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College level mentoring for underrepresented populations: Enhancing the transition into the corporate world

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Abstract

This research paper examines existing mentoring services at a regional southeastern university with major emphasis on mentoring services mainly available to underrepresented populations at the institution. The investigation aims to define the importance of and the need for such programs and the impact the absence of said programs might have on the university population with emphasis on the underrepresented. For the purpose of this research, mentoring is considered in terms of employment preparation and transition into the corporate world. Mentoring services awareness and employment preparedness from the student perspectives are surveyed.

Keywords: Mentoring, Underrepresented population, Employment preparedness

College level mentoring for underrepresented students: Enhancing the transition into the corporate world

Mentoring is defined as a developmentally-oriented relationship between a younger or less experienced individual (the protégé) and an older or more experienced individual (the mentor) (Jacobi, 1991; Kram, 1985; Rhodes, 2005). The impact and benefits of a successful mentoring program are well known and recognized worldwide. It is also said to be a unique, idiosyncratic relationship marked by an emotional bond between mentor and protégé, where the mentor offers guidance and new learning opportunities to the protégé (DuBois & Karcher, 2005; Eby, Rhodes, & Allen, 2007).

Day by day, the world is becoming more diverse with people migrating to various countries from all parts of the world. With this advancement, the world is gradually and continually striving for equality in all areas. Equality including but not limited to race, gender and income. One of the main and important factors to reach this equality is the availability of equal resources from which everyone may benefit. The type of learning that occurs in a mentoring relationship varies. In academic settings, it may include hands-on learning in a scientific laboratory, and in the workplace, it may involve learning how to network to advance one's career.

Mentoring relationships have always been encouraged and a review of current literature concerning the effects, usefulness and impact of mentoring further emphasizes the possible successes of such a program on a college or university campus. According to "THE BLACKWELL HANDBOOK OF MENTORING: A MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVE APPROACH", interest in mentoring to foster individual growth and development continues to flourish among researchers, educators, practitioners, policymakers and the public at large.

Majority of mentoring research has focused on three different focal points: mentoring of youths, student-faculty mentoring relationships and mentoring within the workplace (Eby, Rhodes, Allen, 2007). Mentoring is also discussed as a means to help reduce school dropout rates, increase academic achievement, promote self-identity and positive self-image, reduce risk behaviors and facilitate career development (Dubois, Halloway, Valenine & Cooper, 2002; Jacobi, 1991; Kram, 1985; Levinston et al., 1978). Other streams of research also support the important role that relationships with non-familial adults can have on individuals, especially college students (Eby, Rhodes, Allen, 2007). Also, according to a journal on the case for a conceptual base for minority mentoring programs, in recent years, mentoring services have been implemented at various colleges and universities to support and encourage individuals of minority or underrepresented groups to enter and achieve success within higher education. An article on the impact of mentoring for minority graduate students also finds that mentoring relationships provide critical personal and professional development opportunities throughout one's career. These relationships are especially important for racial minorities who often lack access to informal networks and information that is required to be successful in academic and professional environments in which they are under‐represented (Thomas, Willis & Davis, 2007).

The Current Study

Currently at East Tennessee State University (ETSU), there are some career resources available to all students. However, the presence of mentoring programs geared towards the underrepresented population are believed to help fill a gap in the advancement of underrepresented graduates to desired employment positions. Such programs can help students

become more prepared to succeed in work situations and employment environments after graduation.

The first stage of the current research investigated existing career services for underrepresented students on campus. The second stage of the research examined workplace preparedness as perceived by the students to determine the need for certain mentoring services. Overall, this research investigated whether underrepresented students are aware of, and are making use of, resources already available.

Part 1 – Benchmarking report

Methods

Population, Participants and Procedure

Preliminary data was gathered during the summer of 2016 through phone calls, in-person interviews, and email inquiries of seven academic colleges of ETSU. Specifically, academic colleges contacted include: College of Nursing, Quillen College of Medicine, Clemmer College of Education, College of Business and Technology, College of Arts and sciences, College of Public Health and College of Pharmacy. In addition, information was also gathered from the Honors College and the Multicultural center as well. Contacts in each college were asked if any mentoring programs exist in their college, how long they have been in existence, the criteria for selection, the challenges faced, and the successes and weaknesses of the programs.

Results

College of Nursing

Within the College of Nursing, it was discovered that a structured peer-peer mentoring program exists for second degree accelerated students. This program is set up in a way that once admitted, new students are paired with older students – students two semesters ahead of them. These older

students then serve as mentors to the newer students for the duration of their study in the college. This program was founded approximately 21 years ago, was discontinued, and then re-implemented in the summer of 2015.

