

Retirement: Rocking Chair and Rocking On!

Congratulations on your retirement! As you charged through the excitement of your professional life, you never imagined you would ever have unstructured time. Now time is yours to schedule as you like. Longevity studies indicate that each of us is likely to live some 35 years longer than our great-grandparents. Many retirees choose to take up second careers to keep active and engaged, both of which have been shown to increase mental and physical health as we age. But before you take up extreme sports or join the tribe on *Survivor*, perhaps you could think about sharing your learned wisdom with those who are just starting their exciting careers in science. Become a mentor.



Caroline Kane

What You Can Offer and What You Gain

You have so much experience to share! The wise experience of retirees can enable younger scientists to learn the unwritten rules of their field and to navigate the perplexing web of available resources in search of those that are reliable and useful for a particular purpose. That these retirees were themselves successful in their careers provides credibility when they describe the roadblocks they encountered and how they overcame those impediments.

There can be great personal reward in connecting with someone who values your experience and translates it into pieces that work for his or her own success. Mentoring, formally or informally, was no doubt part of your experience; it is as simple as encouraging a coworker or sharing with someone how you chose a research topic during your career. Retirees can even mentor those soon to retire about expectations and planning.

Mentoring means listening as well as advising. It means developing a trusting relationship that enables someone to ask for help in framing an issue, handling a controversy, making a decision about a career path, or other areas.

Finding Mentoring Opportunities

Where can you find mentoring opportunities? There are several online mentoring organizations, MentorNet being one of the oldest and most used. MentorNet focuses on engineering and science (www.mentornet.net). There is also the National Mentoring Partnership (www.mentoring.org), which helps children and young adults.

Formal efforts to acquaint the inexperienced and the experienced are not new, and working professionals have volunteered in such efforts across many disciplines. But enlisting retirees to share their experiences takes advantage of a huge reservoir of history, knowledge, and energy. Melding the generations also provides opportunities for understanding across cultures of background, experience, and even language. Mentoring opportunities may also be found at start-up companies, many of which actively seek “gray matter” in the company’s area of expertise for just these reasons. More-established companies also enlist their retirees to mentor newer employees, providing continuity and rapid training.

For faculty retirees who are still doing research in the “chemical sciences,” the Camille and Henry Dreyfus Foundation provides funds to work with undergraduates as mentors in their Senior Scientist Mentor Program (www.dreyfus.org/awards/senior_scientist_mentor.shtml).

Mentoring at Your Institution

Another option is to mentor at your own institution. There you already know the rules of the road and thus can be especially helpful to students and faculty trying to navigate those roads. Moreover, you may be more likely to have the opportunity to work with someone face-to-face, even if some of the communication is “virtual” by telephone, email, or social media.

But how do you connect with those from your institution interested in having a retiree as a mentor? How do you let people know that



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you would like to assist them? And how do you determine if those who contact you are people with whom you can connect well? That is where emeriti associations can help. The emeriti associations of several academic institutions help organize volunteer retirees to work with students or junior and mid-career faculty.

One of the best developed of these programs is at The University of California, San Diego (UCSD), where the Emeriti Association Mentoring Program is euphemistically referred to as “The Match Game.” As described on its website (<http://emeriti.ucsd.edu/mentoring/index.html>), the program was established to provide guidance to “high-achieving first-generation and low-income students who often do not have someone at home with a core set of college experiences.” In this program, “Faculty mentors are matched one-on-one with first- and second-year undergraduates based on the students’ interests and goals. The mentors are able to assist students with questions about classes, grades, and graduate school, as well as help students identify opportunities for scholarships, undergraduate research, and internships.” Faculty from many disciplines are involved.

The University of California, Berkeley, is also in the process of establishing a mentoring program with the goal of having volunteer retired faculty from many departments work with low-income, first-generation undergraduates and with assistant and associate professors. The goals are very similar to those at UCSD: to provide guidance as students or faculty try to navigate the experience on campus, and for the students, as they propel themselves into their careers. Prospective mentors and mentees (or protégés) provide a small amount of information about themselves to the program’s emerita organizer (Caroline Kane, kanecm@berkeley.edu). Mentors and mentees are then “matched” based on their background and interests.

For the students, mentors arrange an initial meeting for introductions and then connect at least once a month, or more often as they like. For the faculty, workshops on topics pertinent to career development will be held and attended by emeriti faculty to share experiences, with networking opportunities to enable future interactions. The plan is also for the mentors to meet periodically to share experiences and advice with each other. Mentees also will meet to talk about the mentorship process, what works and how to make it work better. The input from both partners in the mentoring process

will allow the emeriti association to adjust the program to function better.

The University of Georgia (UGA) has also established an Emeriti Scholars Program to connect retired faculty with honors students (wwwctl.uga.edu/faculty/fac_dev_programs/emeriti/emeriti.htm). This program is coordinated by UGA’s Center for Teaching and Learning.

If your organization does not have an emeriti or retiree association, or does not have one sponsoring a mentoring program, consider enlisting fellow retirees to start such a program. Tap the resources listed above to assist you. There are personal rewards for mentors and mentees as well as great value to the organization in having a young cohort made savvy thanks to the input of retirees. “It takes a village” includes the wisdom and experience of the elders. ■

—*Caroline Kane, University of California, Berkeley*

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