

The Mentoring Program for Research at URJC



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1. INTRODUCTION

Both the education system as a whole and the role of university researcher in particular have undergone important transformations in recent years. This has increased the need for closer attention to be paid to novice researchers, who often feel unsure about how to proceed in their research careers.

To this end, mentorship programs are efficient tools by which to orient the initial and continuing activities of such researchers. In such programs, a researcher with acknowledged research experience (a mentor) assesses, guides, and supports another researcher with less experience (a mentee). It has been shown that this is a beneficial strategy for both parties as well as for the institution itself.

Mentorship programs must fulfil the following important conditions:

1. They must offer emotional support.
2. Be realistic in their aims and expectations.
3. Demonstrate commitment from the novice researcher.
4. Offer long-term support.
5. Have a vision of the future, given that early actions will influence the future of those researchers and
6. Recognize that institutional policies have a direct impact on the well-being of novice researchers.

The **Human Resources for Researchers Strategy HRS4R**, enacted by the European Commission, aims to support universities and research institutions as well as organizations that fund research by implementing the **European Charter for Researchers** and the **Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers** with the goal of contributing to the development of a European labour market that is attractive to researchers.

In July of 2020, the **Universidad Rey Juan Carlos received the HSR4R Seal** from the European Commission. This emblem identifies institutions that generate and support environments that are stimulating and favourable to researchers. The URJC commits itself, in accordance with its internal policies, to develop its human resource strategies, adhere to the recommendations and principles enunciated in both the Charter and the Code, and guarantee transparency, accessibility, equity, and the search for excellence in the recruitment of researchers.

In accordance with the guidelines established in Art 28 of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers, the **role of mentor** is a crucial component within framework of Human Resource management:

"Employers and/or funders of researchers should draw up, preferably within the framework of their human resources management, a specific career development strategy for researchers at all stages of their career, regardless of their contractual situation, including for researchers on fixed-term contracts. It should include the availability of mentors involved in providing support and guidance for the personal and professional development of researchers, thus motivating them and contributing to reducing any insecurity in their professional future. All researchers should be made familiar with such provisions and arrangements."

Within this framework and with the goal of training novice researchers in all fields of knowledge, the URJC is putting into motion the **EURICLEA Mentorship Program**. This program aims to unite novice researchers with highly qualified researchers who lead research teams. The mentors of EURICLEA will orient and accompany mentees as they pursue their research careers at the university institution.

2. OBJECTIVE

The principle **objective of the EURICLEA Program** is to support researchers during the early stages of their research career by means of the assistance of highly qualified mentors with ample experience in the academic-research environment.

The specific objectives of the EURICLEA Program, shown in Figure 1, are as follows:

1. To offer advice on professional options.
2. Facilitate professional development.
3. Develop professional relationships.
4. Cultivate individual career plans.
5. Improve leadership skills.
6. Provide support to pairings, whereby knowledge and experience are shared.



Figure 1: Specific objectives of the EURICLEA Program

[Figure 1:

- 1) **Professional options**
- 2) **Professional development**
- 3) **Professional relationships**
- 4) **Career plans**
- 5) **Leadership skills**
- 6) **Support between paired researchers.]**

Mentorship is a process that facilitates the **interchange of experience**, knowledge, and skills between the mentor and the mentee.

The mentor will be tasked with **guiding the personal and professional development** of those who are embarking on their initial research endeavours within the university environment.

Mentorship provides an opportunity to discuss the aspirations and concerns of mentees, while also providing assessment and support to help them prepare for their professional future as researchers.

3. PROFILE OF THE MENTOR

Mentors are **individuals with ample experience** and acknowledged prestige as researchers. In addition to their professional qualifications, mentors must also demonstrate outstanding competence in the following areas:

1. Social: respect, a high level of empathy, the ability to communicate and listen actively.
2. Methodological: planning, organization, the capacity to solve problems, evaluate, and engage in scientific production.
3. Institutional: knowledge of the institution and its norms, as well as of the trajectory of a career in research and its particularities.

Commitment of the Mentor: mentors should guide and attend to the needs of mentees, while maintaining confidentiality throughout the process.

4. THE BENEFITS OF BEING A MENTOR

Mentorship is often a **gratifying experience** as well as an *opportunity to reflect* on one's own professional trajectory, skills, and knowledge. Likewise, it allows the mentor to:

1. Make connections with the next generation of researchers.
2. Support mentees so that they can identify and achieve their professional goals and pursue them with confidence.
3. Generate new perspectives on research careers.
4. Help shape the future of his/her profession and community.
5. Sharpen his/her leadership skills.
6. Reconnect and strengthen bonds with the university.

In addition, the work of mentors will be accredited by the **DOCENTIA Program**.

