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MentorLinks continues to serve as bridge for tech ed

By Madeline Patton, Published December 2, 2011

While searching for \$500,000 to purchase equipment for a new process technology program at [South Arkansas Community College](#) (SouthArk), Jim Roomsburg was not sure that applying for a \$20,000 [MentorLinks](#) grant was worth his time and effort.

Roomsburg, the dean of business and technical education at SouthArk, now says that he's "delighted" that SouthArk President Barbara Jones encouraged him to seek that grant. The relationships that MentorLinks fosters far exceed the grant's monetary value, he said.

Weeks after attending his first MentorLinks meeting in Washington, D.C., Roomsburg is still excited about the "amazing meetings" he and Instructor Joe LaVeer had with their mentor, Tom Deits, who recently retired as chair of the science department at [Lansing Community College](#) in Michigan. They also had good interactions with the other MentorLinks mentees, mentors and the team of former mentors who serve as the program's advisors. In addition, Roomsburg and LaVeer plan to follow up with people they met at the [2011 Advanced Technological Education \(ATE\) Principal Investigators Conference](#), which they attended after the MentorLinks meeting.

Just talking for several hours with Deits about employer needs for skilled process technicians in El Dorado, Ark., clarified the SouthArk team's plans for developing the college's process technology curriculum, setting up the lab and obtaining equipment.

"He has done this before. He spotted some things I hadn't," Roomsburg said.

Based on the caliber of Deits' technical advice, Roomsburg anticipates that his mentoring over the next two years will be extremely helpful to LaVeer, an industrial chemical engineer who is in his first semester of teaching.

Roomsburg has plans to follow up on the electronics, alternative fuel, and entrepreneurship programs he heard about from the leaders of ATE centers and projects that he met at ATE conference in October. Calling the meeting "absolutely the best conference I have attended in my 22 years working in higher education," Roomsburg said he was particularly impressed with the advanced technology work that other community colleges displayed during showcase sessions.

The [American Association of Community Colleges](#) (AACC) sponsors the principal investigators conference and manages MentorLinks with support from the [National Science Foundation's](#) ATE program. In addition to pairing selected community college educators with mentors, AACC allows MentorLinks participants to attend the conference that is otherwise limited to ATE grant recipients.

Setting goals

Based on their initial meeting with their mentors, the eight new MentorLinks colleges formulated goals for themselves. [Fox Valley Technical College](#) in Wisconsin plans to use a "lesson study" process to improve curriculum for an information technology security certificate program. Mentor Jaishri Mehta, a professor at [Mount San Antonio College](#) in California and principal investigator of [CyberWatch West](#), will help match



Dawn Rohm (left) and Anne Haberkorn from Fox Valley Technical College confer with their mentor Jaishri Mehta (right), a professor at Mount San Antonio College, during a recent MentorLinks meeting in Washington, D.C.

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networking and systems skills to local employers' needs. If the "lesson study" process succeeds, the college plans to use it for other program revisions.

In Virginia, [Eastern Shore Community College](#) wants to link the small, rural college's electronics program more effectively with the needs of NASA's [Wallops Flight Facility](#) and the companies that work for NASA. Mentor Jim Hyder, the industry liaison for the [Southwest Center for Microsystems Education](#) in New Mexico, will help the college expand its professional development program, increase the number and scope of student internships, and revamp the industry advisory committee for its electronics technology program.

[Joliet Junior College](#) (JJC) in Illinois wants to develop and implement a sustainable energy technology program. Mentor Ken Walz, a chemistry and engineering instructor at [Madison Area Technical College](#) in Wisconsin, will first help the college determine whether to "green" current programs or start new ones. JJC's architecture and construction program works with trade unions and Habitat for Humanity, but it would like to add industry partners and improve its connections with government green initiatives.

Also in Illinois, [Kaskaskia College](#) aims to create the first geographic information systems (GIS) degree program in the state by 2013. A college survey of local employers found strong demand for workers with GIS skills. Mentor Vince DiNoto, dean of College and Systemic Initiatives at [Jefferson Community and Technical College](#) in Kentucky, will help the college develop programs that bring awareness and enthusiasm for GIS careers among students and educators.

Working with high schools

[Mount Wachusett Community College](#) in Massachusetts wants to develop non-credit and credit courses for stackable credentials that prepare technicians to work for the biomedical device companies that are moving into the college's service area. Mentor Linda Rehfuss, assistant professor of biotechnology and biology at [Bucks County Community College](#) in Pennsylvania, will help set priorities for the new program and develop ties with area high schools that would like to offer the biomedical program as a dual-enrollment option.

In Nebraska, [Northeast Community College](#) hopes to improve its recruitment and retention of underrepresented populations—particularly women and low-income students—in its information technology (IT) programs. Mentor Davina Pruitt-Mentle, co-principal investigator of [CyberWatch](#), will help Northeast develop a way to deliver IT courses online to rural high schools that cannot afford to bus dual-enrollment students to the college campus.

[Northeast Iowa Community College](#) wants to involve local businesses to develop a new, ABET-approved engineering technology program. Mentor Peggiew Weeks of Lamoka Educational Consulting will work with an industry advisory committee on crafting curriculum and help faculty develop internships for students.

SouthArk, which already partners with eight employers, has identified the [Gulf Coast Process Technology Alliance](#) standards as the target for its new process technology curriculum. Mentor Tom Deits will work with faculty on professional development and offer advice on student recruitment and purchasing equipment. MentorLinks complements the college's involvement with [El Dorado Promise](#), a scholarship program for local high school graduates, and an economic development initiative that combines entrepreneurship with science, technology, engineering and mathematics education.

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