

# EACL 2026 Student Research Workshop: Mentorship Program Report

**Selene Báez Santamaría**

University of Zurich  
selene.baezsantamaria@uzh.ch

**Sai Ashish Somayajula**

Oracle AI  
Ashish.somayajula@oracle.com

**Atsuki Yamaguchi**

University of Sheffield  
ayamaguchi1@sheffield.ac.uk

## Abstract

This report provides a summary and analysis of the EACL 2026 Student Research Workshop (SRW) Mentorship Program, using structured exit surveys collected from mentors and mentees. Following the spirit of recent ACL Program Chairs' Reports, this document aims to increase transparency, record lessons learned, and offer actionable guidance for future SRW organizers. The analysis evaluates overall satisfaction, identifies systematic strengths and weaknesses of the mentorship process, and offers recommendations to improve the alignment of expectations and program logistics. We hope that the publication of these findings serves to clarify the organization of mentorship at \*ACL venues, provide empirical data for future chairs, and contribute context for meta-research regarding early-career support within the NLP community.

## 1 Introduction

With the continued growth of the NLP community and increasing participation by early-career researchers, structured mentorship has become an essential complement to peer review and formal publication venues. The SRW Mentorship Program is designed to provide constructive, formative guidance to student authors, particularly first-time submitters, by pairing them with experienced researchers. Similar to the process of peer review, mentorship within large conferences is inherently imperfect. However, systematic analysis of participant feedback can help identify what works well, where friction arises, and which interventions are likely to yield the largest improvements. Inspired by the transparency-oriented approach adopted by the ACL 2023 Program Chairs (Rogers et al., 2023), we make this mentorship report public and document the outcomes and lessons from this iteration of the program. The results presented in this document are based on self-reported survey responses

from mentors and mentees and should be interpreted accordingly.

## 2 Program Statistics

The mentorship program received 53 submissions: 40 were accepted, 1 was withdrawn, and 12 were desk rejected. Among the desk rejected papers, 6 did not use the official \*ACL template, 2 exceeded the page limit, 2 violated anonymity policies, and 2 did not meet the student author requirement. Furthermore, 13 submissions did not have a Limitations section, which would normally result in a desk rejection according to the official \*ACL guidelines. However, given that the goal of the program is to guide students, we, the organizers, decided to issue a warning to authors instead, allowing them to rectify the error before making the formal submission.

Mentors were recruited through email in conjunction with the request to review for the SRW. Through a provided form, invitees could also opt to be mentors, reviewers or both. The criteria for mentors included the following:

1. A completed PhD or a main conference publication in a \*ACL venue from more than 5 years ago.
2. A minimum of four papers published in main \*ACL events or Findings.
3. Extensive experience in peer review.

The form was sent to 973 people and received 39 positive responses from mentor volunteers. However, after the verification of requirements and the request for valid OpenReview profiles, 28 mentors remained. Of this group, 27 mentors provided feedback for 1 or 2 submissions. On average, each mentor revised 1.62 submissions.

## 3 Data Sources and Methodology

This report draws on two structured exit surveys:

- **Mentee Feedback Form:** This survey measures the perceived usefulness, clarity, responsiveness, and impact of the mentorship.
- **Mentor Feedback Form:** This survey evaluates the engagement, feasibility, challenges, and perceived contribution of the volunteers.

Both surveys include Likert-scale questions and open-ended free-text responses. Similar to the methodology of the ACL 2023 peer review reports (Rogers et al., 2023), response rates remain partial and voluntary. Consequently, the findings in this document provide indicative trends rather than an exhaustive representation of all participants.

## 4 Overall Satisfaction and Perceived Impact

### 4.1 Mentee Feedback

Across core dimensions (Figures 1 and 2), responses of the mentees indicate strong overall satisfaction:

- Most respondents rated the quality of the mentorship as Good to Excellent.
- A clear majority report that the feedback of the mentor:
  - Improved the clarity of contributions.
  - Helped align submissions with the expectations of the SRW.
  - Increased confidence in the presentation of the work.

