

## Collaboration has benefit

Russell Yost

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Each summer, the call goes out from Beth Ursin, the director of career services at Willamette University's Atkinson Graduate School of Management. The Willamette MBA program is looking for motivated, excited and well-networked people who will get the opportunity to interact with budding new MBA students.

It's open enrollment time at the Atkinson Graduate School of Management's mentor program and slots fill up quickly as past mentors eagerly renew.

What makes this mentorship program so popular? For the student, the benefits are clear — the chance to interact with a local business leader or expert in his or her chosen career field. Students have the opportunity to discuss trends in the industry with their mentors, refine networking skills and create long-term career strategies.

"This often leads to introductions to key people where students find internships during their MBA experience or jobs upon graduation," Ursin said. "It's a professional relationship that can go wherever the student and his or her mentor would like to take it."

In some cases, mentors are so impressed with the students they work with that they end up hiring them.

"The program also serves as a learning opportunity for the mentors — a chance to network with up-and-coming business leaders who are excited to share their newly learned knowledge and talents," Ursin said.

Beth Vargas Duncan, a mentor in the Willamette MBA program and a certification program manager for Oregon Department of Transportation, said: "As a graduate student, I quickly realized that my most meaningful learning came from the relationships I developed with professionals working in my career interest areas.

This mutually beneficial relationship makes mentorship programs — at all levels of education — important and meaningful. Students and mentors both need the guidance, support and continual learning that mentor programs provide.

Gerry Griffin, a retired project manager from Silicon Valley, just started his second year mentoring a Willamette MBA student. He sees the program as the next phase in his life — learning, earning and, now, returning.

"You have to be conscious of the mentee's needs and what he or she is looking to get out of the relationship," Griffin said. "It's a learning experience for them where you (as the mentor) make introductions, talk about the profession and act as a coach in developing interviewing and networking skills."

Griffin's work paid off. His mentee pursued multiple internship offers at the end of the last academic year in her chosen area of interest.

What does Griffin get out of the relationship? "Plugging into a graduate community for

continuous learning on what's current in the business world — with the added benefit of the network created through fellow mentors."

Willamette's program allows mentors to interact with each other outside of the traditional mentor-mentee sessions. Workshops, training sessions and special events help mentors fine tune their skills and serve students as effectively as possible.

Organized mentor programs, such as the one offered at Willamette's Atkinson Graduate School, offer an easy way to plug into a mentor role. Resources such as [mentoring.org](http://mentoring.org) offers suggestions about how to start a mentor program to meet needs in the marketplace.

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