M&M General Mentoring Tips

Find more mentoring resources and M&M program information at https://engineering.purdue.edu/WIEP

What is an M&M mentoring relationship? Central to a mentoring relationship is a teacher, advisor, good friend, & a role model; someone who provides information & support in engineering. A mentor has her mentee’s best interests at heart & leads through guidance/setting a good example. With her experience, she can prepare the mentee for what lies ahead.

Examples of what you can gain from mentoring interactions

- Derive satisfaction from helping others/from being helped yourself
- Impact female student retention in engineering
- Learn the importance of experiential (outside of classroom) learning
- Have opportunities for positive interaction with faculty, administrators, staff and alumni of the university
- Create strong personal and social bonds through resources/opportunities at Purdue and the West Lafayette community

Skills for Effective Mentoring Relationships

- Be willing to take risks by opening up to another person—then be honest and open and give them your full attention (or arrange to talk at a later time if the present is not good timing).
- Listen actively and ask open-ended questions—instead of getting “yes/no” answers, use a “what, when, how, who” question. “Why” questions seem useful, but keep in mind that they can sometimes imply criticism and cause defensiveness (i.e. “Why didn’t you go to the Earhart tutor?”). Be aware of body language during conversations.
- Attend and respond to both content and feeling—often there are two things going on at once – there is an issue, and the person has some kind of feeling or reaction to that issue. Remember that issues presented to you could have some underlying themes and might even be symptoms of a larger problem.
- Let others solve their own problems (but you can help guide them!)—it’s easy to want to try to solve things for others, but that’s not really as helpful as it might seem. Usually, we have some idea about the answer to a problem but we just need someone to ask the right questions and encourage our analysis.
- Refer to/use your resources—The most important thing to remember in any situation is that students are NOT trained, professional counselors. Each M&M participant should know her limits – sometimes the best way you can help others is by referring them to someone else with more experience and expertise. It is perfectly OK to say, “I don’t know” and then direct them to someone with the necessary expertise.
- Show appreciation and respect—when someone has shared their feelings with you or shared advice/guidance with you, it is important to show that you care and that you appreciate and respect them.
- Use self-disclosure tactfully—providing examples of past experience are helpful as long as they point to a productive lesson learned. For example, “I was in a similar situation and I did this_______ which helped for this reason________. Through trial and error, I also learned that_______ did not help.” versus “I was in that situation, too, and it sucked and no one helped me and blah, blah, blah.” How helpful was the second example? Not at all and it may only help to paint a negative portrait of you.
- Be a good role model—others are often observing you whether you know it or not! Always act in a way that positively reflects who you are and what your values are.
- Observe confidentiality—this is an important point that merits further discussion below.

Importance of Confidentiality

It is important that all parties in mentoring relationships give their full attention and assure others that what is shared is kept in confidence. In some instances, information shared in a mentoring relationship cannot always be confidential. If information is shared where someone means to harm him/herself or others, that information must be reported immediately to the appropriate person (Associate Director of WIEP, Dean of Students, Counseling & Psychological Services-CAPS, etc). If a student has a condition that is beyond your ability to assist (i.e. serious neurosis, alcohol, drug problem or depression), it is in the student’s best interest that you refer them to the appropriate experts or contact the WIEP Administrators who will contact the relevant professional staff at Purdue(CAPS, Dean of Students). Please also be aware that there are some people with whom you cannot share information: parents (because of privacy laws), significant others, friends, roommates, etc.
Common Dialog in College Mentoring Relationships

**Personal challenges:**
- Adapting to a new environment or new situations
- Leaving friends & family behind (for FYE students)
- Living with a roommate
- Meeting new people (including new romantic interests)
- Making personal decisions everyday
- Facing new peer pressures
- Conforming to behaviors that conflict with personal beliefs
- Learning how to show emotions in appropriate ways
- Managing conflict situations

**Physical challenges:**
- Coping with weight gain/loss
- Competing athletically
- Forming positive health habits and breaking problem habits
- Becoming self-reliant in managing health/stress
- Finding lifetime hobbies and activities

**Intellectual/Academic challenges:**
- Speaking up in class
- Communicating with professors
- Managing course demands and schedules
- Developing a plan of study (by semester and long term plans)
- Seeking academic assistance when problems arise
- Balancing academics and social life

**Career/Lifestyle challenges:**
- Choosing an academic major
- Changing a major
- Identifying & prioritizing other educational/vocational opportunities (e.g., internships/study abroad)
- Deciding to leave school/change schools
- Making decisions related to future issues (marriage, income needs, etc.)

**Challenges in Mentoring Relationships**
(but which must be overcome for successful mentoring experience!)

**Motivating/encouraging:**
- Students not wanting to participate in planned activities
- Trying to make everyone happy
- Dealing with apathy (trying to get people excited!)
- Students having different expectations
- Students not meeting expectations

**Role perceptions:**
- Being viewed as a teacher or parent rather than a peer
- Others wanting you to solve their problems
- Not being seen as someone who should be respected

**Time issues:**
- Getting students to show up for meetings/events
- Working with multiple schedules when trying to plan events
- Finding time to build relationships
- Having consistent contact with others

**Individual issues:**
- Giving advice without personal morals/values getting in the way
- Dealing with difficult/controversial issues appropriately
- Not giving too much advice but empowering the other person
- Being inclusive and helping to break the ice with others
- Reaching out to those who need assistance but won’t ask for it

**Programming/activities:**
- Breaking the ice
- Being inclusive
- Getting everyone involved
- Gathering and utilizing feedback

The information above is adapted from the Iowa State University Peer Mentor Handbook: http://www.lc.iastate.edu/Peer%20MentorManual.pdf