

MENTORING SPARK

Quick ideas to light up your doctoral conversations.

► LIFELONG LEARNING



SOLUTIONS FOR STUDENTS

Many students struggle with knowing the expectations for success while pursuing an advanced degree, especially if they do not have exposure to others with advanced degrees. During the process of getting the degree, students do not always take stock of their competency levels in different skill areas, or what might be needed to get to (*or remain at*) an “expert” level. This self-questioning by the students as to whether or not they know enough can cause stress in terms of the **Impostor Phenomenon**, being truly ready to graduate, and/or to beginning their first position after graduation.

The act of pursuing an advanced degree suggests a self-motivation for continued learning. Conversely, lifelong learning requires students to realize that having an advanced degree is not the end of learning – that there is always room for improvement and growth.

This **Spark** is intended to set the stage to help students be successful in their future endeavors by thinking about (*and taking stock of*) their levels of knowledge and areas of interest for continued learning.



LEVEL 1: TAKING STOCK

LEVEL 2: GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

LEVEL 3: FLIPPING THE SCRIPT



FACULTY FYI

This **Spark** is focused on the importance of lifelong learning, and introduces the competency wheel as a tool for tracking lifelong learning. This **Spark** series is intended to help graduate students think about learning *starting* with, rather than *ending* with, a degree. This series provides faculty with a tool to discuss the process of developing and improving lifelong learning habits and skills, including competency wheels (*Level 1*), individual development plans (*Level 2*) and being in your future position (*Level 3*).

Think about learning starting with, rather than ending with, a degree.

A RESOURCE FROM:



Use this QR code to access this and other Mentoring Spark tip sheets:



ACTIONS FOR FACULTY

- Discuss with students what being a lifelong learner means to you, and have the students, articulate what it means to them. Consider including that lifelong learning requires intrinsic motivation to continue learning.
- Discuss with students what is necessary to obtain their degree in terms of expertise, and contrast it to being a national or international expert (*which happens over time and after graduation*).
- Help students think about their current level of competency and where it should be to graduate. Look for any potential gaps.
- Depending on their current career path (*e.g., industry or academia*), discuss how their individual competency wheel may look different.

CONTINUED ...



DIGGING DEEPER

- **Competency wheel** – typically including six to eight competency areas with levels of novice, intermediate, and expert. Individuals self-report on their level for the areas. Often, the person's manager/advisor also assesses the individual's level.
- Note that one does not need to be an expert on everything within each pie piece.
- **Competency wheel for lifelong learning** – are there any skill areas not on your competency wheel designed for your work and personal life? For example, self-assessment? What can be done to help develop your lifelong learning skill?
- **Consider the different Sparks (and topics) as a competency wheel**
 - **Reflection as a Tool**
 - Take stock of where you are in terms of adapting lifelong learning habits – do you learn only what is required, or do you learn in addition? Do you look at your network as an avenue for lifelong learning resources?
 - If you want to improve your competency in some areas, what is your plan, and what tool will you use to document your goals and plans?



ACTIONS FOR FACULTY

- Introduce students to competency wheels as a tool to determine and track the skills and knowledge they should focus on for the type of work they want to perform. Help students think beyond the technical skills to include items such as communication, writing, and the other **Spark** topics.
- Discuss the short-term and long-term benefits of lifelong learning.
- If appropriate, discuss the Impostor Phenomenon with students.
- **GOAL Setting:** Agree on a goal for the student related to understanding the importance of taking stock of what it means to be a lifelong learner.



EXERCISES FOR STUDENTS

The below suggestions can be done with individual students, or as a research group. If done as a research group, the students can be given the autonomy to develop what they deem as important.

- **Group Work**
 - ▶ Have students write down the top three to five skill areas they would want on a competency wheel.
 - ▶ Have someone list out the items (*white board, online, etc.*).
 - ▶ Instruct students to then put a mark next to their own top three, based on the entire list (*an important item may appear that was not on their list*).
 - ▶ Develop the group's competency wheel based on the results.
- **Group Work**
 - ▶ Same as above, except the students write down their top six to eight skills.
- **Faculty Work**
 - ▶ Review and/or work with students to help them think about needed critical skills, and to review the competency wheels for gaps.

NOTE: The idea of competency wheels will be continued in the *Level 2 Spark*. If the student(s) become stuck, consider suspending this activity until *Level 2*.

Reflect on lifelong learning as an ongoing process...



REFLECTION & NEXT STEPS

- **Student:** Reflect on lifelong learning as an ongoing process, and one that should become a way of thinking and acting.
- **Faculty:** How often should each student's competency wheel be reviewed; is it different for individual students?



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