Nevertheless, a small number of low ratings appear across multiple questions. Similar to the peer review analysis for ACL 2023 (Rogers et al., 2023), these outliers are important. Negative experiences tend to be sharply negative rather than mildly so, suggesting localized failures rather than systemic dissatisfaction.

### 4.2 Mentor Feedback

As illustrated in Figures 3, 4, and 5, mentors generally report the following:

- Participation provided an intellectually rewarding experience.
- They were able to offer constructive, high-level guidance to students.
- The mentorship aligned with the educational mission of the SRW.

At the same time, mentors frequently note time pressure and uncertainty regarding expectations. These themes recur across multiple responses and receive further discussion in Section 5.

## 5 Challenges Identified

### 5.1 Time Constraints and Scheduling

Both mentors and mentees frequently identify limited time availability as a primary challenge:

- Mentors report difficulty integrating mentorship into already full academic schedules.
- Mentees report delayed or minimal interaction in a minority of cases.

This situation mirrors challenges documented in large-scale peer review at ACL 2023 (Rogers et al., 2023), where workload and limited bandwidth similarly constrained engagement.

### 5.2 Expectation Ambiguity

A recurring theme in both surveys is the presence of unclear expectations:

- Some mentors felt uncertain regarding the expected depth or the number of feedback rounds.
- Some mentees were unsure whether iteration or follow-up questions were appropriate.

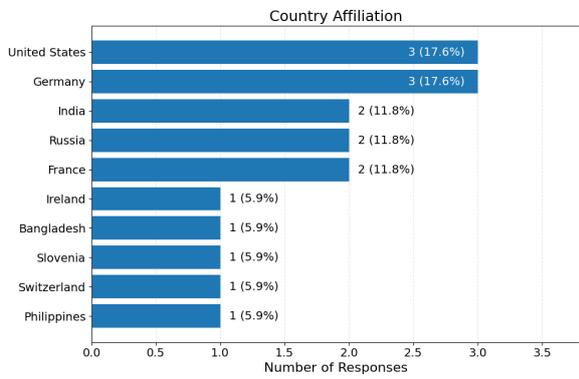
Similar to issues regarding the interpretation of review scores at ACL 2023 (Rogers et al., 2023), ambiguity in process design appears to amplify dissatisfaction even when the goodwill of the participants is high.

The organizers acknowledge that information and guidance for mentors were limited at the start of the program, as previous iterations of the SRW did not provide formal guidelines. To address this gap, we published mentor guidelines at <https://2026.eacl.org/calls/srw/mentor-guidelines/>. Nonetheless, the survey responses indicate that these guidelines would benefit from a more detailed explanation of expectations for both parties.

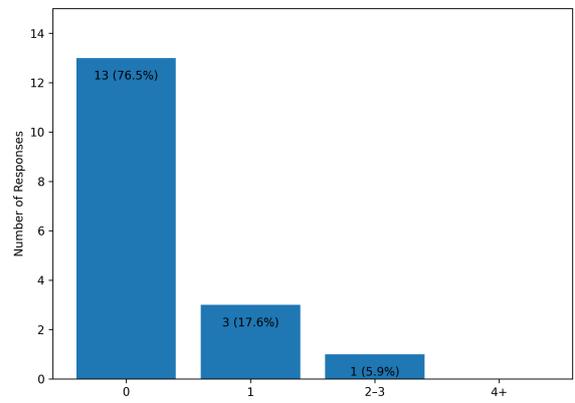
### 5.3 Paper Readiness and Fit

Several mentors indicate that:

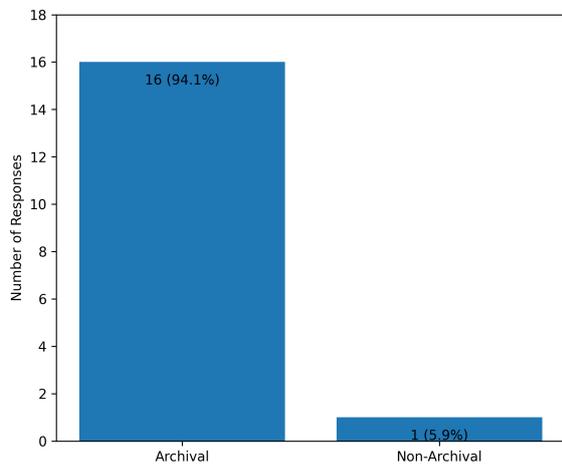
- Some submissions were too early-stage to benefit optimally from mentorship.



