

Research Student Buddy System Guide

*“Mentoring is a brain to pick, an ear to listen, and a push in the
right direction.”*

– John C. Crosby

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1. Introduction

Embarking on a research journey can be both exhilarating and daunting. To ease this transition and foster a supportive academic environment, Research Students in the School of Nursing and Midwifery, University College Cork have established the “Research Student Buddy System.” This initiative pairs incoming research students (*referred to as Mentees hereafter*) with more senior students (*referred to as Buddies hereafter*). Buddies offer invaluable peer support, sharing insights into navigating research, university resources, and the overall research experience. By connecting new and experienced students, the buddy system promotes a sense of community and empowers students to thrive throughout their studies. This system is completely voluntary. Students are under no obligation to opt in.

2. Program Objectives

- Facilitate smoother integration of new research students into the academic environment.
- Provide peer-to-peer support and guidance for new students.
- Enhance the leadership and mentoring skills of advanced students.
- Foster a collaborative and supportive academic community.

Note: This mentorship program is intended to be informal and operates independently from the student's supervisory team. It serves as an additional support mechanism for new students, complementing the existing university processes.

3. Program Structure

3.1 Orientation

- Assign buddy-mentee pairs and introduce via email.

3.2 Meetings

- Buddy-mentee pairs can arrange meetings, as agreed between them. However, a minimum of four meetings per year is recommended.
- Encourage informal check-ins via email or messaging platforms, as agreed between the buddy and mentee.

4. Buddy/Mentee Matching Process

4.1 Student Selection

- *Buddies*: Research students in their second year or beyond.
- *Mentees*: All incoming first-year research students.

Verify buddies and mentees' willingness to participate through a voluntary application via Microsoft Forms sent to students' UCC email address.

4.2 Advertising the buddy system

On commencement of the research programme, incoming students are sent an Invitation Email about the Buddy System by the Senior Executive Assistant (Research and Graduate

Studies) on behalf of the Vice Dean of Graduate Studies in the School of Nursing and Midwifery.

4.3 Expression of interest

Incoming students complete a short questionnaire via Microsoft Forms (see Appendix 1) to gather information on:

- Research interests including topic and methods
- Preferred communication styles (face to face, online)
- Specific areas where mentees seek guidance
- Consent for email and name to be shared between buddy and mentee

4.4 Matching buddies to mentees

Questionnaire responses are used by the program coordinator Patrice Crowley p.crowley@uemail.ucc.ie to match buddies to mentees based on compatibility. Aim for a ratio of 1 buddy to 1-2 mentees.

5. Conflict Resolution

- Establish a clear process for addressing conflicts or incompatibilities between buddies and mentees.
- Designate a program coordinator (Patrice Crowley) to mediate any issues that arise.

6. Program Timeline

- Official matching process begins at each entry time (i.e., October, January, April, or July) of each year.
- Buddies commit to a one-year mentorship, with the possibility of continuing as agreed between the buddy and mentee.

7. Roles and Responsibilities of Buddies and Mentees

7.1. Buddies' roles and responsibilities

Guidance and support

- Provide advice, guidance, and support to your mentee based on their needs
- Share experiences and insights about the research and overcoming challenges
- Share strategies for academic writing and publishing

Resource navigation

- Signpost mentees to relevant supports where appropriate e.g. Skills Centre
- Signpost to relevant policies if needed e.g. UCC Code of Research Conduct

Networking

- Introduce mentee to other students and faculty members where appropriate
- Encourage participation in academic and social events

- Advise of the range of Clubs and Societies available in UCC:
<https://candsportal.ucc.ie/>

Communication and confidentiality

- Maintain contact with mentee
- Set boundaries for contact (agreed upon between mentor and mentee) (e.g., within normal working hours)
- Respond to mentee in a timely manner
- Maintain confidentiality of discussions with mentees
- In the rare event that a student discloses information that necessitates a breach of confidentiality (such as a risk of harm to themselves or others) the following supports are available:
 - UCC Student Counselling at <https://www.ucc.ie/en/studentcounselling/>
 - UCC Student Health at <https://www.ucc.ie/en/studenthealth/>
 - Pieta House 1800 247 247
 - Samaritans Ireland 116 123
 - Niteline 1800 32 32 42
- It is important to note that providing counselling or professional mental health support falls outside the scope of this role. Students are encouraged to refer individuals in need to appropriate campus resources and mental health professionals for such assistance (such as those listed above)

Respect and professionalism

- Maintain professional boundaries in the mentoring relationship
- Be punctual for meetings and respectful in communications

Conflicts

- In the unlikely event that a conflict arises, please reach out to the program coordinator (details below)

7.2. Mentees' roles and responsibilities

Active participation

- Engage actively in mentoring relationship
- Attend any scheduled meetings with buddy (mentor)
- Seek out resources and opportunities suggested by your buddy

Communication

- Seek advice and clarification from your buddy when needed
- Be receptive to feedback and advice

Respect and professionalism

- Respect your buddy's time and commitments
- Maintain professional boundaries in the mentoring relationship
- Be punctual for meetings and respectful in communications

Responsibility

- Take responsibility for your own academic progress and decisions
- Use the buddy as a resource, not as a solution provider

Confidentiality

- Respect the confidentiality of discussions with the buddy
- Maintain appropriate boundaries in sharing personal information

Conflicts

- In the unlikely event that a conflict arises, please reach out to the program coordinator (details below)

These roles provide a framework for you to understand your responsibilities and make the most of the mentoring relationship. The success of the buddy system relies on both parties actively engaging in their roles and maintaining open, respectful communication.

If you have any queries, please reach out to: Patrice Crowley (PhD student and buddy system program coordinator) at p.crowley@uemail.ucc.ie

Appendix 1. Expression of interest form

Thank you for considering being a part of the Research Student Buddy System.

Please complete the below expression of interest form.

Name

Enter your answer

Student number

Enter your answer

UCC email address

Enter your answer

Are you interested in being a buddy or a mentee?

☐ Buddy

☐ Mentee

Please briefly mention your research interests e.g. topic, methods

Enter your answer

What is your preferred method of communication?

☐ Online e.g. email, Teams

☐ Face to face meetings

☐ Other

If you are a mentee, please give any specific areas where you require guidance (optional)

Enter your answer

Do you consent to your name and contact information being collected and shared with your matched buddy/mentee?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Thank you for completing this form. You will receive an email with the details of your buddy-mentee pairs as soon as possible.

Any queries please reach out to: Patrice Crowley (program coordinator) at p.crowley@umail.ucc.ie

Link: <https://forms.office.com/e/vyQJcfECVh>