according to the preferences given to these areas in our initial survey, but understand that needs may change as the mentoring process develops.

- Instrumental: advice on building disciplinary competency in narrative, navigating job or grant applications, publishing an article or monograph, etc.
- Psychosocial: encouragement and support, including advice on work-life balance and/or connection of social identity to the discipline and community
- Networking: advice on developing professional contacts, connections to potential collaborators, future referees, etc.

First meeting
As you lay out expectations for your interactions, please be candid about the time and energy you have available to invest in this program. One valuable feature of the mentor/mentee relationship will fall under the arena of praxis: the manner in which you model professionalism – including appropriate boundaries – serves to enhance mutual respect, trust, and collegiality.

The aims of the first meeting are to get to know your mentee and to define together what you want to focus on during the mentorship period. It may be wise to limit the first meeting itself to a 50-minute call to avoid “zoom fatigue”. This could be a good time to clarify practical expectations: establish when you will meet again and agree whether it is okay for the mentee to contact you by email in-between meetings.

We have suggested to the mentee that after the meeting they send you an email summing up the way of proceeding that you have agreed upon, just to make sure that you are both on the same page.

We wish you a rewarding experience and are looking forward to hearing about it at the end of November via the questionnaire. In the meantime, if you have any comments, suggestions or questions, please don’t hesitate to contact us!

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