 WHY HAVE A GRAD-UNDERGRAD STUDENT MENTORING PROGRAM?

Research has shown that low-income and first-generation students are less likely to be engaged in the academic and social experiences that foster success in college, such as interacting with faculty and taking advantage of support services. Faculty-student mentoring programs have been one of the most effective methods employed as means to promote the success of underrepresented ethnic minority students. Yet, for many faculty members, time for mentoring falls through the cracks because of multiple demands.

Underrepresented ethnic minority graduate students can serve as alternative sources of support and may be more accessible. Also, given the proximity in age, graduate students are well-positioned to be role models. Many ethnic minority graduate students are first-generation students themselves and have faced similar challenges as undergraduates. A meaningful relationship between ethnic minority undergraduate students and graduate students can be fostered in part because of their shared ethnic
heritage, language skills, and knowledge of family traditions, and experiences having been raised in similar communities.

In Spring 2017, the Chicano Studies Institute initiated a collaboration with the Center for Black Studies Research (CBSR) and Student Affairs Academic Initiatives and put in place a one-quarter mentorship program for sophomores. The New Heights Grad-Undergrad Mentoring Program took 57 sophomores of color to "new heights"--primarily first generation Chicano/Latino students and Black students--allowing them to work in small groups with graduate students from similar backgrounds to explore the many opportunities available to help them succeed at a research university and reach their educational goals. This brief report presents survey trends and undergraduate student comments from a post-program questionnaire aimed at evaluating the quality of the experience.

**PROGRAM**

Six first generation Latina/o graduate students in the Education department served as mentors to 57 undergraduates from various disciplines (Chicano Studies, Humanities, Global Studies, Anthropology, Psychology, Sociology, and STEM-related fields). All undergraduates were required to sign up for independent studies/research course credits. Each graduate student was assigned to work with 10 mentees in small groups of 4 to 5 students.

During the quarter, the undergraduates alternated between attending panel sessions or small group meetings every other week. The graduate students met at least twice with their mentees individually. The undergraduates worked with their mentors on assignments such as how to find research opportunities, and how to craft an email message to faculty expressing interest in their research. Other assignments included attending workshops at the Career Center and learning how to create a resume.

**Panel Session Themes**

| Grad student panel | Graduate School: How did I get here, how I am surviving, and where am I going. |
| Faculty panel     | What makes research amazing: Faculty tales of undergraduate student involvement |
| Faculty panel     | Communicating with faculty: Not as hard as you might think |
| Peer representatives | You don’t have to do it alone: Student support services |
QUESTIONNAIRE

The undergraduate students were asked to respond to three questions about the impact of the program on their confidence and four questions about the quality/usefulness of different facets of the program. The questions were:

1. Did the program increase your confidence that you can “x”....
   Scale (1 = not at all; 2 = somewhat; 3 = a lot; 4 = very much)

2. How would you rate the quality or usefulness of “x”....
   Scale (1 = disappointing; 2 = so-so; 3 = satisfying; 4 = exceeded my expectations)

Correlational analyses showed that the ratings to these questions were associated with one another.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did the program increase your confidence that you can</th>
<th>Succeed academically</th>
<th>Interact with faculty</th>
<th>Graduate in 4 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of mentoring relationship</td>
<td>.34*</td>
<td>.34*</td>
<td>.53**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of small group meetings</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.49**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usefulness of assignments</td>
<td>.31†</td>
<td>.38*</td>
<td>.37*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usefulness of panel sessions</td>
<td>.44**</td>
<td>.39*</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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†p = .06; *p < .05; **p < .01

- Students who reported that the program helped increase their confidence to **succeed academically** also reported having a **high quality mentoring relationship** and that the **usefulness of the assignments and panel sessions was high**.

- The **same pattern of correlations** was found for confidence to **interact with faculty**.

- Students who reported that the program helped increase their confidence that they could **graduate in four years** also reported having a **high quality mentoring relationship** and that the **quality of the small group meetings and usefulness of panel sessions was high**.
Faculty-student Interaction

- Almost all of the students (95%) reported that they communicated with faculty through email during the quarter.

- A large proportion interacted with faculty during class (88%).

Faculty-student Research Involvement

- About 48% percent of the students found research opportunities during the quarter and 58% signed up to do research with faculty in the future.