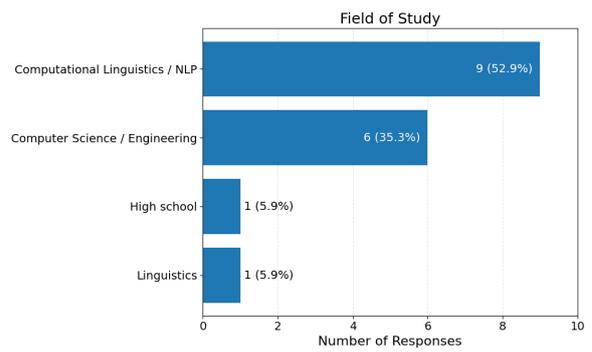
(a) Country Affiliation



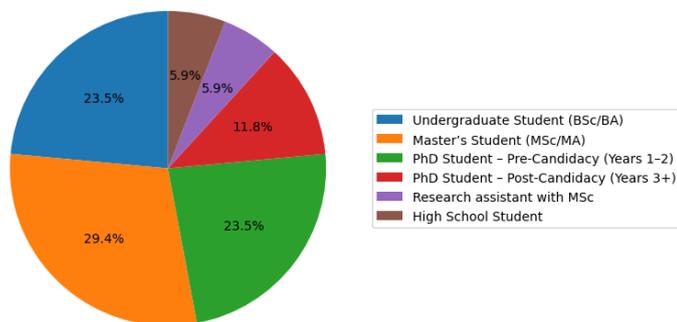
(b) NLP Papers Authored



(c) Archival vs. Non-Archival

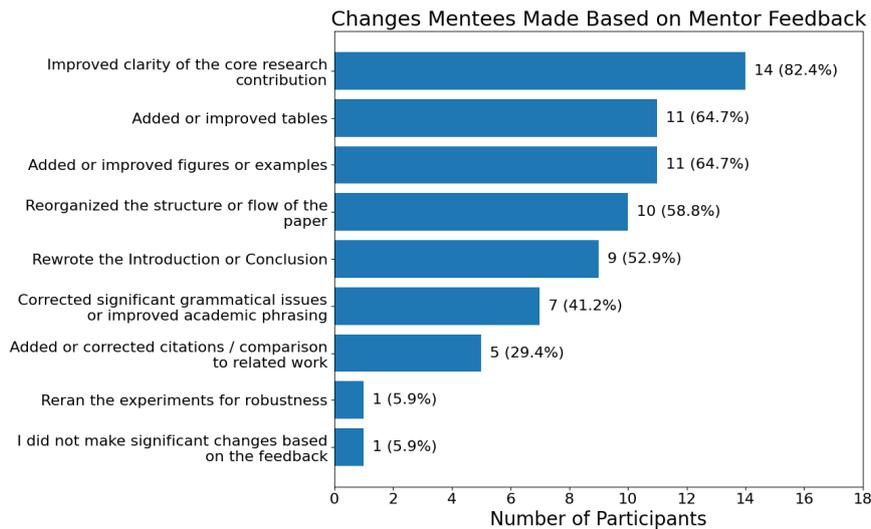


(d) Field of Study



(e) Academic Representation

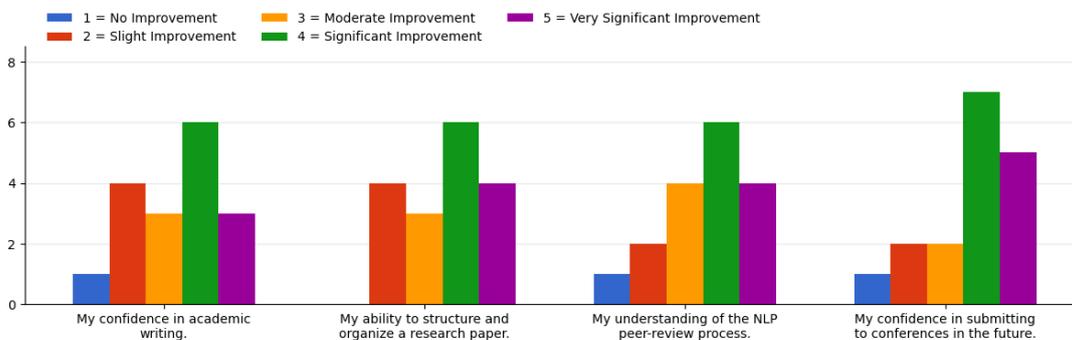
Figure 1: Participant profile and academic background of mentees, including submission track, prior research experience, field of study, geographic affiliation, and academic representation.



