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VIP MENTORSHIP

Finding a job mentor can make all the difference
to your career

story Sara Falconer

You probably don't have a mentor. You probably didn't even know that you needed one. Sure, there are people in your field you admire, and maybe even someone you can go to for informal advice. But a relationship with an actual mentor can make all the difference in your career development – and with the innovative programs being offered throughout Montreal, it's easier than ever.

Academos is a free, bilingual e-mentoring program for youth aged 14 to 30. Originally started at Bois-de-Boulogne College in Montreal by psychology PhD student Catherine Légaré, it is now in its tenth year and offered across Quebec.

"In 1999, there was no example of mentoring online," says spokesperson Stéphane Bérubé. "It was an experimental project."

The exchanges take place in the form of emails via a secure website (www.academos.qc.ca). Mentors come from a wide variety of sectors, from filmmakers to truck drivers to scientists. "They can tell the student what it is actually like on a daily basis to be a doctor, or to be a mechanic," he explains.

In 2006, Academos received \$2.7-million as part of the Quebec government's Youth Action Strategy, and was able to bring the service to every high school in the province. With funding recently renewed for the next several years, Academos will continue to offer the service at the CEGEP, college and university levels as well. Their studies show that students who are e-mentored stay in school longer, Bérubé adds.

Although Academos has over 1,600 mentors, they struggle to meet the increasing demand from young people, and are especially in need of anglo mentors, and those from non-academic fields. It's not only fulfilling – it looks great on a CV.

Concordia University's alumni relations department also offers a unique spin on the process: speed mentoring (<http://alumni.concordia.ca/benefits/mentor>). "It's like speed dating with a twist," says Nicole Saliel, director of operations. Supplementing their traditional mentoring program that matches alumni with current students, the one-hour sessions give students 10 minutes each with a different mentor.



CONCORDIA'S DINNER FOR 8

photo Howard Kay, PBL Photography

The school recently revamped its eligibility criteria to allow graduates to participate as mentees. "We know anecdotally that this has been an incredible help for alumni who were hit by the recent economic crisis," she says.

Concordia's newest initiative is Dinner for 8, an evening in which alumni or faculty members host eight mentees in their homes or in restaurants. "We got rave reviews," says Saliel, who herself had a group

of students over for dinner. "In that informal setting they really have the opportunity to talk and ask any questions... We adapt and speak to people's different interests rather than having a cookie-cutter approach to mentoring."

Mentoring programs are also offered by McGill and by Youth Employment Services Montreal (http://www.yesmontreal.ca/yes.php?section=job_search/services/mentorship).