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Faculty mentors will improve WSU commercialization, impact

🕒 December 14, 2015

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PULLMAN, Wash. – A peer-mentoring program to help Washington State University faculty commercialize their research will launch on Jan. 19 with a reception 4–6 p.m. in the CUB junior ballroom.

The goal of the Entrepreneurial Faculty Ambassadors (EFA) is to build a stronger entrepreneurial infrastructure at WSU by creating a resource of faculty mentors who are both outstanding academic scholars and have successfully commercialized university research.

The EFA program will also engage innovative student entrepreneurs with faculty mentors, alumni and business leaders to support regional economic development.

"We want to create a multicampus culture of innovation and impact that helps move research from the campus to the community to change and improve people's lives," said Chris Keane, vice president for WSU research.

In addition to mentoring and networking, the group will identify key gaps and make recommendations for improving the support structures for faculty entrepreneurship at WSU.

"We anticipate the EFA program will evolve to embrace the full range of scholarly excellence at WSU, from science and engineering to the creative arts and social sciences," Keane said.

The program is modeled on one begun in 2007 at the University of Utah. It now includes 145 faculty from all 14 of UU's schools and colleges.

Among the WSU faculty mentors will be Amit Dhingra, associate professor of genomics and biotechnology in the Department of Horticulture. He developed a soil-free plant multiplication method that accelerates plant growth, conserves water and reduces the need for pesticides.

From this innovative discovery, he helped create the company Phytelligence. Launched in 2012, it now employs around 20 full-time and 34 part-time people in Pullman and Seattle.

"Building the EFA network will serve to disseminate lessons learned and connect the entrepreneurial faculty," Dhingra said. "It represents a key grassroots effort to incubate new opportunities across the WSU system."

Glenn Prestwich, the chancellor's distinguished visiting professor at WSU Spokane, will serve as the EFA program's interim leader. He created UU's program and is experienced in the commercialization of academic research.

Other inaugural members who will act as peer advisors include:

- Cliff Berkman, Department of Chemistry
- Clint Cole, School of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science
- Joe Harding, Integrative Physiology and Neuroscience
- Marie Mayes, Department of Management, Information Systems & Entrepreneurship
- Katrina Mealey, Department of Veterinary Clinical Sciences
- M. Grant Norton, School of Mechanical and Materials Engineering
- John Wright, Department of Psychology

The EFA program is spearheaded by the WSU College of Arts and Sciences and the Office of Research. It is supported in part by the College of Agricultural, Human and Natural Resource Sciences, the Carson College of Business, the College of Veterinary Medicine and the Voiland College of Engineering and Architecture.

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