UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA
NEW FACULTY & LIBRARIAN
SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES
HANDBOOK

University
of Victoria

INTRODUCTION

The UVic New Faculty & Librarian Supportive Communities Program is designed to bring together new faculty and librarians in their first year at UVic with peers at all career stages to share their experiences and expertise.

The program's guiding principles and structure are designed to create opportunities for faculty and librarians to connect, network, teach, and learn from each other. The program will provide opportunities for both new and established faculty and librarians to connect with each other through multilateral knowledge-sharing and networking opportunities, including group and peer support and informal networking activities.

New faculty and librarians ("peer supports") who wish to participate in the program will complete a welcome questionnaire and will be matched with a **support pod**.

The structure of supportive relationships is determined by the goals of the new faculty and librarians. Peer supports will be matched with approximately 4 – 6 new faculty and librarians and at least 1 established faculty or librarian ("senior support"). Each pod will be comprised of colleagues from different faculties and unit types. Unlike formal mentorship relationships that exist within each unit, this program's goal is to create multi-directional relationships that span disciplines.

This program serves as a means of sharing common goals, challenges and experiences, networking beyond participants' home units, and learning about the broader campus community and Victoria more generally. Faculty and librarians will have opportunities to meet with all participants in the program, including those outside of their pod for additional support and networking.

The most successful and satisfying relationships for all parties involved are those where participants establish clear objectives and meet regularly. **Members of each pod must take the responsibility to organize activities of interest to the group and as their schedules permit.** These can be structured as informal group gatherings, one-on-ones with the senior support, or as peer support sessions. Online communication channels will be set up so that faculty and librarians can chat and share resources or ask questions informally between meetings. Given the broad range of possible community activities, it is essential that new faculty and librarians articulate their needs and interests in order to ensure effective peer support relationships.

This resource guide provides information, ideas and resources to encourage the supporting relationship. It includes an overview of senior support in academia, information on various senior support models, guidelines for peer supports and senior supports, and suggestions for department chairs and directors and deans leading non-departmentalized faculties.

If you have any questions regarding the program, process or events, please email Carleigh Dean at projcom@uvic.ca.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

ROLE OF THE PEER SUPPORT:

- **MANAGE THE RELATIONSHIP** – Peer supports take equal responsibility for working to build a rapport with their senior supports and peers in their pod and ensuring that times and locations are booked for meetings.

- **BE CLEAR ABOUT OBJECTIVES** – Peer supports need to consider what they want from their senior supports such as: advice on work/home balance, advice about career transitions and challenges, a particular skill set, or some other objective. Peer supports should communicate these objectives to their senior supports and peers, recognizing that these may change over time.

- **TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OPPORTUNITIES PROVIDED BY THE SENIOR SUPPORT** – Senior supports may be able to provide opportunities for social and professional engagement in a variety of communities.

- **ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR OWN DEVELOPMENT** – Peer supports must make their own decisions; senior supports can, if requested, provide advice and feedback, but peer supports are responsible for their careers.

- **SEEK INFORMATION** – Peer supports should come to meetings prepared with questions so that meeting times are focused and useful.

- **BE OPEN TO FEEDBACK** – Peer supports need to be willing to consider what their senior supports have to say with an open mind.

ROLE OF THE SENIOR SUPPORT(S):

- **TAKE THE LEAD** – Although the primary responsibility to organize pod activities lies with peer supports, it can be intimidating and overwhelming. Senior supports should take the lead on introductions and organize the first support pod meeting to bring the group together.

- **LEAD BY EXAMPLE** – Senior supports are not expected to be experts, or to take on a formal mentorship role. Their role is to share their own experiences, strategies and knowledge to assist new faculty and librarians as they navigate their way through the early stages of the UVic career and life in Victoria. The peer supports will likewise be encouraged to share knowledge and skills with senior supports.

- **LISTEN ACTIVELY** – Senior supports should allow their peer supports to lead the process, giving time and space to ask their questions and convey their desired outcomes. A senior support may also ask questions to find out information. This program is designed to be mutually beneficial.

