Peer Mentoring in Graduate School: Fostering Diversity & Inclusivity to Achieve Scholarly Excellence

Shannon E. Moran, Cláudio Vilas Bôas Fávero, Omolola Eniola-Adefeso
Department of Chemical Engineering, The University of Michigan

Goal

We aim to build and sustain a more diverse and inclusive graduate program using peer mentoring to facilitate inclusive social interactions, improve collaboration, and drive stronger academic outcomes.

Program structure & implementation

Peer Mentor selection

- Selection: Six senior PhD students are selected based on academic and research performance and prior involvement in the department
- Training: Mentors meet biweekly w/faculty advisor, encouraged to participate in diversity and mentorship trainings offered through College of Engineering
- Compensation: Mentors are incentivized with a $3,000 stipend, half directly as stipend, half available for academic travel expenses

Mentorship group implementation

- Structure: Each peer mentor group consists of approximately six first-year PhD students ("mentees") to one senior PhD student "Peer Mentor"
- Composition: Mentees are assigned such that diversity in each group is maximized with respect to gender, race, citizenship, and topical research focus
- Participation: Peer mentor program is compulsory for all incoming students, enforced as part of the grade for a pass/fail seminar course required of all first-year graduate students

Curriculum and activities

- Frequency: Groups meet once per week for social events and/or academic enrichment events (e.g. study hall, tutorials); topics covered shown below
- Inclusivity: To ensure that all students can participate in social and academic activities regardless of financial situation, all mentor groups are provided with $600 over the academic year to fund activities

Program evaluation

- Quantitative: Surveys were administered as a "Social and Academic Activities" assessment via email to all graduate students; surveys were conducted in December 2016 and May 2017 to establish peer mentor program impact
- Qualitative: Peer Mentors provided feedback in 1:1 interviews; survey respondents had opportunity leave free response feedback

We segment students as follows for demographic analysis:

- Matriculation: 2016, 2017, 2018
- URM: Not white or Asian
- International: Not a U.S. Citizen or permanent residents

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by a Faculty Allies for Diversity Grant through the Rackham Graduate School at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, awarded to Omolola Eniola-Adefeso. The authors thank Susan Hamlin for assistance with data collection.

Contact

Professor Omolola Eniola-Adefeso may be contacted at olnaa@umich.edu

A preprint further detailing the implementation and results of this program can be provided upon request.