



SCS Foundation

News and Announcements
www.scs-foundation.ch

The SCS Foundation 2024/25 Mentoring Program: Its Benefit for Mentees and Mentors

Andreas Ostertag^a, Elizaveta Maksimova^a, Anamarija Nikoletic^b, Titus Wuermeling^b, Gaetano F. Geraci^c, Murad Najafov^d, Samy Kichou^e, Sarah Isabella Jaeggi^e, Florian Ruepp^f, Marie-Désirée Schlemper-Scheidt^{g,*}, and Hans Peter Lüthi^{h*}

*Correspondence: M.-D. Schlemper-Scheidt, E-mail: youngscs@scg.ch; H.P. Lüthi, luethi@scg.ch.

^aUniversity of Basel, Department of Chemistry, St. Johannis-Ring 19, CH-4056 Basel; ^bUniversity of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland (FHNW), Institute of Chemistry and Bioanalytics, Hofackerstrasse 30, CH-4132 Muttens; ^cUniversity of Applied Sciences and Art (HEIA-FR), Institute of Chemical Technology, Boulevard de Pérolles 80, CH-1700 Fribourg; ^dUniversity of Fribourg, Department of Chemistry, Chemin du Musée 9, CH-1700 Fribourg; ^eUniversity of Zurich, Department of Chemistry, Winterthurerstrasse 190, CH-8057 Zurich; ^fETH Zurich, Department of Chemistry and Applied Biosciences, Laboratory of Organic Chemistry, Vladimir-Prelog-Weg 3, CH-8093 Zurich; ^gUniversity of Neuchâtel, Institute of Chemistry, Avenue de Bellevaux 51, CH-2000 Neuchâtel; ^hSCS Foundation, Marktgas 32, CH-3000 Bern.

Keywords: Mentoring · SCS mentoring program · youngSCS

Introduction: The Program, Its Structure, and Goals

In 2023, the SCS Foundation, in collaboration with the SCS and the youngSCS, implemented a mentoring program for students at Swiss universities.^[1,2] A few years earlier, the Swiss Women in Chemistry (SWC) had already launched a mentoring program supporting female students in their transition to professional life.^[3]

The goal of the new mentoring program is to support the personal and professional development of Swiss university students by providing guidance, advice, and feedback from senior professionals from industry, academia, higher education, and governmental agencies in various functions. The program is supported by industry and the Swiss Academy of the Natural Sciences (see Table 2 at the end of this report).

The most important feature of the program is that the mentors and mentees work in small groups at four different locations: Basel, BeNeFri, Léman and Zurich (for the current edition of the program, the Léman and BeNeFri clusters were merged). There is no 1:1 mentor to mentee relationship, but an open, dynamic team structure involving about six mentors and twenty mentees. This format supports peer-learning, *i.e.* mentees and even mentors can learn from each other. Each of these clusters or cohorts is led by a management team consisting of representatives from the young-SCS (Table 1). The management teams oversee organizing and leading through the events. Different formats of training and exchange are offered, including roundtables and discussions in small groups, lectures, company or lab visits, as well as social activities.

The program is open to MSc, PhD, and Postdoctoral students at all Swiss universities. Participation is free of charge. The participants are selected based on the application documents submit-

Table 1. The clusters, the management teams and the mentors.

Cluster	Management Team	Mentors
Basel	Elizaveta Maksimova (UniBas) Anamarija Nikoletic (FHNW) Andreas Ostertag (UniBas) Titus Wuermeling (FHNW)	Fabrice Gallou (Novartis), Alexander Lederer and Melanie Steck (BraunPat), Jonathan Medlock (dsm-firmenich), Christoph Meyer (Lonza), Oya Tagit (FHNW)
BeNeFri	Gaetano F. Geraci (HEIA-FR) Murad Najafov (UniFR) Marie-Désirée Schlemper-Scheidt (UniNE)	Yves Auberson (Novartis), Christian Bochet (UniFR), Kim Diep-Long (HEIA-FR), Stefan Irmeler (Agroscope)
Zurich	Florian Ruepp (ETHZ) Samy Kichou (UZH) Sarah Isabella Jaeggi (UZH)	Martin Althaus (Carbogen Amcis), Sergio Grunder (DuPont), Michal Juricek (UZH), Guido Koch (Amphilix), Nico Santschi (Syngenta), Veronica Tona (J&J)

ted (CV and motivation letter). The classes run from September to June, include a kick-off event, at least two activities during the terms, and a closing event.

