



## UIC Spark Series Mentor Guidelines

### Program Overview:

Our goal at UIC is to build an inclusive entrepreneurial community where all students have access to the support and resources they need to learn, grow, and succeed as entrepreneurs. The [UIC Innovation Spark Series](#) support students in their journey as they learn and prepare to showcase their startups ideas at the Blaze Venture Challenge on April 16, 2024 where they will deliver a 5 minute pitch to a panel of judges for a chance to win startup funding.

Students are encouraged to attend **five workshops** to refine their business idea leading up to the Blaze Venture Challenge, which are focused on working with mentors, generating ideas, building business models, conducting customer discovery, and preparing and delivering a pitch.

### Mentoring Overview:

We need your help to provide guidance and inspire our students along the way! In a recent focus group, UIC students rated **mentorship** as a **key aspect** of their entrepreneurial journey. As a mentor, you will play an important part in the process by being an advocate and resource who is available to provide advice to help UIC students explore and refine their business idea. With your support, students will feel empowered to grow their idea and achieve their goals.

Mentoring is set up using a **pool system** where students will review your areas of expertise and schedule time with you during your identified office hours. Some participants may want to meet regularly whereas as others may just need occasional technical assistance or have specific questions they need addressed. Mentoring sessions will range from 30 to 60 minutes each. Please let us know if you find that students are not keeping appointments.

### Mentor Expectations:

- Commit to holding office hours for at least **30 minutes per week** between **February 19 to April 16**.
- Participants will reach out directly to schedule time; these meetings can take place **virtually or in-person**.
- Approach mentoring with **empathy and openness**; students have varying levels of experience.
- Listen, learn, assess, ask questions, **provide feedback**, and help students set realistic milestones and goals.
- Share resources and help to connect students with extra assistance as needed.

### Timeline:

- Commit to being a mentor for the UIC Spark Series: Blaze Venture Challenge by **Friday, February 2**.
- Share a short bio (include areas of expertise) and headshot by **Monday, February 5**.
- Attend the **Welcome Mentor Virtual Gathering** on **Thursday, February 15 at 5:30pm** (not required for participation)
- Start to hold office hours the week of **February 19** (we will highlight your availability for students)
- The UIC Innovation Spark Series: Blaze Venture Challenge will take place in-person on April 16, if possible we would love for you to attend!

### FAQs

- Mentors may participate virtually if they do not live in the Chicago area.
- Mentors may meet with teams outside of business hours at their own discretion.
- We understand that things come up; if your commitment level changes, you can still participate. We just ask that you are available to hold office hours for most weeks between February 19 and April 16
- If you have questions or concerns as you're mentoring, the UIC team is here to help! You can also email us at [innovation@uic.edu](mailto:innovation@uic.edu)