Make the Most of your Mentoring Sessions!

YOUR GUIDE TO THE 2024 IIDA STUDENT MENTORING PROGRAM

The IIDA Student Mentoring Program is one of the most dynamic mentoring programs in the interior design industry. Each year, IIDA pairs more than 500 students across the U.S. with mentors that work in the interior design industry as design professionals, manufacturer representatives, architects, dealers, interior design educators, and more, to give students the opportunity to experience a real-world look at interior design, and make lasting connections in the industry.

PROGRAM UPDATES FOR 2024
This year the mentoring program will be offered in-person and virtually, giving mentors and students the flexibility they need for a successful mentoring experience.

March 1: Student Mentoring Kick-Off Webinar
Join IIDA and past program participants in a conversation and Q&A covering tips, tricks, and insights that students can use to get the most out of their mentoring experience. Register today!

March 1 - April 30: Mentoring Sessions Take Place
We encourage mentors and students to create their own, personalized experience. You may choose to meet in-person, virtually, or create a hybrid experience.

Based on your availability and location, you will need to commit to meeting for one-day in person or a minimum of three times virtually for at least one hour for each meeting. Or, you may develop a hybrid experience that consists of meeting in-person for at least three hours with supplemental meetings virtually. It's up to you!

This guide is for both mentors and students participating in the 2024 IIDA Student Mentoring Program. For general information about the program, visit our IIDA Student Mentoring FAQ page.
WHAT TO DO BEFORE YOUR FIRST MEETING

Once you’re paired, you’ll work together to schedule your mentoring sessions. When reaching out to your mentoring partner, remember to:

• **Tell them who you are.** IIDA will provide a lot of information, but reminding your partner who you are is always helpful—name, school/company, where you’re located, etc.

• **Share your preferred way to communicate.** Are you always on Instagram? Do you prefer to get a phone call or text? Let your partner know the best way to contact you (and include the phone number, email address, or social handle).

• **Factor in the time it takes to coordinate schedules.** You’re busy. Your partner is busy. It may initially feel challenging to schedule your first meeting, but be patient, considerate, and understanding with each other. If you know specific days, dates, or times between March 1 and April 30 won’t work for you, be upfront with your partner and let them know (we suggest using software like Doodle or Calendly to make coordination easier!)

• **Check your spam and/or junk folder.** You never know what a school or company’s firewall and spam settings are, so make sure to check all of your email inboxes. To ensure you receive emails, make sure to add your partner’s email address to your contacts and safe sender list.

• **Respond to follow-up emails, calls, or texts in a timely manner.** Promptly respond to your partner and confirm the date of your first mentoring session. If meeting virtually, you’ll also want to agree upon the software to use for your session—ask each other what platform works best (Zoom, Teams, FaceTime, etc.).

• **If you’re meeting virtually, test the software you decided on at least one day before your first meeting.** Make sure you have downloaded the latest version of the software you’ll be using, and that the equipment you need is ready and working.

THE FIRST MEETING

Your first email, call, or meeting is an opportunity to get to know each other and outline what you want to achieve during your mentoring sessions. As a mentor, what do you want to share? As a student, what do you hope to gain? Answer these questions together as mentor and mentee—that way you can make the experience as meaningful as possible.

**Mentors:** We know some professionals may be between opportunities—if you’re a professional doing freelance work, searching for a new position, or making a career pivot, we’re happy you’re still volunteering your time to be a mentor. We suggest following the same outline below, but focusing on past projects, places you have worked, and design experiences you’ve had.

**Students:** If you’re in the middle of a semester break, we suggest using this time to review your previous work and strategize for the future.

**Make a good first impression!**
Dress in business casual attire for your mentoring sessions and select a clean, quiet space clear of distractions if you’re meeting virtually.
For Students

• **Before your first meeting, do your homework!**
  Research the company your mentor works for. Find out about the clients, mission, structure, and other aspects of the business that interest you. Also take the time to research your mentor to understand their background, career path, and more.

• **Set goals for your sessions.** Outline what you hope to achieve overall and per session. Do you want to understand more about the business of design, such as how you use your design education working at a furniture manufacturer or dealer, or what do you need to know to specialize in healthcare design? Do you want feedback on your resume or portfolio, or do you want to do a mock interview?