Given the success of its first edition,^[1] the program was re-launched for the 2024/2025 academic year. In the following, we report on the second edition of the program, with a special focus on the benefit generated for the participants.

The BeNeFri Cluster

The BeNeFri Management Teams shaped the mentoring experience by designing a diverse and well-structured series of events across the universities of Bern, Neuchâtel, and Fribourg. The team coordinated the kick-off event at the Pavillon Vert in Fribourg, creating a welcoming space for mentors and mentees to connect and discuss expectations. They also introduced an online self-assessment form^[4] to support early career reflection and to stimulate the discussion.

“Having my CV checked by multiple mentors showed me that, depending on the position, you should adapt its style. It also reminded me how important it is to make a good first impression, on paper or in person – something I’ll carry with me as I start applying for jobs.”

Leonie Braks, PhD student and mentee, UniFr.

In Bern, a dedicated Career Development Day was organized, where mentors provided detailed feedback on each mentee's CV and led group discussions on various career paths in the natural sciences. In Neuchâtel, the focus shifted to time management, with practical exercises such as weekly planning tasks and discussions on prioritization strategies to enhance productivity and self-awareness.

At METAS in Bern, a site visit and a practical session on interview skills, including mock interviews and role reversals, giving mentees a holistic view of the hiring process was organized (Fig. 1). As Gabriela Henriques, Master's student at University of Fribourg noted, *"The exchange with the mentors was easy and interesting, and the activities, such as the CV reviews and mock interviews, were really helpful,"* which captured the spirit the committee had carefully cultivated. Finally, at HEIA in Fribourg, a meeting centered on work-life balance and ethics in science, featuring guest speakers from industry and engaging group discussions took place.



Fig. 1. Visit at METAS. Photo credit, G. F. Geraci.

Each event was curated to blend professional development, interactive learning, and community-building: From selecting relevant themes and designing hands-on activities to fostering a welcoming atmosphere and ensuring smooth coordination across three universities, the BeNeFri Management Team played a central role in delivering an engaging and impactful mentoring experience. Therefore, the participants found the program highly rewarding as Dr. Stefan Irmeler noted: *"The events were well organized and covered a variety of exciting topics. Preparing for the meetings and interacting with the other mentors and mentees was enriching in terms of both content and personal level. I hope the program encouraged the students to approach their career choices with confidence and not be guided by fears about the future."*

Murad Najafov experienced the BeNeFri cluster from both sides, first as a mentee, then as a co-organizer. In his own words: *"As a mentee, I found the supportive, team-based approach particularly valuable. The personalized guidance and peer interactions not only expanded my professional network but also helped me gain more clarity and confidence in navigating my career path. The role of co-organizer allowed me to strengthen my leadership and organizational skills as I helped design interactive sessions, ensured clear communication, and contributed to a welcoming, engaging atmosphere."*

"The role of co-organizer allowed me to strengthen my leadership and organizational skills as I helped design interactive sessions, ensured clear communication, and contributed to a welcoming, engaging atmosphere."

Murad Najafov, BeNeFri Management Team

The Basel Cluster

The Basel Cluster started this year's program with the kick-off event held at the Department of Chemistry of the University of Basel on November 5th, 2024, followed by three visits to industry, a visit to academia as well as a visit to a patent attorney company, all organized by its management team.

The kick-off event started with the introduction of our mentors who briefly shared their educational path and motivation to join this program with the participants. The discussion then focused on the expectations and topics to be covered. This meeting was followed by an informal networking at the Herbstmesse (Autumn Fair) in Basel (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. The Basel cluster's Kick-Off Event fun part at the Autumn Fair. Photo credit, A. Nikoletic.

In January, we visited the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland (FHNW) in Muttens. After a campus and lab tour of the School of Life Sciences, the host and mentor, Prof. Oya Tagit, provided valuable insights into pursuing a career in academia and shared personal and practical tips for success during a roundtable and apéro.

In February, we were invited to spend a morning at Novartis. After an introduction by our mentor Fabrice Gallou and his colleague Michaël Parmentier, the mentees had the opportunity to visit the chemocatalysis lab and a pilot plant, guided by Dominik Ruffe and Adnan Ganic. Afterwards, Fabrice Gallou and Michaël Parmentier provided insight into different divisions of Novartis and led a roundtable discussion with five additional scientists from different labs. They shared details about their research, career journeys and illustrated career opportunities at Novartis. The discussion continued over lunch.

