

Mentoring LatinX People - What do they need?

LXAI AAAI Social

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My Experience

- I was born in Santiago, Chile, did undergrad in Chile, Masters in Germany (self funded through student work), and PhD in Scotland (funded by a Marie Curie fellowship).
- Currently I work at the German Research Center for Artificial Intelligence in Bremen, Germany. Active participant in the organization of LatinX in AI workshops.
- I have mentored over 5 mentees in the LXAI mentoring program, over 10 Master theses, and 5 bachelor theses. I also participate in the Black in AI Academic Mentoring program.
- In this talk I will share my experiences mentoring LatinX people, and things that are commonly asked or that people need help with.

What everyone needs?

Undergrads

Internships. Grad school applications. Career planning.

Graduates

PhD Applications. Internships. Research Careers. Alternative Careers (non-academic).

PhD Students

Internships. Doing Research in AI. Publishing, Attending Conferences. Career Planning.

Professionals and Postdocs

Career Planning. Networking. Aims to a permanent position.

LatinX-specific Challenges

- Lack of mentoring structures and access to mentors, specially with experiences in AI.
- Lack of information on how to access/apply to high quality graduate programs (Masters and PhD).
- Lack of connections and role models.
- Low investment in Education and Research in Latin American countries.
- Unclear information on migration possibilities.
- People might need encouragement to leave their comfort zone.

What is Mentoring?

From Wikipedia *Mentorship*:

*Mentoring is a process for the **informal transmission of knowledge, social capital, and the 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/mentee).*

The learning process in a Doctoral program is a long-term mentorship relation.

LXAI Mentoring Program

LXAI RESEARCH MENTORING



VIRTUAL MENTORING

Connect with your mentor.

You'll be matched with a mentor for monthly meetings to discuss your career aspirations and receive feedback on your research.

CHOOSE YOUR RESEARCH

Select your specialization and preferences.

Complete our quick questionnaire to identify your area of research, level of experience, and preferences for being mentored.



EFFECTIVE PRESENTATION

Practice successful delivery.

Visually represent your data and outcomes in posters or slides, making complex info easier to share & digest.

Mentors can suggest improvements to organize your images, charts, and text.



IMPROVE OUTCOMES

Incorporate mentor feedback.

Take time between mentoring to iterate on your idea, improve the accuracy of your models, and write your findings.



PRESENT AT WORKSHOPS

Relax and share your expertise.

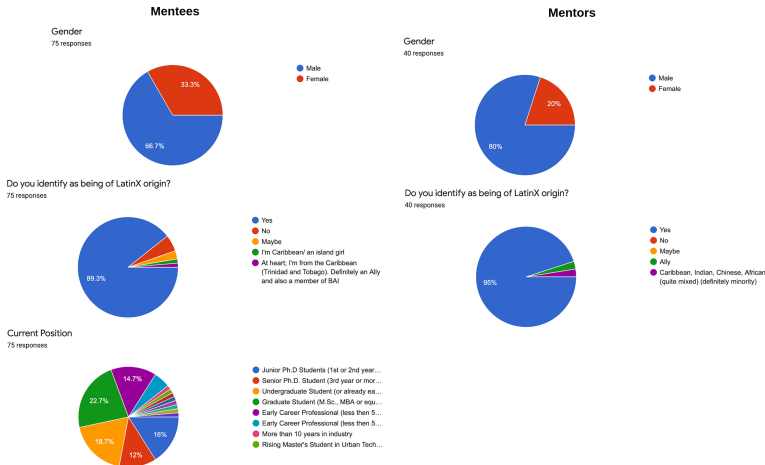
Submit your abstract for an opportunity to present at our official LatinX in AI workshops co-located with prestigious AI, ML, CV, and NLP conferences.

LEARN MORE: WWW.LATINXINAI.ORG

Mentoring LatinX People - What do they need? - Dr. Valdenegro

ICML 2020 Mentoring Program

75 mentees matched with 40 mentors. First version.



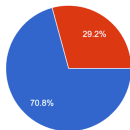
A large majority of mentees are from Latin America.

NeurIPS 2020 Mentoring Program

57 Mentees matched with 42 Mentors. Mentees need a motivation statement to apply.

Mentees

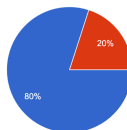
Gender
65 responses



Mentors

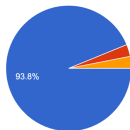
Gender
45 responses

Male
Female



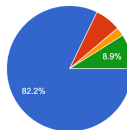
Male
Female

Do you identify as being of LatinX origin?
65 responses



Do you identify as being of LatinX origin?
45 responses

Yes
No
Maybe



Yes
No
Maybe
Ally

Most mentees are from Brazil, Peru, and Mexico.

Graduate School

- Applying to Grad School is difficult, many choices to make. Try to get a friend or mentor that can help you in the process, which significantly decreases uncertainty and mistakes.
- Consider **applying to programs around the world**, and not only to the US/Canada. Hyper-competition in these countries makes it more difficult to get accepted (standards might be much higher).
- Other countries might provide more support and more friendly visa regimes.
- Overall it should be possible to get scholarships and funding, this is more true for PhD programs than Masters.

