

Special Section

Join the Mentoring Program of the Early Career Archaeologists Community!

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The Early Career Archaeologists (ECA) Community was founded in 2020 as a response to the challenges early career archaeologists face, such as growing employment precarity, imposed mobility, a lack of research freedom, independence and results ownership. Naturally, over the past two years, these professional restrictions have been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic¹. The initiators of the ECA Community strongly believe that support systems have to develop in tandem with the transformations taking place in the field of archaeology. For this reason, creating a mentoring program as an appropriate tool to address the above-mentioned challenges has been one of the aims of the community from its inception. Studies from other disciplines have shown that positive mentoring experiences can improve aspects of job-related well-being, self-esteem and self-efficacy even within relatively short periods of time (e.g. from six months to one year; Dutta et al, 2011, p. 7; Carmel and Paul, 2015).

What is mentoring?

¹https://www.eaa.org/EAA/Communities/Early_Career_Archaeologists_Community/EAA/Navigation/Communities/Early_Career_Archaeologists.aspx

A very simple definition of mentoring describes it as the act or process of helping and giving advice to a younger or less experienced colleague². In the Professional Charter for Coaching and Mentoring (2011, p. 4) mentoring is described as “*a developmental process which may involve a transfer of skill or knowledge from a more experienced to a less experienced person through learning dialogue and role modelling, and may also be a learning partnership between peers*”. Bozeman and Feeney (2007, p. 731)³ define mentoring as

a process for the informal transmission of knowledge, social capital, and psychosocial support perceived by the recipient as relevant to work, career, or professional development; mentoring entails informal communication, usually face-to-face and during a sustained period of time, between a person who is perceived to have greater relevant knowledge, wisdom, or experience (the mentor) and a person who is perceived to have less (the protégé).

What are our aims?

The ECA Community’s mentoring program is designed as a support mechanism to help early career archaeologists navigate different aspects of the archaeological field, irrespective of mentees age, gender, ethnicity, sexual identity, socio-economic background and so on (Brown, 2018). Our aims are to contribute to levelling differences in support available to early career researchers, to create a safe environment in which people can seek guidance, support and feedback regarding professional development. Furthermore, we would like our mentees to gain a set of useful skills and knowledge to help them pursue longer-term career plans and be more prepared for the job market. In the end, our goal is to create a community based on empathy and intergenerational solidarity.

Who can get involved?

The program is available to postgraduate students (MA or PhD), postdoctoral and independent researchers who want to pursue a career in archaeology. The mentors that we identify tend to be at least one stage ahead in their careers. Thus, postdoctoral researchers are mentoring PhDs, full-time professors are mentoring postdoctoral researchers, and so on. Our program is based on volunteer action, therefore, mentors should be persons who are motivated and willing to engage in the mentoring process, supporting other researchers to build a career or sharing their own experience and insights into the academic world in general and archaeology in particular. Although planned as a tool to support early career researchers who enrol as mentees, mentoring also gives mentors the opportunity to stay connected to the current realities of the field, as well as to offer something back to the community. In addition, mentors also gain further experience and skills as part of continuous career development.

² <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/mentoring>

³ <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/resources/docs/142-private-act--2.pdf>

How does it work?

The matchmaking system, pairing mentees and mentors, takes its starting point in the needs and expectations of the mentees. Mentees are asked to fill out a standardized form which addresses issues such as the kind of support they expect from the mentor, what their research goals are, and the skills they feel they need to progress. The questions are formulated in such a way as to encourage respondents to use some keywords and criteria that can help us clearly identify their needs, such as high-profile publications, writing grant applications and obtaining funding, pursuing alternative career paths, or even just support and general mentoring. Another standard form is sent to the mentors to fill, in which they can present their area of expertise, knowledge and/or experience with relation to what they feel they could bring to the mentoring process. Participants are then presented with options based on needs and expectations on the mentees' side and skills and research experience on the mentors' side. We should mention here that both mentees and mentors have the possibility to accept or decline our suggestions, in which case we continue searching in order to come up with options that are more suitable. We trust that giving both mentees and mentors the agency to choose to work together enables them to be more engaged in the mentoring process.

Are there any other things you should know before starting?

Prior to the beginning of the mentoring process, both mentees and mentors have to acknowledge and commit to a code of conduct prepared by the ECA Community which is meant to set the foundations for a positive mentoring experience. In a nutshell, this code of conduct states that the relationship between mentees and mentors should be based on trust and open dialogue, and that participants should cultivate healthy interactions with their mentoring peers and also respect their privacy and personal boundaries. Both mentees and mentors are expected to maintain strict confidentiality on all information shared, both during and after the mentoring process, as well as to disclose to the ECA any issue encountered during the mentoring process or any potential conflict of interest whenever arising. Mentees are expected to be proactive, to take the initiative, and to clearly express what their needs and expectations are. Mentors are kindly asked to show empathy and understanding to their mentees, and be available for support and guidance.

The scope of the mentoring relationship is to be agreed between the mentors and the mentees. The goal of the program is to create transnational support networks for early career archaeologists and, for this reason, the pairs of mentors and mentees are often comprised of persons working in different countries. We encourage the participants to organise the practicalities of the mentoring process as it suits them best (how and when they keep in contact, be it via email exchange, online meetings or phone conversations, and meeting regularly or only when necessary, and so on).

Once the mentoring relationship has been established, the involvement of the ECA Community is limited, as we believe that a proactive approach on the part of both mentors and mentees is crucial for the success of the mentoring program. However, we do keep in touch with the participants on a regular basis, send surveys to monitor how the mentoring process is going and can be reached for support throughout the mentoring relationship in case it becomes necessary.

How to join?

The program has already been running for a year. Surprisingly, more mentors than mentees have enrolled. Therefore, we currently still have mentors that are waiting to offer their support and guidance to early career archaeologists.

If you want to join the mentoring program, either as a mentee or mentor, you can contact the ECA Community either by emailing us at ecataskforce@outlook.com, or by sending a message using the contact form on our community's website (<https://ecarchaeologists.com/contact/>).

We welcome both mentees and mentors to join our efforts to create a better environment for early career archaeologists!

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Sources that inspired our code of conduct

The Professional Charter for Coaching and Mentoring

<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/142-private-act--2.pdf>

Code of Conduct. Mentoring Programme – MSF Mentoring & Coaching Hub

<https://mentoring-coaching.msf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/code-of-conduct-mentoring.pdf>