Mentee Handbook
A guide to the mysteries of mentorship

What is mentorship and why do I need it?
The art and design world is not linear — you know this and that’s why you’ve chosen a school with an open curriculum. But it can be tricky to navigate a career path without a clear “A to B” roadmap. A good mentor can help with this and so much more. Mentors can provide feedback on your work and the direction of your practice, help you identify opportunities for exhibition or further development, give you tips on graduate school applications, and how to successfully transition from student to alum.

Where do I find a mentor?
In addition to being great teachers, faculty members at Stamps are also highly successful professional artists and designers in their own right (learn more). Faculty mentorship gives you critical feedback, professional development TLC, and other meaningful advice to help your creative practice shine.

Purpose and Goals of Mentorship at Stamps
- Promote your creative and professional development.
- Emphasize the importance of seeking and using wise counsel.
- Mentorship should be a reciprocal relationship where both the creative practice and development of both mentors and mentees is enriched.

Process
1. The fall following successful completion of sophomore review, you will identify two faculty members to serve as mentors. At least one of the mentors must be a permanent full-time faculty member at Stamps (i.e., tenured or tenure-track — let the school website be your guide). MDDP Students must select a mentor from Stamps and one from their other school or college.
2. You will contact a potential mentor and must obtain their signature (mentoring agreement). You'll also talk with your mentor about the best way to communicate. You will then submit this form to Alyssa Cozad (acozad@umich.edu).
3. Faculty mentors agree to take an interest in your creative practice and development as a professional in the art and design world. They can email or meet with you to suggest directions for your creative practice, inform you of opportunities, discuss your work, and write letters of recommendation (to name a few things).
4. You will meet and communicate with your mentor as outlined in the mentorship agreement.

How do I decide who to approach about mentorship?
Start by thinking of people that have taught your courses. Next, think about your goals and priorities as a creative practitioner. Check out the Stamps Website to find Faculty Biographies to see who might be a good fit for you. If you haven’t had the professor before, check out their work and see what courses they’ve been teaching. Still stuck? Ask your academic advisor or another trusted source if they have suggestions.

How do I ask someone to serve as a mentor?
Okay, so you’ve done some research and you think you’ve found a good fit. Feel free to send an email (you can blame it on your advisor if that helps break the ice). To give them a bit of a heads up, please write “mentorship request” in the subject line. Explain that you’re interested in their background and you think they may be able to help you reach some of your creative/career goals. If you happen to see them in person — by all means have a good old fashioned conversation. Now you might be asking “what if I don’t
know them?” That’s ok! Simply introduce yourself and see below for some ideas of what to include in your email.

Nobody likes a long winded email so keep it brief but here are some things you might want to include:

- Your name — seems obvious but trust me, sometimes we forget the important stuff
- Some background — i.e. your class standing, focus/themes in your work or media
- Creative projects you’ve been involved in
- A link to your website (if available)
- 1-2 goals for your work and practice

The First Meeting/ Setting Boundaries
Setting boundaries is an important step in forging a strong mentoring relationship. It’s important that you respect the time and space of your mentor, and boundaries help to ensure that. The first meeting is a great time to discuss some boundaries and what you’re looking to gain from their mentorship. Some things you might want to talk about include:

- **Contact Methods/Rules.** How and when will you contact your mentor? How frequently?
- **Respecting one another’s time.** Your mentor likely has a lot on their plate (just like you), it is important to acknowledge and be respectful of this. This means asking your mentor how much lead time they need for letters of recommendation and other commitments with larger time expenditures?

What else should I discuss with my mentor at our first meeting?
- **Creative Work + Goals.** Ask your mentor about their work and get some feedback on your own. Discuss the direction you would like to go and get their suggestions. Laying out some goals is a great way to structure this conversation. Ask them for suggestions on achieving your goals. They want to know how they can help you.