- Students who reported that they had signed up for research with faculty in the future reported having a better quality relationship with their mentors compared to students who did not sign up to do research (p < .05).

Use of Student Support Services

The students also reported more interest in taking advantage of student support services.

- Almost all of the students (95%) reported that intended go to the Career Services Center in the future.

- About 85% reported that they intended to seek Student Mental Health Coordination Services in the future.

- About 88% reported that they intended to go to CAPS (Counseling and Psychological Services) in the future.

STUDENT COMMENTS

How would you describe the quality of your relationship with your mentor?

“I was able to reach out to my mentor and he would get back to me within minutes. I really enjoyed having him as a mentor because he really wanted us to believe that graduate school was possible and ensured that we each were able to speak our mind at the group meetings. All my questions were answered.”
“Overall, my mentor was great and definitely exceeded my expectations. He was always available to meet with me if I had any questions. He was able to look over a resume before turning it in. He helped me construct an email to send that involved my interest in applying to a research position.”

“She was a good mentor! I just wish I would have gotten closer with the other girls in my group but that’s okay! I learned important skills from her!”

“My mentor was super available when I asked her to meet and was a great resource for learning new information.”

**How can we improve relationship building with mentors?**

“Maybe have more one-on-ones. That helped me feel as if I mattered because my mentor got to know me better.”

“I think meeting weekly and not bi-weekly would help.”

“I think having dinners with mentors would be nice. I’m looking forward to continuing my relationship with my mentor.”

“Maybe having mentors meet with us outside of school settings? I feel like having a good relationship with a mentor is also about being able to talk them about anything not just school related topics!”

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**How would you describe the usefulness of the panel workshops?**

“I really enjoyed the panels. I think they were very informative and I enjoyed hearing what they had to say.”

“The faculty ones were great the rest not so much.”

“I loved faculty being interested in talking to us.”

“The panels were a really good resource of information and networking!”

**How could we improve the panel sessions?**

“More group activities during the panel discussions would help.”
“Perhaps do ice breakers during panels to get people out of their comfort zone.”
“Include more Humanities faculty”
“include more STEM faculty”

How would you describe the quality of the small groups?

“I enjoyed the small groups because being in a large university, you don’t get to be in that kind of setting often. And it was nice to meet other people who come from a similar background as you as they are able to relate a lot more to your experiences.”

“It was helpful to listen to my peers’ points of views and experiences!”

“The small group meetings were great. I liked the way we got to interact as mentees.”

How can we improve the small group meeting?

“I like the small group meetings because you are able to ask questions with ease. I maybe suggest keeping the groups small to ensure that every student is heard.”

“Not much to improve besides finding a way to have small groups communicate with one another or getting the groups to work cooperatively for a project.”

“Having more time with them or having more individual things to do rather than in groups or if groups doing little fun things rather than just the group meetings.”

How would you describe the usefulness of the assignments?

“The resume workshop was very helpful. I learned some tips on how to write one so that in the future, I am able to use those tips to land me a position.”
“I looked into things I would not probably have until graduation if I hadn't had them as assignments.”

“The assignments were cool for I got to reflect on myself and what I had just learned. The most useful to me was writing an e-mail to faculty! That got me to go out of my comfort zone and take a chance.”

How can we improve the assignments?

“Make some assignment that involve working with each other or going to events together.”

“I enjoyed the assignment of looking for graduate school programs, but the problem was that I had no guidance on how to start the search. I think just give the students a bit more information on how to do that because some of us do not know what we want to do yet. So maybe, start with the career services activity first and then begin looking for programs afterward.”

“I feel like making students go to more workshops and write reflections on it would be helpful for that way it forces them to go and seek help.”

FINAL THOUGHTS

Our data trends and student comments show that an overwhelming majority of the students benefitted from the experience. They reported increased confidence that they could succeed in the UCSB environment, both academically and socially. These findings were linked to different facets of the program including the quality of their mentoring relationship which was associated with students’ signing up to participate on faculty research in the future. A great majority of the students reported intentions to seek career services and mental health services in the future. These trends provide supportive evidence of the value of ethnic-minority graduate-undergraduate student mentoring programs in encouraging students to gain research experience, reach out to faculty, and look out for their psychological well-being
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