3

- **BE A SOUNDING BOARD** – Peer supports should be encouraged to make their own decisions. Senior supports provide a place where peer supports can bounce off ideas and try out solutions. Advice is not always needed or desired.

- **PROVIDE SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE** – When a peer support seeks advice, senior supports can provide suggestions. To advise effectively, senior supports need to understand the qualities, skills and experience of their peer supports. If the senior support does not feel well equipped to answer their peer support's question(s), they are encouraged to reach out to Elizabeth Adjin-Tettey at avpap@uvic.ca for guidance on where the peer can go for additional resources.

- **ASSIST WITH SKILL DEVELOPMENT** – Senior supports may suggest that peer supports attend their class or visit their workspace. Senior supports may assist peer supports with advice and coaching for important meetings and/or invite them to some of theirs to share good practices.

- **CREATE A SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT** – Senior supports assure their peer supports of confidentiality, subject to disclosures that require mandatory reporting to the University such as where the person becomes a risk to themselves or others.

- **UNDERSTAND THE PEER SUPPORT'S OBJECTIVES** – Senior supports usually need to ask a lot of questions to ensure they understand what peer supports hope to achieve.

- **ENCOURAGE AND SHARE** – Senior supports are selected because they are successful and admired. Their role is to encourage and support their peer supports to achieve.

MEETING YOUR SENIOR SUPPORT/PEER SUPPORT

SETTING EXPECTATIONS:

One of the most important features of supportive communities may be accessibility. One of the best things that both the senior support and peer supports can offer is time on a predictable schedule.

It may be useful for a senior support and peer support(s) to consider having a conversation about the terms of their engagement and the broad parameters of the relationship. Such agreements will vary. Relationships tend to wane over time without such an understanding. Whether the expectations are oral or written, the following things should be considered:

- Short-term and long-term objectives for the relationship
- Preliminary development/relationship goals for the peer support
- Expectations that all parties have for the relationship(s)
- Necessary contributions to ensure a thriving relationship

- Tentative schedule for meetings (either formal or informal with an understanding that not all pod members can participate in every activity
- The procedure for handling informal contacts between formal sessions (e.g., text message, Microsoft Teams, email, etc.)
- Agreement on confidentiality

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION TOPICS:

Meeting regularly is an important part of maintaining a successful supporting relationship. Senior supports and peer supports may have informal meetings, but might also consider creating a more formal list of agenda topics. Since this is not a formal mentorship program, we suggest focusing on learning about the broader campus community and Victoria more generally. Here are a few suggested topics:

WORK-LIFE
- Discuss work-life balance
- Discuss concerns in career or personal transitions or other work-related challenges
- Share information regarding resources available to support teaching, research, personal wellbeing, etc. (e.g., LTSI, research supports, workshops, counselling services, multi-faith services, etc.)
- Share ideas about teaching, maintaining an active research agenda, time management, etc.

PERSONAL
- Advice on accessing resources for managing workplace conflict, personal wellbeing, etc.
- Discussion of ways to explore the campus community and Victoria (e.g., campus events, local hiking/walking spots, concerts, lectures, organizing support group outings/events, etc.).

DEALING WITH PROBLEMS:

Some causes of supporting relationship failures:
- Poor communication
- Lack of commitment
- Personality differences
- Perceived competition
- Conflicts of interest

Many of these difficulties can be avoided with clearer expectations of the roles of the senior and peer supports and an agreement about what the goals and parameters of the supporting relationship. However, there may be other reasons why a supporting relationship may not work out, and these do not necessarily imply blame or inefficiency on either part. While the supporting relationship is not one that necessarily requires personal friendship, it is important that both the senior and peer supports are able to communicate openly and effectively and have some degree of mutual interests, trust and respect.

In cases of changing commitments, incompatibility or where the relationship is not mutually fulfilling, either the new faculty member/librarian or senior support should seek advice from Elizabeth Adjin-Tettey, AVP Academic Programs, at avpap@uvic.ca about making a change.