Purdue Polytechnic Research Impact Areas
Peer Mentoring Program
July 5, 2018

In an effort to support the success of new Polytechnic faculty and continued development and success of current Polytechnic faculty and research enterprise, the Polytechnic Research Impact Areas (RIA) are launching a peer group mentoring program. Mentoring is widely accepted to be crucial to professional development and success. Personal connections and healthy relationships support positive workplace culture which ultimately supports job satisfaction and organizational productivity. Mentoring can happen ad hoc or through formal mentoring programs, which vary among universities, colleges, and departments. Senior to junior mentoring which occurs in a one-on-one setting is an effective approach but in situations where more mentors are needed than available, peer mentoring has been shown to also be effective as well as complementary to other mentoring approaches[1]. It would be uncommon for a single mentor to have the bandwidth and experiences to fully address the myriad of issues related to faculty success, many programs rely on multiple mentors for each faculty member, addressing different topics such as P&T, research, and teaching[2]. This creates a tremendous burden on the system. We propose to support existing departmental mentoring programs by providing opportunities for peer mentoring among the members of the research impact areas. Peer group mentoring brings together peers with similar learning or professional development needs to learn from each other's experiences through a structured process[3]. In order for peer mentoring to be successful members must be in trusting relationships[4]. For the past 12 months, the RIAs have been working to build and support the development of such relationships by creating communities of researchers, we will continue to create and support new and existing relationships.

Peer Mentoring Framework

Beginning September, 2018, ten minutes will be devoted at each regularly scheduled meeting for group peer mentoring. Impact area leaders will solicit topics/issues for which the members might benefit from seeking answers from their peers. The faculty member whose topic was selected for a particular meeting will succinctly describe the issue for consideration. The audience will ask clarifying questions, if needed, and briefly share their relevant experiences. If the issue cannot be fully resolved within ten minutes then the leader will request volunteers to continue the conversation "off line". If no one has the appropriate experience to provide assistance then the leader will request suggestions for who, outside the group, the faculty member should talk to.

Alternatively, faculty can volunteer to present research problem talks which seek input from colleagues on a particular research problem they are seeking to address. Problem talks provide very brief background to provide context and spend the majority of the effort describing the problem/opportunities for which input is sought. These should require no more than 20-30 minutes for presentation and 10-20 minutes for discussion.

Objectives

1. Group professional development through sharing of knowledge, best practices, and experiences relevant to the research ecosystem

2. Personal professional development by serving as a resource and engaging in trusting relationships

Research Office Expectations:

The Research Office looks to develop a faculty peer mentoring program in the Polytechnic through the RIAs. This initiative will ensure a vibrant and diverse culture that supports faculty development and success. To support this effort, the Research Office will help develop and set expectations for the program.

Department Expectations:

The faculty peer mentoring program is intended to augment not replace existing departmental mentoring programs. Departments will benefit from faculty that feel better supported both professionally and psychosocially. Departments will support faculty participating in the peer mentoring program by encouraging them to regularly attend RIA meetings.

Faculty Expectations:

Faculty will participate in the peer mentoring program by regularly attending RIA meetings and volunteering to actively contribute to mentoring discussions. Faculty will follow the established ground rules for the RIA meetings (Appendix A). Faculty will receive group mentoring by sharing problems they are facing that can likely be solved through group discussion. Faculty will mentor their peers through active listening, appreciative inquiry, and providing constructive feedback, advice, and sharing personal experiences.

Research Impact Area Expectations:

Members of the research impact areas will work together to define and agree upon ground rules for peer mentoring. Prior to each regular meeting RIA leaders will solicit problems to be considered by the group. Faculty will submit their problems for consideration to the RIA leader who will share with the larger group as an agenda item during a regular meeting. No more than 15 minutes will be taken to discuss the problem. If additional time or expertise is needed, the group or group subset will agree to discuss at a separate, mutually agreed upon time. Alternatively, the group will suggest others people that could be engaged to help solve the problem. Solutions will be noted in the meeting notes for future reference.

Possible questions to solicit topics:
1. Given your responsibilities, what are your pain points?
2. What is a personal learning goal for yourself that you seek to accomplish this AY?
3. How can you improve the way you contribute to the team, function, and organization?
4. How can you support others' growth and development?