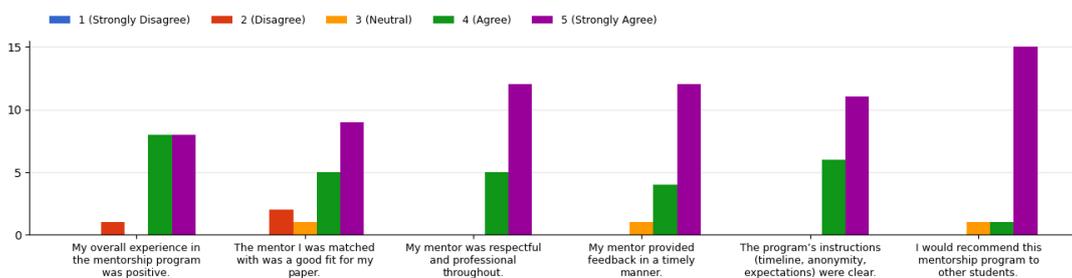
(a) Types of Revisions Made Based on Feedback



(b) Feedback Quality Ratings

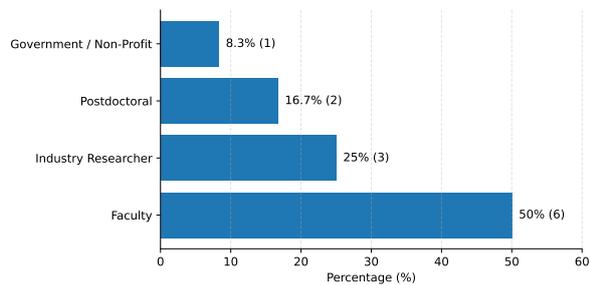


(c) Confidence and Understanding Gains

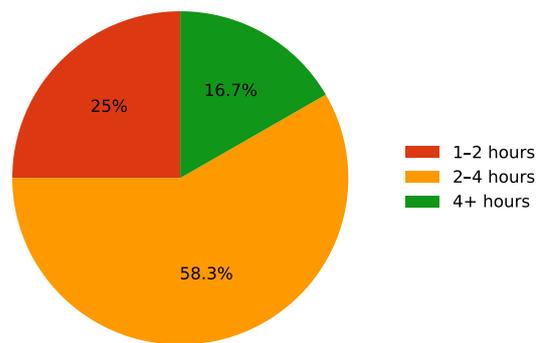


(d) Overall Program Evaluation

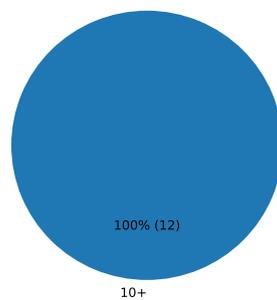
Figure 2: Mentees' perceptions of the mentorship experience, including revisions made in response to feedback, perceived feedback quality, self-reported confidence gains, and overall program evaluation.



