My mentor and me

Initially conceived in 1999 and considerably developed in 2002 as an online community, the LSE Alumni Professional Mentoring Network scheme is a true success story. Mentors and mentees explain how it works.

Dirk Robertson (BSc Sociology 1987), actor and writer and Andrea Schusterbauer (Intercollegiate with SOAS 2005), communications assistant with the UN World Food Programme

How did it all start?

Dirk: I had been wanting to make a contribution to the School in some shape or other since I graduated in 1987, as my attendance at LSE was a life changing experience. After a series of exchanges with the School, looking at what would work, I became a mentor. I was staggered at the volume of people who got in touch with me, asking for very specific advice, in most cases.

Melissa Hagemann (MSc International History 1985), programme manager with the Open Society Institute – mentor

I first searched the mentoring network by industry and background as, after I finished my MSc, I was interested in working in the non-profit sector. I contacted three on four people and I found Jayanti Durali (BSc Econ 1991) on the network. We first met in December 2003 and explored what kind of career I was looking for. We discussed the pros and cons of working for NGOs and how to identify the right type of role and organisation. I then went to Mexico and, when I came back, I started working in the same area that Jayanti had moved to, corporate responsibility and socially responsible investment.

The network was very helpful as I gained advice on practical things such as corporate responsibility networking and email group communication. I am still in touch with Jayanti, but the relationship has evolved over time. We have both had a number of job changes since we first met but we keep in touch with what is happening in our fields of work. The mentoring has developed into information exchange and interesting conversations. It also turns out that we have friends in common so we socialise together and bump into each other at events. It is now more like a friendship where we discuss our different career choices.

When I have some more professional experience, I plan to become a mentor too, as I would like to contribute back to the alumni network.

Melissa

Iris Lapinski (née Gundermann) (MSc Human Rights 2003), consultant with Orlun Ltd – mentee

I have enjoyed being a mentor since joining the network over four years ago but always I could do more to help those who contact me.

I work for the Soros foundations/Open Society Institute (OSI) and many graduates seem interested in working in philanthropy. I find that many of those who contact me are recent graduates and have been looking for work for several months. I was in the same position and can share with them my own frustrations of my job search, but reassure them that eventually everything usually does work out.

The most useful thing I have been able to do is to share job postings from within our foundations, which have helped one or two graduates find jobs at OSI (actually one even married a close friend of mine, so maybe this could be considered a double placement).

I realise that the world of philanthropy is quite different from the financial sector and it’s difficult to hold job postings or such to help those interested in this field find employment, thus I believe the LSE Mentoring Network is probably the best way to make contacts with those within foundations and NGOs.

Saray Maitzumer (BSc Economics 1996, MSc Economics 1998), director of IMAZ Ltd – mentor

I have been a mentor since January 2003. To date I have mentored five LSE alumni. I have been an extremely interesting and personally rewarding experience. I have tended to mentor LSE candidates that have chosen not to go down the traditional investment banking, academic or blue chip consulting routes. It is probably due to the fact that I myself took an unconventional career path out of LSE – I went to work for Aida on their graduate scheme and then progressed through other companies to run my own consulting business, IMAZ Limited.

The best part of the experience has been about helping three individuals in particular who were clearly very bright and talented but were being presented with the other resources when applying for consulting positions. I enjoyed thinking things through with them and acting as their sounding board. It was a delight to hear when each of them landed their foot in the door of a company they might otherwise have struggled to impress, given their backgrounds. I am also eagerly awaiting some more news from a female mentee who is looking to expand her own business.

See www.lse.ac.uk/alumni/mentoring for more information

Dirk and Jayanti are pictured together.

The Alumni Professional Mentoring Network was created eight years ago to offer a one-to-one relationship, helping recent graduates and those with less experience with their careers or professional development. It has now developed considerably.

How many people are involved?

In 2002, as an online community, the network registered approximately 150 new joiners. In 2006 over 400 new mentors or mentees registered for the scheme. The network currently has around 450 active mentors and 1,550 mentors in 75 countries and in more than 35 different professions and sectors.

What do they gain from it?

All mentors are LSE alumni with a few years of professional experience. What they all have in common is the desire to give something back to the School and to help others in the LSE community by sharing their skills, knowledge and experience.

The mentees are all LSE alumni who are looking for extra valuable tips to progress in their professional fields. Many of the current mentees have also become mentors looking for advice on professional development from other mentors. Mentees still use the LSE Careers Service or LSE Jobs, but this is a unique network for those in the LSE alumni community, and can be an extremely powerful tool.

The mentoring network is self-regulated by its users and is organised through the LSE alumni web pages (www.lse.ac.uk/alumni). Those wishing to volunteer their time as alumni mentors, and those seeking help or advice, will have to make an online application to the LSE Alumni Relations Office (at www.lse.ac.uk/alumni/mentoring) explaining why they want to get involved. Alumni mentors with a few years of work experience will have their chosen details listed on the Alumni Mentoring web pages. Mentees will email the mentors who seem to provide the most suitable advice in a specific profession or field of experience. Once contact has been established, it is up to both parties to develop their mentoring relationship, delimiting the purpose and boundaries of the network. The Alumni Relations Office provides full guidance and support for everyone involved in the Mentoring Network.

What do you get out of it as a mentor?

Dirk: I joined the LSE European Alumni Group Leaders Forum, I was able to meet Andreia, and after we had exchanged the first couple of emails felt that it might lead towards a reciprocal mentoring relationship.

AS: After I graduated with a degree in International Politics in 2005, (intercollegiate between LSE and the School of Oriental and African Studies), I felt it would be good to get some advice and support for starting my professional career. I also wanted to keep in touch with the School. So I went through the LSE Alumni Mentoring Network looking for someone working in media, I contacted Dirk and after we had exchanged the first couple of emails felt that it might lead towards a reciprocal mentoring relationship.

How do you keep in touch?

Dirk: Either by email, telephone or face to face. I now mentor people from all over the world. If I am in their country and they want to meet up, we do so. When I went to Berlin for the LSE European Alumni Group Leaders Forum, I was able to meet Andreia.

AS: We keep in touch via email. I really appreciate it that Dirk usually responds to my emails on the same day, no matter whether he is in the UK, US, New Zealand or India. Meeting in Berlin last November was also a great opportunity to discuss things face to face.

What makes it work?

Dirk: Properly thought out advice and guidance. Not just some generic speech with a mentoring theme.

AS: I find the mentoring scheme is about support and advice as well as cooperation. The mentoring scheme is a good way of gaining some practical insight into the working culture of the world of media and helping others to find their way. I feel that it has been extremely beneficial to me and helped me push forward in my career.

Melissa

Iris

Dirk

At first, I was working in a corporate responsibility role. I then changed my mind and started looking for a career in philanthropy. I felt that mentoring was a great way to ensure that I got the support that I needed. It also gave me the opportunity to give something back to the community.

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