

# Mentoring Diverse Students

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# The Hard Facts

- Nationwide, half of all graduate students who start a doctoral program fail to finish (Dorn & Papalewis, 1997; Lovitts, 1996; Bair & Haworth, 2004; Bowen \* Rudenstine, 1992; Gardner, 2008)
- For students from underrepresented groups, this number is FAR worse
- **What goes wrong?**

# Why Does a Student Leave?

- Decision to remain enrolled relies heavily on program structure and campus culture (Lovitts, 1996)
- Decisions to leave are largely based on campuses not working to ensure a supportive and/or inclusive environment that encourages success (Kezar, 2000)

# Why Does a Student Leave?

- Is there a support structure?
- Does the student feel isolated?
- Is there a perception of unequal treatment?

**What Does Mentoring Mean to You?**

# Mentoring

- What is your experience?
- Take a moment to share with a partner what your experience with mentoring was.
- What do you consider to be a good mentoring relationship
- Report back to the group

# Mentoring

“A nurturing process in which a more skilled or experienced person, serving as a role model, teaches, sponsors, encourages, counsels and befriends a less skilled or less experienced person for the purpose of promoting the latter’s professional and/or personal development” (Anderson and Shannon, 1988)

# Mentoring

- Success in mentoring relies heavily on competence and/or accessibility of mentor/advisor
- Success also relies on understanding where a student has come from....
  - First generation?
  - Underrepresented?
  - Woman in STEM?

# Some Background



# An Example

- Formal mentoring at The University of Alabama
- Each student is assigned a peer and faculty mentor.
  - Student able to state gender/race preferences for mentors
- A program coordinator also serves as a mentor
- Professional development program

# Different Perspectives

- Older students are less likely to find mentoring an important aspect of their studies (Rose, 2005)
- Women want both professional and personal insights as part of mentoring relationships and seek acceptance and confirmation from mentors to a greater extent than male peers (Holly and Caldwell, 2010)
- International students find mentoring invaluable (Rose, 2005)
- Minority students face feelings of isolation and a lack of minority role models – leading to difficulty in developing effective mentoring relationships

“The cultivation of developmental or mentoring relationships between graduate students and their professors is a critical factor in determining the successful completion of graduate programs” (Davidson and Foster-Johnson, 2001)

# Importance of a Peer Network

Mentoring is not just about the faculty-student relationship



# Importance of a Peer Network

“Social membership within one’s program becomes part and parcel of academic membership, and social interaction with one’s peers and faculty becomes closely linked not only to one’s intellectual development but also to the development of important skills required for degree completion” (Tinto, 1993)

Idea – assign an advanced student as a peer mentor for a new student

# **Some Examples of Challenges**

# **Role of the Department/College/ University**

Provide opportunities for students to engage in professional workshops, academic lectures, and informal discussions with peers and faculty – creation of a community of practice

Formal professional development opportunities should be included

# A Word Regarding Mentors

- Johnson (2002) found that good mentors are “compassionate, competent, appropriately humorous, patient, and flexible, as well as supportive, composed, and emotionally intelligent”
- In general, female students and/or those with a higher need for achievement have higher expectation levels for mentors (Young and Perrewe', 2004)
- Expectations can extend beyond the traditional realm of academic support and contribute to satisfaction, such as social support and emotional nurturance – many traditional advisors unable or unwilling to do this

# Mentoring is all about Retention

“There just came a day when I had to ask myself, Why am I here? Is it worth it? Hardly anyone talks to me. I know most of them (student and teachers) don’t think I’m as smart as they are. They don’t think I earned my place here. Maybe they don’t even like me. Do I have to take this crap?”

(Johnson-Bailey, 2004)

# Factors That Influence Retention

- Negative classroom interactions
- Family responsibilities
- Insensitive institutional atmosphere
  - Class schedule
  - Support structures centered on traditional students
- Apathetic advisor

(Johnson-Bailey, 2004)

# Professional Development Examples

- How to write abstracts/introductions
- How to find funding opportunities
- CV workshop
- Presentation tips and skills (oral/poster)
- Interview skills
- Imposter syndrome
- Communication skills
- Maintaining a health lifestyle
- Strategic planning
- Leadership skills
- How to get a job (academic and non-academic)
- Intro to Writing Center and Speaking Studio

# Questions?

## Useful Resources

- How to Mentor Graduate Students – A Guide for Faculty at a Diverse University. University of Michigan, The Rackham School of Graduate Studies (free - <http://www.rackham.umich.edu/downloads/publications/Fmentoring.pdf>)
- On the Right Track: A Manual for Research Mentors. Council of Graduate Schools ( <http://cgsnet.org/right-track-manual-research-mentors-0>)

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