(a) Mentor Roles



(b) Time Spent Mentoring



(c) Prior ACL Reviewing Experience

Figure 3: Mentor-reported background, including professional role, time spent mentoring, and prior conference reviewing experience.

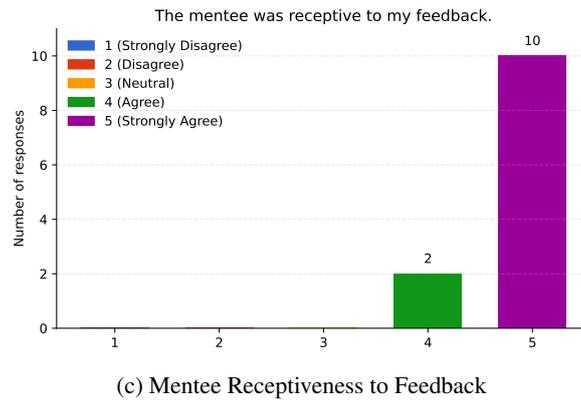
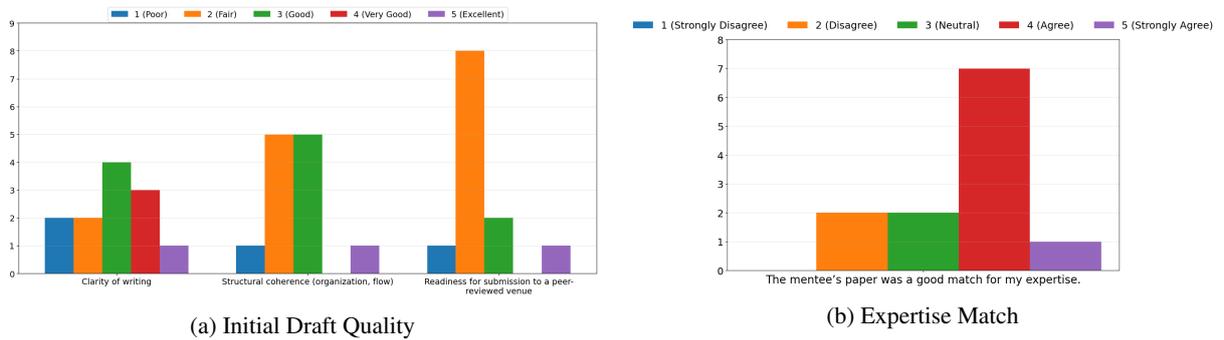


Figure 4: Mentor perspectives on mentee submissions, including perceived initial draft quality, mentor–mentee expertise match, and mentee receptiveness to feedback.

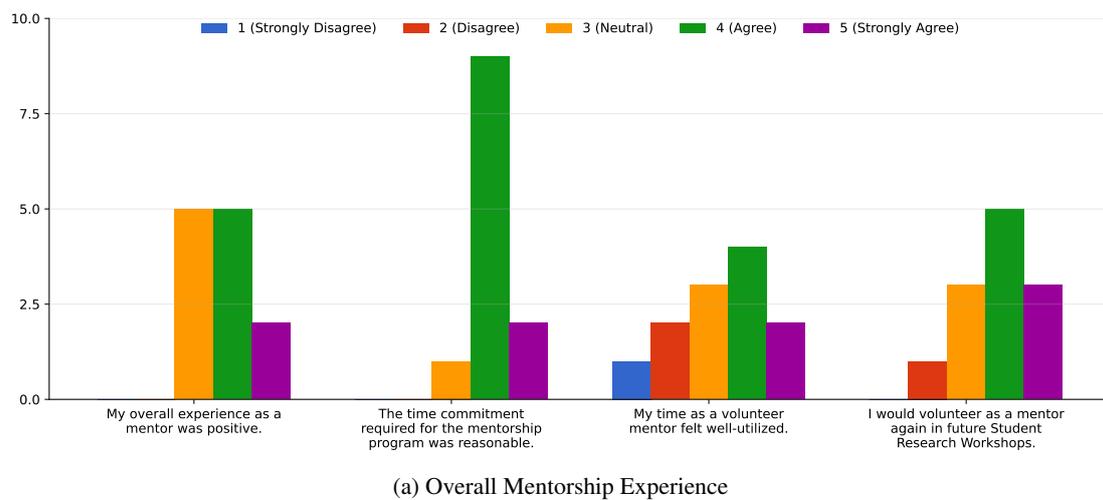


Figure 5: Mentor-reported overall experience in the mentorship program.