In March, the mentors and patent attorneys Melanie Steck and Alexander Lederer gave an insightful presentation about intellectual property protection. The mentees learned how the patenting process works, how to patent your own idea and how to become a successful patent attorney. The presentation was followed by fruitful discussion over an apéro.

In April, the program continued at dsm-firmenich at their Kaiseraugst site, where Principal Scientist Jonathan Medlock welcomed the mentees and gave a general presentation where we could learn what the company is all about (Fig. 3). He and a few of his colleagues, all with a chemistry background, presented their individual career paths and their current positions at the company: Insightful information was shared, and different professional possibilities for chemists were illustrated. Finally, the mentees got to tour different company laboratories.



Fig. 3. Our visit to dsm-firmenich in Kaiseraugst hosted by Jonathan Medlock. Photo credit, J. Medlock.

On May 8th, during a lunch meeting, Dr. Christoph Meyer, Vice President, Global Head of Quality at Lonza Specialized Modalities, gave the mentees a broad introduction to one of the world's largest healthcare manufacturing organizations. With the mentees, he shared details on his career and gave insights into how it is to work in a position with global responsibility.

The program concluded with a closing dinner in Basel, bringing mentees and mentors together for inspiring conversations.

There are two quotes that illustrate the value of the program for the mentees:

"It was a nice opportunity to visit different companies in the Basel area, get to know their labs and to experience how the company functions. The mentors were very helpful and patient in answering all my questions."

Zhengxing Zhao, PhD Student, UniBas

"The program gave me thorough insights in what is needed now in industry. With mentors covering all areas of Basel's life sciences industry, it was a great opportunity to connect with experienced professionals and learn first-hand from their experience."

Jan Klopfenstein, Master's Student, FHNW.

The Zurich Cluster

With this year's edition of the SCS Mentoring Program, the Zurich cohort grew even larger, bringing together 25 mentees and six mentors from diverse backgrounds ranging from large-scale chemical industry to start-ups and academia.

The kick-off event at ETH Zurich began with an interactive exercise in which mentees and mentors collaborated on selected career development topics in small groups and shared their insights. This was followed by an informal apéro that provided an opportunity to get to know each other on a more personal level. The second event featured a stimulating panel discussion, where the mentors shared stories, observations and experiences with the audience and responded to questions submitted beforehand by the mentees. The discussions continued over a cosy Raclette Dinner at the Green Kitchen Lab at UZH.

At the third event, mentees presented their resumes and received feedback from mentors. They also explored career paths

and practiced their interview skills through short mock interviews.

"It was a wonderful opportunity for us mentors to interact with the next generation of chemists, supporting them and being a part of their professional development."

Martin Althaus, mentor, Carbogen-Amcis AG.

The highlight of the program was the company visit to the Aarau site of Carbogen Amcis AG, organized by mentor Martin Althaus. The company is specialized in contract development and manufacture of active pharmaceutical ingredients, offering their services to the pharmaceutical and biopharmaceutical industries. After an introduction by Martin Althaus and his colleagues, the mentees visited various departments. In the afternoon, they took part in an engaging open discussion with representatives of different sections of the company.

The final event took place in August and concluded this year's program on a fun and meaningful note in the form of a barbecue party at Irchel Park. Hopefully, with these events we created connections that last well into the future.

Table 2. The program-supporting companies and institutions.



Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge the financial support from industry and SCNAT (Table 2), David Spichiger and the Swiss Chemical Society Office for their support of the program. Finally, we extend our heartfelt thanks to our mentors for their exceptional and inspiring dedication.

Received: August 28, 2025

1. T. Dörenkamp, G.F. Geraci, A. Kudashev, M. López-Tena, A. Ostertag, O. Pant, M. Perrin, T.F. Wuermeling, M.-D. Schlemper-Scheidt, *CHIMIA* **2024**, 78, 629, <https://doi.org/10.2533/chimia.2024.629>.
2. <https://foundation.scg.ch/mentoring>.
3. <https://scg.ch/component/pages/page-women-in-chemistry> (See section Mentoring Program).
4. <https://myidp.sciencecareers.org>.