

Workshop: Initiating A DiGRA Mentoring Programme

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INTRODUCTION: WHY DIGRA MENTORING PROGRAMME?

Every year there are dozens of doctoral students and other early career scholars who attend the DiGRA conference for the first time. Many of them do not get much support from their home institution or department, and in this respect the DiGRA conference and the enveloping international community can play a more significant role than we sometimes think of. To better identify the central needs and the required support structures, we propose a DiGRA mentoring programme.

An association-level mentoring program can serve several important purposes within the international scientific community. Mentoring programs offer opportunities for early-career researchers to receive guidance and support from more experienced scholars. This guidance can be crucial for navigating the complexities of academia and understanding the research field. More practically, mentees can also gain access to the mentors' professional networks, and this can open doors to new research opportunities and collaborations.

We see the DiGRA mentoring programme as an opportunity to contribute to a much-needed sense of belonging and to support the development of individuals within this community. If structured wisely in collaboration with the DiGRA Diversity Working Group, the programme can also play a role in promoting diversity, equity and inclusion within DiGRA. We hope that in the following years the programme can foster a culture of collaboration, learning, and support, ultimately benefiting the entire scholarly community.

In dialogue with the DiGRA leadership, the mentoring programme initiative has been identified as a top priority for the association. The initial idea has been introduced in the DiGRA board meeting in January 2024 and the proposal summarizes the key discussions that have followed from this opening. The list of possible topics discussed in the workshop includes but is not limited to:

- What are the existing benchmarks, best practices and guidelines that can be beneficial in creating an international mentoring programme?
- What are the expectations of mentees and mentors?
- How do we identify the participants for the programme (both mentees and mentors) and what's the right matchmaking method?
- What's the role of the annual conference for the mentoring programme? Should we organize the programme around the conference or use the programme to fill the periods between conferences?

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- How do we find an optimal division of labour between the existing support structures (doctoral consortium, solidarity fund etc.) and the mentoring programme?
- How do we ensure that the mentors also benefit from participating the programme?

After the workshop the organizers will summarize the results and in collaboration with the DiGRA board propose a mentoring programme pilot.

PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS

The duration of the workshop is three hours. We hosts will begin the workshop by explaining the background and the objectives of the initiative. The participants are then encouraged to share their experiences and ideas of what is central to a mentoring programme. There have also been talks about collaboration with the doctoral consortium. This could for example mean that at the end of the workshop the doctoral consortium participants will join the session and 1) share their ideas and expectations towards the mentoring programme and 2) provide feedback to the early drafts created during the workshop.

Workshop host: Olli Sotamaa is a professor of game culture studies at the Tampere University, Finland. He serves as a co-leader of the Tampere University Game Research Lab and a team leader at the Center of Excellence in Game Culture Studies (2018-2025). In his own institution, Sotamaa has served as a mentor for early career researchers and tenure track professors and initiated a peer-mentoring group for postdocs. Sotamaa has also served in the DiGRA board in 2018-22. Olli is responsible for recruiting the co-hosts and invited speakers for the workshop (he almost missed the workshop proposal deadline and is a little late with this part).