Program Overview
The Mountaineer Mentors program enables alumni to share their professional knowledge and experience with students who are exploring various career opportunities and planning their early years of professional life. The right mentor can provide advice and connections that help their mentee reach heights that exceed their expectations. While a student’s participation and networking may lead to an internship or full-time employment, this is not a requirement of the program.

The matching process for mentorship is based on rolling applications that are accepted throughout the academic year. The program will pilot with approximately 40 students and 75 alumni in January 2020, in preparation of a spring semester launch. Mentees and mentors will be formally matched through an online platform and will be unmatched at the end of the pilot semester. Mountaineer Mentors will be broadened and opened to junior and senior students in multiple academic disciplines at the start of the fall 2020 semester, when mentees and mentors will again be formally matched. While the Mountaineer Mentors program has no year or time limit, students and mentors may also take on new mentoring relationships each year if schedules and other responsibilities allow.

Please note that due to the need to have more mentors than mentees, a match is not always possible. A mentor’s information may remain in the database for future matching processes if a suitable match is not found.

Mentors and students will be matched based on a variety of factors, including common career interests and areas of expertise. Mentees will also be allowed to “favorite” mentors through the online platform, and those “favorites” will be considered in the matching process. There is an expectation for mentors and mentees to engage each other on a regular basis to ensure the relationship grows and benefits both the student and the professional. While there are no formal requirements regarding the frequency and structure of these meetings, the Alumni Relations team will suggest tasks such as resume review and interview preparation that students may choose as goals or objectives. We hope to allow each mentoring relationship to develop in a way that best suits the individuals involved.

**It is the responsibility of the STUDENT to reach out to the mentor and initiate the conversation.**

Alumni Relations will conduct follow-up emails and send online evaluation surveys to program participants following the matching process. The results of the evaluation survey will be used to assess and improve the Mountaineer Mentors program. All feedback regarding the program is welcome. In addition to the evaluation surveys, mentors may provide feedback to Ann Johnston, Director of Alumni Relations, at mountaineermentors@western.edu or 970.943.2493.

Eligibility
The program is open to any alumni from Western Colorado University, as well as other invited professionals that are looking for an opportunity to connect with WCU and provide assistance to our
students. We accept mentors from all industries, regardless of their years of experience. The program will include mentors who are not located in the Gunnison area. Mentoring will most commonly occur via email, phone, video chat, text message or social media, although there may be opportunities for meeting in person.

What is Mentoring?
Mentorship quite simply is a relationship in which a more experience or more knowledgeable person strategically affects the academic or professional life of someone else by fostering insight and expanding the other person’s horizons.

By expressing an interest in a student’s development as a person and a professional, mentors can help them navigate challenges and give them the confidence to make informed professional decisions. Mentors point out talents that mentees may not notice in themselves, and stimulate ideas about what they might be able to accomplish. They nudge them when they need a nudge, and ask them hard questions when they need a challenge.

Above all, mentoring begins from a place of care.

The benefits of being a mentor
Successful mentoring relationships can offer many benefits to the mentor, including the opportunity to reinforce professional connections within their network and evaluate their own professional development. Other benefits include the opportunity to:

- Stay up to date with personal and professional best practices
- Build your professional network
- Contribute to your profession by helping to develop future leaders
- Develop your own leadership, communication and interpersonal skills
- Stay connect to your alma mater and continue the legacy of Western Colorado University
- Acquire mutual feelings of respect and professional validation
- Learn from future generations
- Identify a potential future employee pipeline

Mentor responsibilities
As a mentor, you are a valuable resource to your mentee and can inspire and facilitate career and personal achievements. The developmental transitions student face in each of these areas are enriched by your experience, wisdom and guidance. Responsibilities of a mentor can include:

- Providing career direction and insight to students
- Acting as a professional resource to students
- Facilitating networking by introducing your mentee to professional contacts
- Sharing knowledge and experiences
- Serving as a coach and advocate for the mentee
- Being a positive role model

Relationships developed with your mentee become channels for the passage of information, advice, challenges, opportunities and support, with the ultimate goal of facilitating achievement and having fun. How is this accomplished? There are as many mentoring styles as there are personality types, and no one individual can be everything to one person. The challenge and fun of mentoring is developing your own personal style for sharing the special strengths, skills and insight you have to offer.
**General expectations**
Most of the students have not been mentored and may not fully understand how to appropriately interact with a mentee. Students are young and are unlikely to have had many professional experiences. By listening actively and asking questions, you may help alleviate much of their anxiety as well as establish rapport. Feel free to coach the student when you see areas that need improvement. Promoting the importance of professionalism, networking and being active in career development can be quite powerful coming from a mentor.

Be open and flexible. This mentoring opportunity will ultimately only be as beneficial as you and your mentee make it. Be honest with your mentee and help them be an active participant in the relationship. Mentoring is not about giving a lecture or entertaining your mentee with stories from your early career. You should ask questions, solicit feedback, and encourage critical thinking from your mentee - all in a supportive manner. Stay flexible and open to new things, and you will be ready for whatever your mentorship may bring.

**Time commitment and communication expectations**
The amount of time given to this program by the mentor can range from quick discussions over email to an in-person visit to the mentor’s company. As mentoring relationships can take many forms, we encourage mentors and mentees to develop a communication and engagement strategy that best fits the relationship. At the same time, be sure to intentionally invest time and effort. Being a mentor is not a passive role. To help, we’ve set up some starter goals that reflect milestones you and your mentee can check-off throughout the program. We encourage you to work with your mentee to customize these goals throughout the mentorship. Goals can be added to your platform as private (i.e., just for you and not shared with your mentor), or as shared with your mentor. Find what communication method is most appropriate for your pairing. Mentees have been instructed to communicate professionally and in a timely manner.