5. PROFILE OF THE MENTEE

Mentees are **novice researchers (R2)** who are interested in advancing in their research careers and who request a companion or guide. They are the main protagonists in this process and are expected to maintain a proactive attitude for the purpose of strengthening the following features or qualities:

1. Social: the capacity to face new challenges, assume responsibilities, and engage in dialogue.
2. Methodological: the desire to develop a research career and acquire the independence, responsibility, and leadership skills with which to apply experiences derived from the program to their own work situation.
3. Institutional: commitment to the institution, its members, and its norms.

Commitment of the mentees: to arrange meetings with mentors, attend said meetings, value the recommendations and orientation of the mentor and the agreements resulting from the mentorship process, and to maintain confidentiality throughout the entire process.

6. THE BENEFITS OF HAVING A MENTOR

Mentorship for mentees is usually a **gratifying experience** as well as an **opportunity to reflect** on their incipient professional trajectory, skills, and knowledge, given that mentors:

1. Challenge, motivate, inspire, and enable mentees to achieve their goals.
2. Encourage mentees to develop career plans and align their goals with their personal values.
3. Help mentees gain confidence and define their professional direction.
4. Allow mentees to learn about and widen their professional horizons in order to explore

new opportunities.

5. Provide the opportunity for mentees to learn from a professional about how to focus successfully on their research trajectory.
6. Increase the likelihood that mentees will proceed successfully in their research careers.

7. WHAT DOES MENTORSHIP CONSIST OF?

Confidentiality and **respect** for the other person's feedback and time are the cornerstones of mentorship. Mentors must be open to sharing their experiences and personal knowledge. This interchange will help young researchers better understand what to expect as they embark on their research careers and will enable them to make more informed decisions about them. Therefore, mentorship:

1. Is a bidirectional relationship: both parties must commit to the process and listen to each other mutually, allowing them both to learn from it.
2. Is a guided path wherein mentees analyze their strong and weak points and achieve personal and professional growth.
3. Provides an environment that foments debate without judgement.
4. Has as its principle tool an open and continuous dialogue between both parties.
5. Challenges preconceived ideas and assumptions about professional trajectories and the best routes toward achieving success.
6. Foments reflection, analysis, and the solution of problems in an autonomous manner.

8. DEVELOPMENT OF THE EURICLEA PROGRAM

The EURICLEA Program **begins with a seminar** that will provide mentors and mentees with all the relevant information regarding the program.

Afterward, each mentor-mentee pairing will meet, in person or virtually, a minimum of 6 times during the year in which the program takes place. Nonetheless, in order to achieve the objectives proposed by the program, we recommend that meetings take place on a **monthly basis**. It is the responsibility of the mentee to reach out to his or her mentor to arrange the best times for meetings. To optimize the time invested in the EURICLEA Program, we recommend that mentors and mentees create a calendar of regular meetings and adhere to it.

It is essential that mentees work on a defined research career plan so that they may obtain the maximum benefit from the mentorship program. Mentees are requested to complete a simple form after each meeting so that their progress can be followed.

At the end of the program, mentors and mentees will be required to complete satisfaction and evaluative surveys of the program.

9. SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR MEETINGS

Given the nature and the objective of the EURICLEA Program, we recommend that the following topics be covered:

1. Aspirations of a professional career.
2. Important areas of competence in the field of research, including:
 - a) Gender issues.
 - b) How to establish a contact network.
 - c) Conflict management.
 - d) Time management.
3. How to innovate and exchange.
4. Research ethics.
5. Management tasks within the university research environment.
6. Entrepreneurship within the university research environment.
7. What have we achieved? What comes next?

In order to make each session rewarding, we suggest prior reflection so that participants arrive ready to propose concrete, measurable, and achievable objectives.

10. EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAM

Upon finishing the program, mentees and mentors will fill out different **evaluative and satisfaction surveys** about the program and the performance of both the mentor and mentee.

In the **first**, you will be asked about the initiative's organization, its development, and the degree to which the program's objectives were achieved.

In the **second** survey, which is directed at mentees, participants will be asked if mentors explained the goals of the program, if they were available to meet with mentees, if guidance and advising activities were congruent with initial goals, and if they were satisfied with their mentors' performance.

The **third** survey will be given to mentors to assess their involvement with the mentee, the degree to which they believe that the guidance and advice were useful, the frequency of meetings and contacts, and how closely the plans for a research career were adhered to by mentees.

11. WHAT TO DO IN THE IMPROBABLE CASE OF A FAILED PARTNERSHIP

All participants in this program have been carefully selected for their willingness to participate, their appreciation of the program's objective, and their resumés. We hope that all relationships in the mentoring program will be successful and gratifying. However, mentorship is based in

large part on good connections between individuals, and it is normal that there will be differing degrees of satisfaction with the pairings.

Nonetheless, if difficulties do arise both mentors and mentees will be able to contact program supervisors for instructions on how best to proceed.

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