Migration

- Please **consider the migration system of the countries** you want to move for grad school or to work long-term. Some countries have systems that tell you implicitly that you are not wanted.
- Things to consider: Time to acquire permanent residence, limits on students visas (like permission to work, or maximum length of the visa), decreased requirements for skilled workers, and pathway for citizenship.
- Some countries like the US might be very attractive but their migration system puts limitations on who can work, how you can support yourself, and how long your visa can be. Some countries do not have a direct path to permanent residence (usually required for citizenship).

What is required from a Doctoral candidate?

1. Intellectual maturity and motivation for Science and the research topic. This is due when **things go wrong** a lot of people simply quit the program, and the supervisor wants to prevent this. Tolerance to failure is very important.
2. Match between your research interests and the ones in the research group. This includes previous professional experience, Master thesis, Internships, etc.
3. Good grades (note this is 3rd from the top, it does not completely disqualify a candidate). It is important to have good grades in subjects related to the research topic.

What to look for in a Doctoral Supervisor?

- Experience supervising Doctoral students (past success predicts future success).
- Experience and expertise in the research topic. Does not have to be a perfect match.
- Connections with the international community of the research topic.
- For migrant students, might be important to consider if the supervisor has previously had international students. Similarly for Female candidates.
- Remember that you can always have more than one supervisor, and it is the student's choice. This can bring possible conflicts but it is also a **backup** in case of problems with the main supervisor. Very useful for interdisciplinary topics.

Interviews

- An **interview is like a date**, it evaluates the connection between two people. The University/Supervisor/Company interviews you, the same as you interview them. It is a two way process.
- It is the best moment to do any types of questions. For example living costs, group dynamics, how many students have previously succeeded/failed. It is not a problem to make hard questions.
- You have to consider that you are making a long-term commitment (3-5 years of your life) to a research topic, so the interview is a good place to gather information to make a decision.
- Supervisors are aware that the candidate might be applying to multiple Universities.

Success in a Doctoral Program?

Success in completing a Doctoral degree depends on the following (and in order):

1. Motivation for Science and Research.
2. Motivation for thesis or research topic. Very important to remember that a thesis topic is completely of the student's choice.
3. The supervisor, its supervision style (Absent, micromanager, good mentor, etc), and its support during the Doctoral program and thesis drafting.
4. Match between the candidates' research interests and the supervisors'. No need for perfect match.
5. Maturity and research experience of the candidate. If the candidate does not consider the suggestions and experience of the supervisor, failure is possible.

Research in Artificial Intelligence

- Work/research on interesting topics, find your own niche.
- Consider **societal and research field impact when selecting problems**.
 - If the problem is not important, when solved, only a few people will care.
 - If its a very important problem, even if progress is small, it will have a large importance and impact.
- Consider the impact of AI developments on minorities and disadvantaged groups.
- Think deeply on **who gets power** by an algorithm. Always think and prevent misuses.
- Just improving on the state of the art (a % on a benchmark) is not always the best. **New problems, tasks, and datasets, are very important too!**

Research in Artificial Intelligence

- A Doctorate can be a pretty lonely experience. Always try to break that loneliness.
- There is always a fear to be an **impostor**, that your research is exposed as low quality or fraud. It is a constant struggle against impostor syndrome. **Mentoring helps :)**
- A lot of people do not like to share or discuss their research, for fear of criticism or finding flaws. But this **discussion is fundamental for scientific progress**. If there is something wrong, it is better to discover it early.
- **Always try to attend conferences and workshops**, publish papers, get reviewer feedback, connect with mentors.
- Try to do networking, connect with people working in similar topics, or communities (like LatinX in AI, Black in AI, Women in Machine Learning, etc).

Tips for Networking

- Conferences are basically networking events, **everybody** is doing networking at some level.
- Always try to connect with people, through (virtual) conferences, events, Twitter discussions, affinity workshops, etc.
- Try to be always clear on what you need. People cannot help if you are not clear in what your needs are. Consider uncertainties in your own needs. **There is nothing wrong in asking.**
- Connect with people that have **something in common** with you, like ethnicity, research topics, citizenship, interests, etc.
- Do not be sad if people do not reply, not everybody has the time. Consider that people might be busy. It is not always about you.
- If writing emails or messages, be specific on what calls your attention about that person (like expertise, papers, etc). The most important thing is **not to be generic.**

Visibility

Minorities sometimes are invisible to some people, but this can be counteracted with modern technologies.

- Have a Twitter account, or a website. Always try to keep it up to date.
- Participate on Twitter or online discussions. Try to always **have a voice on topics of your interest**.
- Participate in Conferences and any kind of workshop or online event. **Always try to network** with like minded people.
- Always try to **highlight how you are different from other people**, for example, expertise, papers, research interests, ethnicity, gender, etc.
- If there are public directories (WiML for example has one), try to be listed there, as some people might use it to find connections, like for keynote speakers or just networking.

The Future

- We are currently working at expanding the Mentorship program into a Internship program, so stay tuned for future announcements!
- LatinX in CV workshop at CVPR 2021. Call for papers is out. Deadline March 7th.
- Upcoming ICML 2021 and NeurIPS 2021 workshops are in the planning process.
- LatinX in AI at CVPR, ICML, and NeurIPS 2021 will have corresponding mentoring programs.

Thank you! Questions?

GET IN TOUCH WITH US

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