

Fall 2025 Activity Report

THE BCS MENTORSHIP AGREEMENT LAUNCHED

This fall, the Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences launched a new Mentorship Committee (MC) to help strengthen and clarify mentorship practices across the department. The committee began implementing the processes outlined in [the new Mentorship Handbook](#), including ensuring signed agreements and annual check-ins. Much of the semester focused on establishing the new system, gathering feedback, and identifying areas for continued improvement. This report provides a brief overview of these early activities and what to expect as the work moves forward into 2026.



September

Three committee members (Greg, Chigusa, Kathy) were elected by students and faculty.

All grad students in Years 1-3, post-docs, and their mentors completed the agreement form.



October

The MC members met with 22 mentees to discuss their agreements and other mentoring experiences.

The MC members compiled meeting notes for individual mentees and filed them for a record.



November

Follow-up conversations were scheduled for mentors and mentees to discuss their expectations.

The MC summarized the initial insights and prepared for a town hall discussion scheduled for January 2026.

WHY DO WE NEED AN AGREEMENT?

The mentorship agreement aims to strengthen departmental oversight and increase transparency around expectations and progress. Because mentoring varies across labs, these conversations help surface effective practices, common challenges, and areas needing support. Below are the key takeaways from this semester's check-in meetings.

COMMUNICATION IS KEY, YET HARD

Mentees generally report supportive environments, though workloads can feel overwhelming. Challenges often arise during high-stress moments—deadlines, technical failures, or personal crises—and many mentees are unsure how to voice concerns. Clear communication and aligned expectations are crucial, yet remain one of the hardest parts of the mentorship process.

Key check-in topics recommended for **mentors**:

- How many classes and projects is your mentee working on? What milestones (e.g., quals) do they need to reach?
- When a mentee cannot reach an agreed goal, how should they communicate to you?
- What should your mentee do when they have a concern?

2025 KEY MEASURES

The number of **agreements** signed

22

(18 grads, 4 post-docs, 91% of eligible members)

The number of **labs** participated

11

(10 BCS, 1 affiliated)

The total number of **meeting hours** spent

58.75 h

(Total person hours, 3MC members combined)

FOR MENTEES

ESTABLISHING A TWO-WAY STREET

In our international, interdisciplinary community, mentors' expectations vary. Raising your concerns early is essential to resolving them and ensuring support. We understand that power dynamics can make this difficult, but the new MC processes provide channels through which you can speak with the MC members, as well as with the DGS, the chair, or other university resources. We ask for your proactive involvement because faculty—especially junior mentors—are under heavy pressure in an increasingly difficult and unforgiving environment, which can affect mentoring. Effective mentorship is a shared effort, and we welcome your ideas on facilitating these conversations.

All of us have access to:

The CARE network

<https://www.rochester.edu/care/>

The Ombuds office

<https://www.rochester.edu/ombuds/>

Graduate Education and Postdoctoral Affairs

<https://www.rochester.edu/college/gradstudies/>

Counseling Center

<https://www.rochester.edu/uhs/ucc/>

SOME FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Good practices: Mentees appreciate clear and regular communication (e.g., in-person meetings, emails, or Slack messages). Some labs also use standardized progress tracking and reflection forms on a quarterly and annual basis. Please share your good practices with others / other labs!

“Big picture” meetings: Our day-to-day work routine can consume us entirely. Some mentors and mentees find it helpful to have time reserved to take a step back from project details, assess broader scientific / academic goals and progress, and make an explicit agreement on how to manage stressful circumstances when they arise.

Career support: Across labs, there is a growing need for supporting non-academic career paths. This has tangible consequences for skill acquisition and various needs for internships and networking. We encourage labs to normalize conversations about career development.

Moving forward: For an agreement to be effective, its content must reflect each mentee’s needs. This year, some mentors used identical language for multiple mentees, which was understandable given the time constraints of this initial year. Now that we have established this process, we ask all mentors and mentees to further tailor the agreement in 2026.

Deep-level mentor-mentee similarity (shared values, beliefs, perspectives)	Strongest predictor
Culturally aware mentoring (mentor responsiveness to identity, culture)	Meaningful effects
Mentor rank (assistant → full professor)	No meaningful effect
Mentee capital (subjective SES)	No meaningful effect
Mentor-mentee gender similarity	No effect
Mentor-mentee racial & ethnic similarity	No effect
Relationship initiation (rotations vs. direct admit)	No effect

Using survey data from **565 life-science PhD students across 70 U.S. universities**, Tuma & Dolan (2024) found that mentoring quality was *not* shaped by demographics or lab-matching mechanisms, but overwhelmingly by shared values and culturally aware mentoring. A question for us is—*how do we build common values and learn about each other’s cultural values?*

Tuma, T. T., & Dolan, E. L. (2024). What makes a good match? Predictors of quality mentorship among doctoral students. *CBE—Life Sciences Education*, 23:2