For Mentors

• **Before your first meeting, share information about yourself and your company.** What can you send your mentee that will help them understand who you are, what you do, and what your company does? Think back on what was most helpful for you at the beginning of your career.

• **Do your homework too!** Ask your student to send more information about themselves or research their schools design program. Be ready to discuss a variety of topics including why you chose a career in design, what your career path was, the new skills you and your co-workers have developed with extended work-from-home scenarios, and the variety of roles offered in the design industry.

Questions to Consider

• How/why did you chose a degree in interior design/become an interior designer?
• What does the mentor like best about working in this field? Least?
• What is the mentor’s favorite recent project?
• What skills does the mentor feel are most important to be successful as a designer?
• What about the mentor’s education prepared them most for this career?
• What does the mentor’s typical day or week look like?
• What percentage of the mentor’s time do they spend interacting with people vs. working independently?
• What is the makeup of the mentor’s team and how do they work across disciplines?

THE SECOND MEETING

This is your opportunity to build on the first meeting and accomplish specific goals you have for your mentoring experience. Or if you’re meeting in person, use this as a road map to plan your day. You may:

• **Review key career-building tools.** Take time to critique the student’s resume, portfolio, website, or LinkedIn profile, and share what you or your company look for when reviewing and selecting candidates.

• **Critique a competition or studio project.** The student could share a project they’re working on and have the mentor provide feedback (like your 2024 IIDA Student Design Competition entry). Or, have the student present their project to the mentor and their co-workers as if they are presenting their design solution to a client.

• **Set up a mock interview.** Sharpen interviewing techniques and provide insight on how students can respond to tough questions.

• **Complete a personal brand exercise.** Personal branding is important for up-and-coming designers who want to set themselves apart. Students and mentors can work together to create a branding statement for the student by asking a few questions like:
  - What value do they provide to an employer?
  - What is unique about the value they provide?
  - Who benefits from their unique skillset and why?

If you’re meeting virtually or have created a hybrid experience, before the end of the second session, confirm a date and time of the next session, and have an outline of goals for your last meeting.
THE THIRD MEETING
This final meeting is an opportunity for the student to take part in something specific to the mentor’s day-to-day design experience. If you’ve chosen to meet in person, consider these for your meeting along with the above. You could:

• Go on a project or firm tour, in-person or virtually. Share photos, video, or get the project team together to talk through a recently completed project including the design processes used to achieve the solution.

• Hold a meet and greet. Set-up a series of introductions with co-workers and peers so the student can make new connections and understand different roles within your company.

• Have a team brainstorming session. Using a current project provided by the mentor or student, brainstorm design solutions as you would for a client so students have a chance to see the collaborative design process in action.

• Include the student in a client meeting or project presentation. This is a great opportunity for students to see firsthand what these experiences look like.

• Review contract documents and boilerplate agreements. Share the other side of design—business development, contract negotiations, etc, and why it’s important to understand the business side of design.

AFTER YOUR MENTORING SESSION
The interior design profession is one of connection and community. Following your sessions, take time to cultivate your relationship.

• Send a personal thank you note.

• Connect through LinkedIn or other social platforms.

• Follow the mentor’s company or the student’s school to stay up-to-date on news.

• Sign up for the mentor’s company newsletter or email list.

• Connect at local IIDA events.

QUESTIONS?
Contact students@iida.org.

Students: Write a note thanking your mentor for their time while the experience is still fresh in your mind. This can be electronic or sent through the mail. Include something specific from the day that made an impact on your understanding of the industry—it will make the note feel more personal and let the mentor know you truly appreciated the work they did to provide you with a meaningful experience.

ENTER THE WILSONART ESSAY COMPETITION (YOU COULD WIN $1,000!)
Students who participate in the IIDA Student Mentoring Program are encouraged to enter the Wilsonart Essay Competition. The winner of the competition receives $1,000 courtesy of the Wilsonart Student Education Fund and publication of their essay on IIDA.org. Wilsonart will also provide the winner with roundtrip airfare and a two-night hotel stay in Chicago during NeoCon in 2024.