Peer Mentoring with eAlliances

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Why Peer Mentoring for Women in Physics & Astronomy?

There’s a body of literature that shows mentoring networks to be very beneficial to the career development and professional satisfaction of women faculty (see our eAlliances site Resources Room[1]). Three of the project leaders have been members of a mutual mentoring cohort of five women physicists at liberal arts colleges that initially received NSF-ADVANCE support from 2007-2010. Details of our mentoring cohort have been described in a Scientific American Blog [2], and the current NSF sponsored-eAlliance project is described in Physics Today (April 2016) [3].

How does an eAlliance work?

The goal of an eAlliance is to reduce the isolation of participating members and provide support so cohort members can achieve their personal goals and enhance their career development at any career stage.

The eAlliance mentoring cohorts will:
- Hold regular electronic meetings
- Complete short electronic journal entries twice each year
- Use project funds to support annual face-to-face meetings at national meetings of their own choosing
- Attend two project-sponsored Summit Meetings to share their peer mentoring experiences

So far over 100 women have registered:
- Each eAlliance has formed and face-to-face meetings have been held
- The first of two summits of eAlliance participants was held in July 2018
- The second cohort is emerging – 3 more eAlliances are forming

Current and Emerging eAlliances:
- Current: Early career, mid-career at primarily undergraduate institution, two-year college, mid-career at variety of institutions, physics education research
- Forming: Two-year college, Hispanic women, women astronomers

What have we learned so far?

We now have 5 eAlliances, some of them have been meeting for over a year. In addition, the first eAlliance Summit was held during summer 2018. The team leaders have learned the following:

- About the similarity of situations:
  - Not as important as we initially thought
  - ‘Don’t be so picky…Any group is beneficial’
- About what works:
  - There’s no one-size fits all - each eAlliance uses different ways to connect
  - Ongoing communication is key
  - Commitment is crucial
  -about its value:
  - Feels supportive to members both personally and professionally

Some challenges:
- eAlliance portal needs to be tweaked to make it more user friendly
- Do we need to continue to help matching? Additional resources to start productive interactions?
- Integration with other professional societies’ membership database
- This is professional development - provide letters to eAlliance members’ departments

How do participants create an eAlliance?

Participants go to ealliances.aapt.org to register and complete a short survey to select personal “attributes.” Attributes include employment sector, gender identity, type of academic institution, career stage (tenured?), sexual identity, area of research, marital status and two-body problem, family situation (children or aging parents at home).

The on-line mentor matching algorithm finds other participants with common interests and provides a match score. Participants can look for matches and review the attributes of other anonymous registrants. Individuals determine when they reveal their identities in response to an inquiry. If matches are mutually interested, a cohort develops and an eAlliance is formed.

All the information will be confidential and name or other data of participants will not be revealed unless they decide to share it.

Other AAPT programs supporting women in physics

Gender Bias in Physics International Forum: Is a space where women and people who are gender and sexual minorities can share experiences of gender and sexuality bias in physics, find resources, and report responses to bias. https://genderbias.compedu.org NSF Grant # 1661340

STEP UP 4 Women: Seeks to increase the number of women-majoring degrees in physics by dramatically increasing the number of women majoring in physics in college. https://stepup4women.org NSF Grant # 1720869, 1720097, and 1720542

HERStories overview video: Shares stories of words of wisdom and encouragement from women in physics around the world. https://aapt.org/resources/sherstories NSF Grant # 1419453

COMING SOON: Physics & Astronomy Departmental Assessment aligned with AASASSC Change — ask me about this!

Do you want to learn more?

- Visit our eAlliances website (ealliances.aapt.org) or contact us at ealliances@aapt.org. We have instructions on how to get started in forming an eAlliance group and tips for what to do to get cohort activity off to a great start.
- If you would like to see a video introduction to eAlliances, check out: http://bit.ly/2qquW0c
- For more information on eAlliances, check out: https://aapt.org/ealliances

References:
[1] Resource Room at ealliances.aapt.org
[3] Committing professional isolations through mutual mentoring by Tom Fuder, Physics Today 69, 29 (April 2016)