Professionalism and Other Tips

- **Ask nicely**
  - When making requests (including asking for letters of recommendation) ask them what they need from you. Better yet — send a resume, cover letter, and any supporting documents. Be very clear about details like who gets the letter, who mails the letter, and when the letter is due. Sometimes a checklist highlighting some relevant work or experience can be very helpful for someone when writing a recommendation. Do whatever it takes to make the process easy on them.

- **Practice an attitude of gratitude**
  - Say “thank you” and do it often. In the professional world, thankfulness goes a long way. Thank them when they respond to your emails or to other requests. Did they write you a letter of recommendation? Thank them and report back about how it went. Did you get an internship? Thank them for their support and let them know you got the job. Even if you didn’t get the gig, an update to let them know how the process went and what you learned from it might lead to a great dialogue and advice.

What Should I be Discussing with my Mentor?
Below you’ll find a list of topics to discuss with your mentor. Some things are probably better discussed with your advisor or CAPS professional. For example, you may want to ask your mentor to recommend some courses that might interest you. However, for specific scheduling, course offering, or registration questions — your academic advisor is a better bet. Same goes for personal issues — mentorship is not an appropriate place for that. Your advisors are happy to point you in the right direction.

Check out the list below for “mentor-approved” topics:

- **Feedback on your work:**
  - When meeting with your mentor, take examples of your work. Ask for feedback and jot some notes. Feel free to ask about your mentor’s work too!

- **Sketchbook/journaling “assignments:”**
  - Don’t shudder at the word “assignments” there is no grading involved here — just exploration. Your mentor may be able to offer some ideas for exercises that could improve a particular aspect of your practice. Feel free to share your sketchbook and discuss ideas for future work.

- **Graduate School:**
  - Have questions about graduate school? Ask away! You might ask about the process of applying, developing work, and accepting an offer.

- **Selling work:**
  - Your mentor can help demystify the business aspects of art and design. You might ask how to acquire a dealer, how to market your work, how to price your work, and how to handle copyright and usage concerns. If your mentor isn’t able to answer your specific question, they can likely point you in the right direction.

- **Recommend resources and opportunities:**
  - Ask your mentor to keep you in mind if they hear of any opportunities that may be a good fit for you (think grants, exhibitions, etc.)

- **Transitioning from student to alum:**
  - Being a U-M student is a sweet deal — an alum… also sweet but not as sweet. You will soon be transitioning into the glamorous “real world.” For the last four years you’ve had access to world class fabrication labs, quality printing, large studio spaces, and great faculty. What will you do without these resources at your fingertips? Do not despair. There are ways to continue making great work beyond graduation. Talk with your mentor about the challenges you’ll face and the resources you’ll need to track down. They can help you get started.

- **Job search:**
  - You are always welcome to talk with John Luther, our Career Development Coordinator and with the University Career Center but it never hurts to have another set of eyes on that resume (or another set of ears listening for career opportunities). You may also benefit from hearing about the professional experiences of your mentor. How did they get where they are today? Do they know someone that is living the life you’re imagining? Can they connect you to that person?

- **Letters of recommendation:**
  - You should get to know your mentor and feel comfortable reaching out to your mentor for letters of recommendation. Be respectful of their time (hopefully you’ve asked them how much lead time they need). Also be sure to get them all of the information they need so that both of your lives can be made easier.

**How can I Communicate with my Mentor(s)?**
- Email: both professional and personal this is a great bet — but be sure to check your email and respond!
- Scheduled coffee/lunch: You may want to invite your mentor for coffee — it’s not just students that can use a caffeine boost. Try to be efficient when it comes to timing. Think lunch break time, before or after class, or in conjunction with the Penny Stamps lecture if your mentor is also going to the event!

Helpful Hints
- Always respect the time and space of your mentor — we want this to be a positive experience for mentors and mentees alike
- Prepare thoughtful questions in advance of your meeting and take notes on their feedback!
- If you have set up a meeting with your mentor, do not miss it

Where to Find Additional Support/ Resources
If you have questions or concerns about mentoring contact Stamps advisor Alyssa Cozad. She can be reached via email at acozad@umich.edu and is happy to help.