Notes from faculty luncheon seminar:
Mentoring graduate students, 19 Nov 2013

Following brief presentations on graduate education at UAF (John Eichelberger) and functions of the Graduate School (Laura Bender), we proceeded to a spirited panel-led discussion of experiences and successful practices in graduate education.

Panel:

Anupma Prakash, Professor and Co-Chair, Department of Geology and Geophysics
- It’s often not obvious to new faculty, but we need to actively recruit graduate students. Let your colleagues know you want graduate students. Don’t worry about funding too much; there are a number of sources starting with TA-ships. By finding good students you’ve solved most of the mentoring problem.

Mike Koskey, Asst. Professor, Department of Alaska Native Studies and Rural Development
- We have the problem of not enough faculty to meet student demand.
- Many of our students arrive from rural Alaska and are unfamiliar with university procedures.
- We especially need to map out very specifically options, rights, and expectations – a checklist is useful.
- In the social sciences, we need to inform students about the IRB process early; it can seem very intimidating for them.
- It’s important for students to be encouraged to look for resources beyond their own department.

Sophie Gilbert, PhD candidate, Department of Biology and Wildlife
- Have a plan from the start; inventory and nurture the student’s skills in research, presenting, publishing, and networking.
- Make time and funding available, but be honest about the limitations up front, and if funding is not available, help the student apply for grants.
- Be positive and prompt with letters of recommendation.
- Nice is easy but honest critiques (and praise) are better over the long term for both the student and the mentor.

Christina Chu, PhD candidate, Department of Physics
- Christina loves research!
- Values relaxed time with mentors out of the office, e.g., when students meet with faculty for coffee or a meal.
- Encourage students to write their own proposals.
- Inform them about career opportunities – not everyone should head for academia.
Barbara Taylor, Assoc. Professor, Department of Biology and Wildlife

- Likes the analogy to children in the sense that graduate students should carry the best of us into the future.
- It takes a village to educate graduate students: both peer and tiered mentoring.
- Tips: Arrange a meeting room for students to meet both with and without you; have students make a timeline, working back from when they wish to graduate.

Discussion (speakers in audience not identified because scribe didn't note all):

Q: Why do students decide to go for a PhD rather than Masters?  
A: (Christina and Sophie) Because it’s a requirement in the academic world and usually a requirement for doing independent research in the public and private sectors.

Q: Isn't a better analogy for mentoring than parent-and-child a constellation, where co-equal stars align?  
Discussion: It’s a bit of both, otherwise there can be problems.

Q: What about Interdisciplinary Programs?  
A: (Anupma) There’s a lot of interest in this and the question is when to introduce interdisciplinarity in the course of education. Anupma believes that a student should be firmly rooted in a discipline before becoming interdisciplinary.  
A: (John from the sidelines) This is a big topic and deserves a faculty luncheon by itself (there was general agreement to this).

Q: Could the Graduate School offer a page with links to new funding opportunities?  
A: (John) Good idea! We’ll do it!

Q: (John) I remember being confused about just how much guidance vs. independence students wanted.  
A: Good to have some productive tension.  
A: Just ask them!

Q: (Anupma) Things to make clear: An RA-ship is a job with certain expectations; Data is not owned by an individual, it belongs to the institution and/or the funding agency that made the research possible.

Q: (Rolf Gradinger, Professor and Associate Dean, SFOS) Most problems arise when students don't understand expectations and faculty provide inadequate advising; i.e., lack of communication. But nothing feeds success like the excitement of research and learning.

On that note of excitement we adjourned..............jce, scribe, 11/20/13