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## Fast Five with the TFSC, February 2022

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# Fast Five with the TFSC

*A Newsletter for First Year Faculty at the University of Arkansas*

FEBRUARY 2022 THEME: MENTORING STUDENTS

## 2 Quick Tips from the TFSC Co-Directors:

1. In mentoring, be sure to set expectations for your mentee as you develop goals for a project. Be open, but kind, in giving advice. Ask a lot of questions, which will help your mentee reach conclusions in a way that they can develop critical thinking skills in an academic context.
2. Be aware that there is a significant award for Teaching and Mentoring students at the University of Arkansas. Here are the criteria: <https://news.uark.edu/articles/57862/call-for-fall-nominations-for-imhoff-award-for-outstanding-teaching-and-student-mentorship> . In this newsletter, we will feature ideas from the most recent winner and finalists. Being recognized in the top three is a significant accomplishment.

## 3.



From **Lauren Lambert**, Imhoff Finalist: Lauren teaches in the Department of Communication in the Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences and is the Basic Course Director. She has a fun class activity to break the ice in getting to know her students to enable a better mentoring relationship. Her tip is: The process of mentoring doesn't have to be a regimented, scheduled experience, in which the instructor listens intently and offers wisdom and guidance. The only necessary part to begin the process is the listening. We know this about our students – they want to be heard. They have opinions and ideas, beliefs and attitudes about the world around them. Creating a connection with a student by simply “hearing” them, I believe, is the best, very critical, part of student mentorship.

Consider this exercise in a smaller class: select a question below and as you take attendance, ask each student to provide a response. The question could be funny as they are listed below, or opinions related to content or something thoughtful about the world around us; however, the purpose of the exercise is in learning about the individual student. Let them know that you are there to listen as much as you are to teach and begin building individual relationships.

- What Netflix show are you binge watching right now?
- Is it acceptable for pineapples to go on a pizza?
- Choose a movie title to describe your life.
- What is your favorite breakfast cereal?
- What is the worst gift you've ever received?
- What is the last song you listened to on Spotify/Pandora/Apple music?

In a large lecture course, select five students each class period to share. Post the question on the board and go down the list of students, making certain each has a chance to share during the semester. This may be the only opportunity the student has to make a connection with you during class. This connection could lead to another connection that could lead to another.

In an online platform, open a discussion thread and ask students to share their goals for the course. Or, ask them their favorite breakfast food or their opinion on the most comfortable footwear and respond to their answers. Show them you are interested in investing in them, even in a virtual platform.

No matter the approach, consider the start. Ask and listen. I have found that students appreciate an instructor that will listen, learn about, and meet them where they are. This simple exercise of listening can lead to a number of benefits, the utmost being a student mentorship opportunity in which the student can better the world around them, because you began by listening and ended up inspiring.

#### 4.

From **Sam Rochell**, Imhoff Finalist: Sam is from the Poultry Science Department in the Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food, and Life Sciences. He serves as an academic advisor



and faculty advisor to the Poultry Science Club and teaches students ranging from freshmen to seniors. He talks about how he reaches out to students: Like teaching, student mentorship is one of the roles that new faculty must take on with little, if any, formal training beyond our own experiences as mentees. Fortunately, I feel that impactful mentorship only requires one qualification – genuine interest in the success of the student. With this goal in mind, the other pieces generally fall into place. It is easy to get philosophical about mentorship approaches, but I'd like to share two concrete practices that have helped me mentor and develop rapport with students. First, don't be scared to recognize that you might not be the right mentor for every

student. There must be a certain level of connection between a mentor/mentee for a fruitful relationship to develop, and its often obvious that another colleague might be a better fit for a particular student. However, the student will appreciate and benefit from you getting to know their needs well enough to connect them with the right mentor. Secondly, follow up is impactful. It is great to point a student in the right direction in their pursuits, but a follow up to check in on their progress is also critical. An unsolicited email or phone call from you to ask how a test, interview, or research project went, along with the appropriate congratulations or motivation to dust it off and try again, really shows the student that you are vested in their success.

## 5.

From **Lisa Wood**, Imhoff Award Winner: Lisa is from the Soil and Environmental Sciences Department in the Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food, and Life Sciences. Lisa is active in study abroad programs and with the honors program. She has some advice for creating out of class connections with students: Faculty mentoring is essential to the success of undergraduate and graduate students alike. Students have to be met where they are. Life experiences, educational experiences, family experiences, etc. are different for each student. Therefore, treat each student as an individual. One activity I have found to be successful is to group my mentees into small groups (5-6 students) and meet informally with them as a group monthly. We meet at a coffee shop, at the Union, or another nearby location. This allows students to cohort and bond as Environmental Soil and Water Sciences students. It also allows me to learn about the students, their interests, and their needs as well as allowing the students to learn more about me, by listening to my experiences, asking me questions about career opportunities, and getting advice on educational matters. My advice, then, to new faculty members is to engage with the students in any way you can.