- Other papers were nearly ready for final submission, which limited the scope for meaningful guidance.

This suggests that the effectiveness of the mentorship is sensitive to the readiness of the paper. This factor may warrant explicit consideration in future iterations of the program.

## 6 Qualitative Benefits of the Program

Despite the identified challenges, qualitative feedback strongly supports the continuation of the program:

- Mentees characterize the mentorship as a process that builds professional confidence and provides intellectual clarity.
- Mentors emphasize the value found in supporting first-time authors and individuals from underrepresented communities.

Consistent with the analysis of ACL 2023 regarding reviewer training and matching (Rogers et al., 2023), these qualitative benefits are difficult to quantify but remain central to the mission of the program.

## 7 Alignment Between Mentor and Mentee Perspectives

A significant finding is the high degree of alignment between the responses of the mentors and the mentees:

- High levels of engagement from the mentor correspond strongly to positive outcomes for the mentee.
- Negative experiences are typically attributable to failures in the process, such as timing or lack of clarity, rather than a lack of expertise or effort.

This alignment suggests that improvements to the system and to communication protocols are likely to yield disproportionate gains in program efficacy.

## 8 Recommendations for Future SRW Mentorship Programs

Drawing on the data and following the recommendation-oriented framing of ACL 2023 (Rogers et al., 2023), this report proposes the following:

- **Explicit Expectation Setting:** Clearly define the scope of the mentorship, expected patterns of interaction, and the necessary depth of feedback.
- **Improved Timeline Communication:** Provide mentors and mentees with clearer deadlines and established escalation paths to address instances where communication stalls.
- **Lightweight Readiness Screening:** Implement a process to ensure that submissions are at a stage where mentorship is likely to be effective.
- **Institutionalize the Program:** Formally integrate the mentorship program into the organizational structure, as it is widely valued and aligns strongly with the educational mission of the SRW.

## 9 Program Impact on Submissions

The ultimate impact of the mentorship program is evidenced by the conversion of drafts into formal submissions. Of the valid 40 mentorship papers, 32 were subsequently submitted to the formal SRW program, representing a conversion rate of 80%. Of these submissions, 1 was desk rejected, 10 were accepted, and 21 were rejected.

Notably, the desk rejection rate serves as a strong indicator of program efficacy. Only one mentored paper was desk rejected, representing a desk rejection rate of 3.1%. This figure contrasts sharply with the broader pool of direct submissions, where 20 out of 138 non-mentored papers were desk rejected (a 14.5% desk rejection rate). This suggests that while the three-week window between the final feedback deadline and the formal submission deadline may be insufficient to radically alter research quality, the mentorship process is highly effective at improving presentation quality and ensuring adherence to submission standards.

## 10 Conclusion

The SRW Mentorship Program is a high-impact initiative that provides meaningful support to early-career researchers. The primary limitations of the program do not arise from the motivation or the expertise of the participants. Instead, these challenges stem from structural ambiguity and time constraints inherent to volunteer academic processes. Through strategic refinements, particularly concerning expectation setting and logistical coordination, the

program possesses strong potential for sustainable scaling and for further enhancing the overall experience of the SRW.

## References

Anna Rogers, Marzena Karpinska, Jordan Boyd-Graber, and Naoaki Okazaki. 2023. [Program chairs' report on peer review at acl 2023](#). In *Proceedings of the 61st Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics (Volume 1: Long Papers)*, pages xl–lxxv, Toronto, Canada. Association for Computational Linguistics.