

## **Guidelines for Mentoring in the BMS (Phase I)**

### **What do we mean by “mentoring”?**

Mentoring is a tool for professional and personal development as well as for career advancement. It is based on the pairing of a mentor and a mentee. These pairings are formed across hierarchies and generations. A person with more professional life experience (the mentor) supports the development and career of a younger, less experienced person (the mentee). Mentees learn from their mentors, benefit from their knowledge, and gain insight into his or her network and contacts. Mentors pass on their personal experience based on their own career and professional style. Mentors provide mentees with guidance that helps them to develop on their own. The meetings are confidential and it is encouraged to discuss personal issues.

### **BMS Mentoring**

At the beginning of Phase I, each student is assigned a mentor from the BMS faculty. The mentors are expected to be familiar with BMS and university regulations and should be able to give guidance and advice for BMS studies and beyond. The idea is that the Phase I mentor guides the mentee during the entire duration of Phase I and after the Qualifying Exam until Phase II really starts. The mentoring is meant to detect possible difficulties early, so that additional support and guidance can be offered and countermeasures can be taken if necessary.

The BMS Admissions Committee tries to match mentor and mentee according to their mutual academic interests. However, at the time of admission to Phase I students are not expected to have decided on a field of concentration, so we do not expect that there is a “perfect fit” between the mentor’s specialties and the mentees interests, which may also develop and change in the course of Phase I studies. Mentees should be encouraged to find and shape their own interests; this may lead them away from the mentor’s interests. The BMS hopes that the mentor can give valuable information to his/her mentee regarding research fields and possible advisors. Other BMS faculty may help to provide specialized expertise within the broad scientific spectrum of the BMS.

The mentor

- advises the mentee on his/her studies and follows his/her successes/achievements,
- meets with the mentee on a regular basis to evaluate the progress made and may consult to this effect with the lecturers and tutors of the courses taken,
- helps the mentee to get to know Berlin mathematics and
- gives advice about different research groups and scholarship possibilities.

After each semester, Phase I students write a short report on their activities. These reports form the basis for discussion with the mentor. During each semester they will ideally meet twice, once in the middle of the semester (optional) to review the mentee's progress and at the end of the semester to review the past semester and to plan the next one (decide which Basic and Advanced Courses to take).

### **Setting up meetings**

The mentees are expected to contact their mentors to arrange the meetings. Typically communication is by e-mail to arrange a meeting within a week (or two weeks in the breaks). Students should keep in mind that their professors have large groups to supervise and that it is the student's responsibility and also in their best interest to meet with the mentor on a regular basis.

## **Contact and first meeting**

The first meeting should take place at the beginning of the first semester or earlier if possible.

The mentor

- should explain to international students how to access the "Vorlesungsverzeichnisse" (course catalogues),
- discusses courses that seem particularly suitable from his/her point of view,
- recommends that the mentee takes classes from different areas in order to expand the knowledge base and ensure that the mentee has major and minor subjects. (It is possible and common to audit a course for two weeks before making the final decision whether to take it or not),
- should explain "Vorbesprechungen" (seminar advance meetings): distributing topics for seminars in some cases takes place at the end of the previous semester,
- should explain that the Qualifying Exam should usually take place within three semesters.

At the end of each meeting it is useful to write down the outcomes for future reference, to arrange a date for the next meeting, and to agree on any necessary preparations.

## **Meeting at the end of the 1st semester**

The mentor and the mentee

- review the past semester and plan the next one(s).

## **Meetings in the 2nd and 3rd semester**

The mentor and the mentee

- review the past semester, plan the next one(s) and discuss the direction of interest.

The mentor

- discusses possible directions, PhD supervisors, and sources for funding (e.g., thus insisting on an appropriate choice of courses, recommending suitable research seminars...),
- recommends taking on an "extended" seminar project (including written documentation) - this may serve as a stepping-stone to finding a PhD supervisor and project,
- gives advice about different research groups and scholarships (or recommends to whom to talk) and talks about the long-term prospects (career in university/industry/ other?),
- starts talking about the Qualifying Exam and prepares the mentee for it, i.e. helps whenever problems occur e.g., it might be advisable to set up training for oral exams (with fellow students), if the mentee has never/seldom taken any,
- ensures that a Phase II advisor is lined up for after the Qualifying exam.

## **Selected possible questions by the mentor/for the range of mentoring topics**

- Personal: What is the current situation? What is annoying, problematic, difficult, unsolved? Do obstacles or barriers exist that prohibit productive work towards the Qualifying Exam? What are your wishes, goals; do you have an idea what you want to do in the future? What interests, strengths, and talents do you have? How do you judge your competence in fields such as decision-making, professional methods, interpersonal and social skills?
- International students: How do you cope with the German/BMS study system (oral exercises, seminars, lectures, homework)? What do you find new/interesting/surprising/ unusual?
- Qualifying exam and Phase II: How far along are you? What is the plan for future work? How can you improve presentations? Do you feel that you are making progress?
- Career: Which professional fields are you interested in? What do you need to know to get into one of these fields either in academia or in industry? What qualifications do you already have and where do you need to add required skills? Which courses, seminars, trainings, presentations, conferences, and events would be helpful in achieving the mentee's goals?
- Career preparations: What can the mentor tell the mentee about the rules and regulations in academia?

These are only a few suggestions from the plethora of possible topics in the mentoring meetings. What will be discussed depends on the interest of the people involved, and should be chosen according to their interests and needs.