

ASA Women in Astronomy Chapter

Speed Meet-a-Mentor Preliminary Report

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During the 2011 ASA ASM in Adelaide, the Women in Astronomy Chapter ran a **Speed Meet-a-Mentor** session on Tuesday 5 July. The idea for the meet-a-mentor session came from the Chapter's Women in Astronomy Workshop held in May in Sydney, where it was made clear that mentoring is importance during one's career, and that the guidance and support of mentors is vital in helping women succeed in astronomy.

The event was coordinated by Tanya Hill and about 70 people attended. Mentor and mentees chatted for 4 minutes before moving on to the next person, and probably spoke to 6 or 7 different people over the course of the session. There were slightly more students (and postdocs) than mentors, so some students just sat out for a round or two, while other students paired up and chatted to mentors together. There were some "conversation starters" up on the screen of the lecture theatre, which helped get people going, though the general vibe in the room was very lively and people clearly had a lot to say. The feedback from the session was positive and participants said that the experience and both fun and worthwhile. Many participants said they would have liked it to have gone longer than the allocated 45 minutes.

After the meeting, Tanya Hill and Andy Casey prepared a survey for the students and postdocs who participated as mentees in the meet-a-mentor session. Here we present a summary of results from the survey respondents.

Impact:

- More than half of the respondents had increased confidence in approaching senior astronomers who they are unfamiliar (57%) or already familiar with (57%). The rest noted no change.
- Just over half (57%) the respondents felt an increased (or strongly increased in one of those cases) involvement in the ASA meeting after attending the workshop.
- There were 64% of mentees who had an increased (43%) or strongly increased (21%) attitude towards reflection upon their future career direction.
- Connection with the ASA community was split; half noted no change whereas 29% noted increased and 21% noted a strongly increased connection.
- In general, there were **no decreased impact or attitudes** noted in any of the categories - a positive reflection of the workshop. The worst category for impact was willingness to contribute in meetings, where nearly all respondents (93%) reported no attitude change.

Networks:

- Since the workshop, one person (of 14) has begun a mentoring relationship independent of the workshop mentors, however **no other mentoring relationships** were reported (either with a mentor or through the networks of mentors). However, three people have followed up with contacts made during the workshop and two have intended to begin a mentoring relationship.
- Most students find the barriers to finding the right mentor are:
 - Finding a suitable person (50% agreed, 29% strongly agreed),
 - lack of time (the results on this were mixed, 36% disagreed whereas 21% agreed and 21% strongly agreed), and
 - they need more information on how mentoring works (50% agreed, 21% disagreed).

Through looking at the individual responses it seems that more real-world information about how a mentoring relationship begins and progresses would be useful for most students. Either there is not a system in place for students to obviously seek additional mentors, or it's not clear how to begin their mentoring network. One participant also noted location as being a barrier.

Event:

- Every respondent found the meeting friendly and enjoyable (50% split in both categories for those who agreed and those who strongly agreed). Only one respondent did not find the workshop useful, with 50% strongly agreeing that it was useful. There was 50% who agreed, and 36% who strongly agreed that the workshop was both engaging and supportive.
- In terms of benefit to the short and long term, the results were mixed. Half the respondents believed the workshop was beneficial in the long term, but 43% selected "neither", indicating they felt the workshop had little impact in the long term. 72% of respondents agreed (42.9%) or strongly agreed (28.6%) that the workshop was beneficial in the short term. 14% disagreed.
- Only one person said they would not recommend the workshop to someone else because there were not enough mentors. Everyone thought the workshop should be run again in 2012, and **every respondent said they would participate in the workshop again.**

Improvement suggestions (paraphrased):

- More time on each "date" (repeated in multiple responses)
- More mentors (repeated in multiple responses)
- Because there were too many mentees some participants spent most of the time speaking to people they already knew because nobody else was available.
- Possibly arrange the seating better so that it's more apparent who you will be speaking to next.
- Maybe hold the session as a dedicated hour block at the end of one of the days.
- One person said they didn't meet enough mentors but felt the session was long enough - perhaps splitting the session into two; at the start and end of the meeting to help relationships evolve.
- A mingling period after the dates so you can re-engage with those you've connected with and chase up those who you didn't get a chance to chat to.

Other comments:

- "It was the best session in the ASA" (!!)
- "It was great, run it again!"
- "Even if no direct relationships come out of this workshop, I think it is excellent to promote the importance of mentorship"
- "It was a great idea and should definitely be expanded!"