

Mentors and the Future of Aviation

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men·tor: a trusted counselor or guide; a senior or experienced person who gives guidance and training to a junior colleague.

The value of the mentor in the aviation industry is often overlooked but is critical to the future of aviation. Those who have chosen to make themselves available to serve as a mentor have had the pleasure of sharing their knowledge and experience with those who will be our future aviation leaders. They have enjoyed the satisfaction experienced with the interest and enthusiasm of the mentees, as well as the positive feedback they have received from them.

The AAAE Academic Relations Committee since 2008 has sponsored a “Mixer with the Mentors” at the AAAE Annual Conference along with other sessions geared toward our Academic/Student Chapter members. In 2011, 94 students participated in the “Mixer” and the other student/academic sessions. These students represented 16 Student Chapters from colleges and universities from across the nation. Their experiences and the ability to relate to current aviation professionals were invaluable benefits to these participants.

What do students have to say about the Mentor/Mentee experience?

The Committee conducted a survey of students who attended the last two Annual Conferences. Their comments overwhelmingly indicated their appreciation of the Mentor experience. Here are a few examples of the positive feedback received as a part of that survey:

- “I found the Mixer with Mentors session to be the most beneficial because we had the opportunity to develop a one-on-one relationship with an industry member, and even to today, I still have a continued relationship with the mentor I had been assigned to.”
- “I think the mentor/mentee ice breaker pairing session and break-out session is invaluable – for many students it is their first real chance to learn the skills of networking/building their aviation network.”
- “Each session in which the mentors are included is a great benefit to all of those involved. The connection that is made with each of them is a wonderful inclusion to the Conference.”
- “The mentor sessions were helpful – airports are such a specialized field that it is helpful to get a new perspective and someone to help you with networking.”

In addition to this sampling, the many favorable comments received on site mirrored these sentiments.

Truly, this is just a small indication of how much this program means to the students and others new to the industry.

Additionally, the sentiments of the aviation professionals who have made themselves available to serve as mentors, have been in the same vein. The mentors have had the opportunity to provide guidance in getting around the Conference and maximizing networking opportunities. This was a good chance for these professionals to talk one-on-one about their personal airport management career experiences, and to introduce their mentees to their colleagues and acquaintances in the exhibit hall.

In addition to the mentoring opportunities at the Conference, the Academic Relations Committee webpage at www.aaae.org/arcommittee contains a list of aviation professionals who have made themselves available throughout the year to aid our academic and student members, as well as others who may need their assistance. Their contact information can be found on the webpage. Do not hesitate to contact them as needed. The experience of these mentors, as well as that of the mentors participating at the Conference, is an invaluable resource to new entrants to the field.

The Academic Relations Committee will once more be making the mentoring opportunity available at the 84th Annual AAAE Conference in Phoenix. We encourage our Academic and student members, as well as others starting out in aviation, to take advantage of this resource or of the year round mentor availability noted above.

For those aviation professionals who have not yet had the opportunity to serve as a mentor, whether it be at the Annual Conference or for first time attendees at the F. Russell Hoyt National Airports Conference, we would encourage you to consider making yourself available to our younger, less experienced members. If you are attending the 84th Annual AAAE Conference and would like to volunteer to be a Mentor in Phoenix, please advise AAAE staff at the AAAE Showcase (Booth #435) located in the Exhibit Hall, who can put you in touch with a member of the Academic Relations Committee. If you are not attending, but would like to be included on the webpage mentor list, please contact Cindy DeWitt, Director, Membership/Accreditation and Certification Programs, e-mail cindy.dewitt@aaae.org or 703-824-0500 x148. You will find the experience to be greatly rewarding and you will be making a substantial contribution to the future of aviation.