The duration of the pilot phase is 100 days (roughly the entire spring 2020 semester, mid-January through early May). We understand that student career goals can change over time and so if appropriate, the relationship can cease at any time you both feel is right. If you do not feel like your personalities are meshing well enough to create a mutually beneficial relationship (which can happen), please contact Ann Johnston, Director of Alumni Relations, at mountaineermentors@western.edu or 970.943.2493.

**The do’s of mentoring**
**Do:**
- Motivate, inspire and encourage your mentee. Develop a balance between challenging and supporting your mentee. Each student will be different, and a larger amount of support may be needed for younger students.
- Be patient and build trust. Uphold the core values of privacy and confidentiality.
- Ask questions and give feedback.
- Be a coach and focus on both strengths and areas where your mentee can grow.
- Encourage goal setting and achievement. Reflect on your own goals for the program – what do you want to achieve as a mentor?
• Offer alternative perspectives.

• Encourage self-directed reflection, analysis and problem solving.

• Establish boundaries with your mentee.

• Contact your mentee if you have not heard from him/her for a while.

• Remember personal safety. Face to face meetings should take place in public places.

• Take the time to familiarize yourself with career resources relevant to your industry. These resources can supplement your personal resources.

**The do nots of mentoring**

**Do not:**

• Simply provide solutions. Rather, advise or identify resources to assist the student to make their own decisions.

• Assume responsibility for the student’s academic or career success. Instead, provide feedback on job search tactics, tips on networking and other strategies to success.

• Offer personal counseling or life coaching that is not related to professional or personal development.

• Neglect agreed commitments without explanation.

**The first conversation**

How you initially connect with your mentee can set the tone for the rest of your relationship. Here are a few suggestions about what you can talk about during your first meeting:

• Clarify expectations about the extent to which you will offer guidance concerning personal as well as professional issues as you work together to define learning objectives.

• Discuss and define common goals and focus.

• Discuss the skills and experience you can offer.

• Decide how you will communicate.

• Discuss any questions or concerns.

Help the student understand your background by letting them know how long you have been in your industry and what you enjoy most about your current position. You can also let them know where you grew up, where you currently live, and how you spend your time away from work.

Establish partnership guidelines such as where, when, how long and how frequently you will correspond with each other. Other guidelines that you can discuss include:

• How you will schedule your meetings.

• What happens if one of you cancels or postpones a meeting.

• Whether or not you will create a written agenda and document action items.

• How you will evaluate your meetings.
• How you will measure success.
• How often you will communicate between meetings.
• How you will maintain confidence (and whether communication tools are confidential).

At the close of the first conversation, you will also want to confirm next steps, including when your next meeting is, how you will reconfirm that date, time and communication venue, and what needs to be prepared for the next meeting.

**Potential activities to do and topics to discuss with your mentee**
All WCU students have access to WCU’s Career Services department, which provides one-on-one career appointments for resume/cover letter review, mock interviewing, networking, job and internship search, general career advising and more. Career Services also offers career-oriented workshops and programs during the academic year. Encourage your mentee to connect with Career Services by reaching out to Craig Beebe at cbeebe@western.edu.

It is also helpful to discuss industry relevant articles, books and web resources. You can discuss where to find resources on career development, especially ones that focus on skills you or your mentee may want to develop, such as cross-cultural communication, conflict resolution, creativity or organization.

It can be helpful if you share your resume and are willing to review your mentee’s resume. Identify “power” phrases or key words they can use in their resume, potential gap areas in their experience or ways your mentee can supplement their education.

Other ideas include:
• Compare and contrast your company’s mission, goals, products and strategic plans with those of peer companies.
• Discuss current business cases/news stories and problem solve together. Consider asking your mentee to diagnose and/or suggest solutions to problems.
• Ask your mentee if there have been recent professional situations where they have struggled and needed advice. Talk those out with them.
• Share your career path and discuss valuable skills, interests, strengths and experiences. Provide long-term career guidance and feedback on their career goals.
• Share your personal stories. Students will be interested in you and your career, not just your company and your industry. Let them know about your struggles and successes.
• Identify possible areas of weaknesses and how your mentee may develop in that area.
• Conduct a mock interview with your mentee to practice interviewing skills and explore interviewing types.
• Discuss the recruitment timelines and processes for your industry/company.
• If possible, invite your mentee to a key meeting in your office and debrief with them afterward.
• Suggest professional contacts with which your mentee can conduct informational interviews.
• Evaluate your mentee’s LinkedIn profile. If you are willing, invite your mentee to connect on LinkedIn.
• Discuss what qualities you look for when you hire candidates.
• Role play how to address challenging situations in the workplace.
• Discuss their job/internship search and what type of companies they are interested in.
Be prepared for questions your mentee may ask, such as:

- What can I do now as a student to prepare for a career in _____?
- What qualities or personality characteristics are present in individuals who succeed in your industry?
- How would you describe your leadership style?
- What are some of the challenges you have encountered in your career?
- What trends have you been seeing in your industry?
- How did you identify and choose this career path?
- What are the top companies in your industry?
- Can you tell me about your office’s norms, culture and practices?
- Do you use LinkedIn? How is social media used in your industry?
- Are there unwritten rules you have observed in your workplace regarding professionalism?

Be sure to intentionally invest time and effort. Being a mentor is not a passive role. The more you know yourself, understand what you are good at and what you are not, the more value you can provide your mentee.

Why mentor? Mentoring makes you a more understanding human being. It keeps you mind young and your skills fresh. Mentoring someone connects you back to the original you who became so excellent.

For more information, contact Ann Johnston, Director of Alumni Relations, at mountaineermentors@western.edu or 970.943.2493.