

Design Mentor Guidelines

SP.722 Spring 2010

This year, we are positioning D-Lab's Design Mentors differently. Instead of serving as a dedicated team adviser, mentors are free to work with all teams to provide feedback primarily during in-class Design Reviews as well as outside meetings and conversations. As the format has changed, we thought it would be helpful to offer Design Review guidelines to optimize the effectiveness and impact of your feedback.

Before each Design Review familiarize yourself (if necessary) with the team content posted on the course website. This can also help catch you up if you have missed the previous session or are expected to be late. We will try to have student presentations posted in advance of the Design Reviews.

As a Design Mentor, you will be serving as a consultant to critique team actions and ideas with constructive feedback. It is easy to focus on the negative, but remember to comment on things done well. Also, keep in mind that teams are comprised of undergraduate students with many responsibilities. Expect effort and results, but be understanding.

While interacting with the teams, we hope that you will

- Offer advice
- Help with prototyping
- Connect teams with contacts
- Identify helpful resources
- Suggest ideas
- Provide direction

In doing so, you should be critical, but constructive. You want to challenge ideas and not people, and do so in a positive way. Avoid using "my" and "your" to abstract away from the person. Be sure to distinguish between facts, experiences, and opinions. Consider using the following phrases¹ to keep things friendly:

- Proposing ("How about...")
- Information Seeking ("Could you describe...?")
- Disagreeing ("This may be a problem because...")
- Standard Setting ("Maybe you should decide by...")

Finally, Design Reviews are intended to be conversational, but professional. Stay on topic and respect others by not talking over them.

The instructors are confident that you will continue to be a key resource for guiding the teams toward their goals.

¹ Adapted from MIT Professor David Wallace

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