Mentoring Diverse Students
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January 10, 2012
Introductions – Who am I?
Plans for today

- Provide an overview of mentoring and promising practices
- Examine how mentoring can reduce the risks of unconscious bias
- Discuss your experiences with effective advising and mentoring practices, and identify possible “promising practices” to address student challenges
- Create an action plan to enhance your mentoring experiences
Mentors and Mentoring

- A mentor is a person in an individual’s chosen profession who is actively working to integrate a new person into a professional role.

- A mentor feels some responsibility for the successful development of the student’s career.

- Mentoring is an interpersonal relationship that contributes to the student’s sense of competence, confidence and effectiveness.

- Mentoring advances the person’s scholastic and professional goals in directions they desire.

- Effective mentoring involves understanding and acknowledging the student’s different identities and communities.

Careful mentoring can help avoid many pitfalls.
Mentoring includes

- Advising
- Supporting
- Tutoring
- Sponsoring
- Modeling
Benefits of mentoring to students

- Improved academic performance
- Increased productivity
- Improved professional skills
- Higher self confidence
- Expanded social and professional networks
Good mentoring: Quotes from students

- My advisor is very nice and warm-hearted. I got a lot of useful advice on academic and career, and s/he is always patient to help me.

- S/he gave me excellent advice and inquired as to how things were going, giving me a chance to ask questions and start discussions.

- They treat me with respect. I understand my position as a graduate student working for accomplished individuals, yet they treat me with the respect I deserve as well. That is invaluable.

- My advisor helped me understand the balance between research and coursework and hence get a good understanding of managing my time effectively.

- My advisor is super-smart, and can usually help resolve technical problems when I get stuck. Overall, my advisor is a caring person who does his/her best to listen to feedback and learn from it.

- My advisor is willing to spend time to talk about career development with his/her students, and s/he really knows the most effective way to train his/her students to achieve their career goals.
Benefits of mentoring to faculty

- Attract good students
- Amplify your own success
- Develop your professional network
- Satisfaction of seeing your students succeed
- Expand your knowledge of the field and life experiences
Students’ perspectives on mentoring challenges

- Every advisor should sit down with their advisee and discuss the program requirements, both short and long term.

- One of the biggest problems of new graduate students is to set his/her academic advisor as soon as possible in order to have both academic and financial supports. However, it is very difficult for first year graduate student to get financial support.

- I do not feel the program cares about how a student is doing. There is no formal proper follow-up on student progress, and there is no evaluation of who deserves more to be awarded financial aid.

- Students generally tend to stick with students from their own community. As such it becomes sometimes difficult to interact with many of them. Also, unfortunately in my department graduate students do not tend to go outside their labs, and so sometimes the environment is a little stifling.

- There seems to be a lot of tension between faculty & students, with students feeling that they have no one to talk to when they have a problem with their advisor, unless they want to risk their reputation by going to the dean or other faculty!

- Provide clear guidance in research. This has not been achieved because faculty are not directly involved in research; rather, they rely on post-docs to keep the labs running well. However, when such post-docs are not interested in helping others, this model falls apart.
Mentoring in a Diverse World

- The global environment and changes in society make mentoring a diverse student body increasingly important.
- Studies show that students and faculty may be most comfortable working with people who they view as similar to themselves.
- Effective mentoring requires working with students from many different backgrounds.

Stereotypes and their impact

- Stereotypes are...  
  - social expectations associated with a group identity such as: gender, race/ethnicity, culture, religion, profession, age, education, etc.

- Stereotypes affect...  
  - perceptions and behaviors in ways that are *automatic* and *unconscious*

Self Fulfilling Prophecy or “Pygmalion Effect”

When teachers are told to expect superior performance from certain students, these students perform better even when aptitude is equal across the students.

Typically, student performance was significantly better than students who were not identified as high potential.

Identity and Perceptions

- Perceptions can be influenced by very subtle cues, such as a name or email address or clothing
- Even when objective data are available, memory can be biased

Results – average Math SAT Score

- Asian
- Control
- Female
Stereotypes and Performance

- Stereotypes about groups can affect the performance of group members *aka* “Stereotype threat:”

  *When individuals are made aware of a negatively stereotyped group identity (e.g. gender or race) test performance is poorer than when identity not mentioned*

- Early studies were conducted with African American and European American college students

- Has been replicated over 300 times with different groups and with men and women with similar results

Small Cues can Result in Stereotype Threat

- “this is a test of intelligence”
- “this is a test of mathematical ability”
- “this is a test of natural athletic ability”
- “this is a test of racial sensitivity”

Gender Stereotypes and Interactions

- Stereotypes can be implicit
  - Woman in Mechanics Environment
  - Man in an Arts and Crafts Environment

- Individuals randomly assigned to male-female pairs to perform same task
  - Activity described as a “building” task or “arts & crafts” task

- In “building” task situation – men took charge and made the most suggestions
- In “arts and crafts” task – women took charge and made the most suggestions

How does Stereotype Threat work?

- Distraction
- Cognitive burden
- Anxiety
- Physiological discomfort
- Underperformance

Impacts on students

- Student’s often react to stereotype threat in the following ways:
  - Disengage from the activity
  - Decrease their performance
  - Distance themselves from the group
  - Change fields or areas of study

Wise Mentoring Can Lessen Stereotype Threat

- Trustworthy feedback explicitly links
  - High expectations
  - High standards of assessment
  - Confidence in capacity of student

- Mentors can communicate that ability or intelligence is not “fixed” but “expandable”
  - If mentors stress expandability the gender gap in math is eliminated

Reducing the Impact of Stereotypes

- Encourage common identities (e.g., graduate student, member of a particular lab)
- Hold high expectations of all students
- Provide role models from a variety of backgrounds
- Recognize that the graduate program is challenging for all students, regardless of identity or background
- Communicate how skills and abilities can be learned and developed
Promising Practices

- New Student Orientation Programs
- “Buddy” Programs that match more advanced grad students with new ones
- Mandatory yearly performance reviews
  - written and oral discussions of strengths and weaknesses
- Honest communication
- Frequent contact/interaction with students –
  - Academic activities: brown bags, colloquia, workshops
  - Social activities: pot lucks, movie nights, picnics
- Match students and faculty with similar intellectual interests
- Developing “mentoring plans” with students on an annual basis

Promising Practices

- Provide supports for mentors
  - Involve faculty in selection of students
  - Build mentoring into faculty workload
  - Reward mentoring through recognition, awards, and faculty reviews
  - Offer mentoring workshops and professional development
  - Acquaint faculty with recent research on mentoring practices

- Provide adequate program support for mentoring activities

Small Group Discussion

- In your small group, discuss the following:
  - What are some of the “challenges” for students in your program?
  - What can a mentor do to address these challenges?
  - What can a department or school do to address these challenges?
Addressing these challenges...

- What is one thing you can try to address mentoring challenges this semester?
MORE Mentoring Resources

- MORE website www.more.umich.edu
  - Bibliography
  - Downloadable documents
  - Links to mentoring websites