



# Mentor Telemachus Program

Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association  
Southwest Section

## Who was Mentor?

Mentor was the friend and surrogate father to Telemachus, son of Odysseus and Penelope. When Odysseus was off to the Trojan War, Mentor watched over Telemachus, introduced him to community leaders and guided the young man's search for his father and heritage. Even today a mentor's protégé is sometimes referred to as "the telemachus".

Mentor's ancient guidance is not all that different from a contemporary mentorship. Both direct us toward understanding our professional inheritance and our full potential within it. Mentors provide such guidance to those who have yet to fully engage themselves in their professions.

## Purpose

The Mentor-Telemachus Program will provide opportunities for students and SW Section members to close the distance between school and the profession through face-to-face and E-mentoring relationships. Section members can enrich the quality of the student experience by interacting, exchanging ideas, and sharing their experiences and knowledge with future planners.

## Goals

The Southwest Section seeks to develop mentorships that:

1. Are professional in nature;
2. Help students transition to the work world in their area of interest;
3. Create opportunities for professional development, networking and exchange of ideas;
4. Expose students to mentors of differing background and/or area of interest;
5. Reconnect alumni with their alma mater; and
6. Are mutually satisfying and beneficial.

## Basic Commitment

Mentors commit themselves to provide one or more students with an opportunity to spend half a day touring their workplace and shadowing them at work. Students would observe a typical workday including meetings with staff and clients. A series of basic coaching sessions completed by phone, e-mail or in person will complete the basic mentor commitment. The type and frequency of these sessions are determined by the mentor so as to be the least interfering with their personal and professional priorities.



"My mother certainly says I am Odysseus' son; but for myself I cannot tell.  
It's a wise child that knows its own father."

(Telemachus to Athena as the Taphian stranger. Homer, *Odyssey* 1.215).

## Communication

It is hoped that each student and mentor pair would engage (minimally) in several informal exchanges by phone or email. These interactions would help the student be better informed about the profession in which the professional is employed, about their career path, and about ways the student can prepare for, move into, and advance in the profession.

## Further Coaching and Shadowing

Beyond the basic commitment the relationship could grow. Depending upon willingness, the mentor could decide to provide students with an opportunity to perform mock job interviews or introduce students to the professional network. Mentors could also provide advice on career options, share professional "war stories", direct the student towards internships/summer positions, volunteer opportunities and permanent jobs, and/or consult on résumés, cover letters, or certain ways to approach a potential employer.

## General Structure

A student planner at the Indiana County Office of Planning and Development will serve as the Mentor-Telemachus Program Coordinator and administer the program. Students and mentors will need to fill out a short survey to be used by the student to broker likely matches between students and mentors. Once a match is made the details of program activities come under control of the mentor and student. Beyond the basic commitment, students and mentors are free to flesh out specific activities as they see fit.

## Who Should be (a) Mentor?

Mentor was not Telemachus' only guide. The goddess Athena would occasionally disguise herself as Mentor providing divine, if hidden, guidance to both Telemachus and Odysseus. So both disguised goddesses and mere mortals can be mentors. The only requirement is a sympathetic desire to assist young people on the early legs of their own professional Odyssey.