



VCU

VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

Graduate School | Graduate School
Mentorship Program

Mentor Spotlight: Emil Iqbal

Why did you apply to the Graduate School Mentorship Program?

I had a number of academic role models and mentors as an undergraduate student who were instrumental not only in helping me get into graduate school but also in providing me with unending support and instilling in me a sense of self-confidence, especially as I am a first-generation college student. I know how important having a mentor is and I wanted to give back, so to speak, to other students who I think can really benefit from such an experience.

What kind of mentor do you want to be?

I always strive to be candid and supportive of any decision of my mentee. My role as a mentor is not to steer my mentee in a given direction but rather to provide feedback and guidance on how to help my mentee get to where she/he would like to go.

What do you hope to gain from mentoring?

The entire mentoring experience is very self-gratifying and the only thing that I hope to gain from this and future mentorship is how to best be able to instill a sense of confidence in my mentees. The majority of the

time, mentees already have an idea about where they want to go, and all they need is for someone to tell them how to get there and that they CAN do it.

What would you want a prospective mentor to know about the program?

This experience is what you make of it. If you put in the time and energy to cultivate a meaningful relationship with your mentee, I think you'll find this experience to be extremely gratifying. I also think that any prospective mentor is likely to learn a little bit about himself along the way—their unique mentoring style, how to listen to and meet a mentee's needs—which is really helpful for honing how to be a better mentor. Prospective mentor, you'll get just as much out of it as your mentee.

What are you hoping to impart to your mentee?

I'm hoping to give my mentee a specific guide for how to be successful in applying to graduate school but more generally, I'm hoping to show her how important passion is for her future endeavors and how to elicit that in everything she does. Specific skills can be taught but passion cannot—this is what keeps a graduate student going and helps them finish their program



Emil Iqbal, GSMP mentor and Doctoral candidate in Chemistry

**Apply to GSMP
here!**

Mentee Spotlight: Tara Francis

Tara is a soon-to-be-graduate of VCU's School of Nursing with plans to attend VCU's Nurse Anesthesia School.

Why did you apply to the Graduate School Mentorship Program?

I value mentors and I liked the idea of having a structured relationship with goals and objectives overlooked by a program director, compared to the informal relationships I have experienced in the past. I thought it would be reassuring to communicate my concerns to someone who has recently gone through the process themselves.

What goals have you accomplished thus far? What goals are you still looking to accomplish?

Goals I have accomplished thus far include lessening my anxiety, networking, updating my resume/cover letter, practicing behavioral interview questions, exploring "what if" scenarios, and reviewing admissions criteria. Goals that I am still working on include a mock interview and submitting my Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA) application!

What challenges have you dealt with in the program?

Walking an unorthodox academic career path. Being paired with a current CRNA student while in the program was not an option for me at the time, making it hard for me to get detailed advice. However, my mentor was able to connect me with a current CRNA at VCU Health!

What would you want a prospective mentee to know about the program? Why should he or she join?

I actually have a mentee who is in her first year of nursing school here at VCU and I told her about this program. I specifically pointed out that she should wait to apply until her senior year because she will have more time in her schedule. Also, I told her about my experiences and how it is designed



to view graduate school as "big picture," focusing on broad objectives and outcomes that provide tools for success for any student in any field of study.

How has this program helped you?

The GSMP has helped me to understand and value all types of advice. I learned from various graduate students studying sculpture, art, business, and advertising. I believe the GSMP is designed to make the transition from

undergraduate to graduate student as seamless, stress-free, and predictable as possible by focusing on logistics and subjective areas like professionalism.

How have you benefitted from the group programs?

I have been able to conquer my fear of the unknown! The more I expose myself to the graduate student culture, the more prepared and comfortable I will be when I am a graduate student.

What are you most excited about in the GSMP?

When I update my mentor on my progress. I feel proud and enjoy the fact that somebody has an invested interest in my journey and is able to offer me advice.

If you could tell your mentor one thing, what would you want them to know?

I would tell him thank you for teaching me the reality of graduate school. Most importantly, for being an ear to listen while I vent about how stressed out I get while still in undergraduate school!



Tara with her mentor
Brandon Lind