Currently, a total of four faculty members are a part of the program. The main criteria for participation include admission into the College of Nursing and good standing with the University (as determined by the college). Both mentors and mentees then sign a contract and are required to check in with one another at least once every two weeks. The strengths of this program are yet to be measured as it was only recently re-implemented in the summer of 2015. (See Table 1)

College of Pharmacy

Similarly, the College of Pharmacy also has a program in which every student gets assigned a mentor as soon as they are admitted. However, this program makes use of faculty mentors rather than peer mentors. These mentors are assigned to help academically as well as help with transition into the college. The program has been in place for 11 years and once mentors are assigned, the mentoring relationship lasts for the duration of the student's time at the college. However, students can change mentors at any point in time if they wish to do so. (See Table 1)

College of Medicine

With regards to the College of Medicine, the main mentoring program that exists is in form of a program known as Medical Horizons, which is mainly within the Department of Surgery. Participants are assigned various physicians who will be responsible for students' experience in the hospital or clinic setting. The eligibility requirements are a bit relaxed as it is mainly for individuals interested in that field. The requirements include: a minimum age of 18,

an interest in medicine, open availability and, various immunizations and insurance coverage. The program has easily had a lot of success because it helps provide clarity and solidification for a prospective student's desire to go into the field of healthcare and it also provides insight into the healthcare community at ETSU and Mountain States Health Alliance (MSHA). (See Table 1)

College of Education

Furthermore, through the College of Education, Department of Counseling, information was obtained about the mentoring relationships that exist mainly through the Ki Sigma Iota society and the Black Counselors Organization. Research was primarily focused on the Black Counselors Organization. This organization was established in 2015 by five African American students within the department with the primary goal of modifying the culture of ETSU with regards to diversity. The founders found that while there is a lot of emphasis on diversity at ETSU, it seems like the different cultures still have a hard time mixing together. People of the same ethnicity still find it more convenient to stick together with others of the same ethnicity while on campus, hence you often find groups in common areas mainly consisting of individuals of the same ethnicity. The organization aims to provide a safe place for students to share their views as to why this is and help bridge the gap in such situations. The organization also visits other undergraduate campuses in the area to recruit more African American students to enroll in ETSU's programs in counseling. Since the birth of this program, it has served as an organization that also provides mentoring relationships for African American students on campus; however, the organization is open to everyone with an interest in counseling or an interest in fostering the diversity at ETSU.

(See Table1)

College of Business and Technology

College of Business and Technology has a program known as the CBAT career services. Through this services, students have access to resources that help with resume edits, career fairs that brings various employers to campus, information about job opportunities that might be available to students and general advice on interview processes.

College of Arts and Sciences, College of Public Health, and Honors College

The last colleges of interest are the College of Arts and Sciences, the College of Public Health and the Honors College. All three of these colleges have similar mentoring programs in that the mentoring relationships that exist are in the form of advisement for students. At the Honors College, students are required to present a thesis prior to graduation therefore the students work hand in hand with a faculty member who serves as a mentor to help with the progress of the thesis. At the College of Public Health and College of Arts and Sciences, advising is conducted through student services, with the focus being geared toward coursework. However, all three programs do not exactly fit into the "mentoring program" category as defined by this research. (See Table 1)

Multicultural Center

Finally, there is a mentoring program that exists through the multicultural center at ETSU. This mentoring program was established in 2014 and is geared towards underrepresented students, minority, low income students and the LGBT community on campus. It is a peer-peer mentoring program in which upper classmen are paired with freshmen. Mentors and mentees are required to meet at least five times over the course of the semester. There is a training requirement that must be satisfied to be a mentor and there are also interest meetings set up for

prospective mentees. Mentors are also required to turn in reports every month once assigned. Criteria for being a mentor includes a GPA above 3.00 and an interest in being mentored. At the end of the year, there is an event to celebrate the accomplishments of the year and to receive feedback from both mentors and mentees. Currently, the program coordinators are considering alumni mentoring. This would be a program to create an avenue for the mentors to be mentored as well. However, nothing has been put in place yet concerning this. (See Table 1)

Discussion

In all colleges, some form of mentoring assistance (whether formal or informal) exists, but there is not a program which is specifically focused toward underrepresented populations to assist in transition into the workplace.

Furthermore I was unable to gather data on any known mentoring service within the College of Clinical and Rehabilitative Health Sciences. In summary, the College of Nursing, College of Pharmacy, College of Medicine and Clemmer College of Education all have some sort of structured mentoring program within the colleges while the College of Business and Technology, College of Arts and Sciences and College of Public Health do not.

After establishing a benchmark, the next stage of this research was to gather further information that presents data from the student's perspectives.

Rationale for selecting survey population

The next phase of this research aimed to determine whether there is still a need for a mentoring program specifically for the underrepresented population despite the existence of some current career services. Hence, the survey was limited to students in the College of Business and Technology. This was decided upon based on the fact that the college has an

established career counseling service, however there is no established mentoring program specifically for underrepresented populations.

Part 2 – Survey of students

Methods

Population and Procedure

This research made use of a convenience sample from the general ETSU population with a target population of students within the College of Business and Technology (CBAT) given the findings and rationale from the benchmarking study. Data was gathered via qualitative methods using structured surveys. After obtaining the IRB exempt status approval for research on human subjects, Business professors were approached to obtain permission to conduct the survey in their classrooms. Students in all classes involved were informed of the study during week 11 of a 15-week semester and were told that participation in the study was in no way mandatory, has no associated risks and, that their confidentiality would remain protected.

Participants

Study participants were undergraduate students enrolled in sections of junior-level business classes at East Tennessee State University. Participants ranged in age from 20 to 39, with the majority of participants being between ages 20-24. A reported 65% of survey participants were male (35% were female) and 100% were undergraduate students. With regards to population status, roughly 28% reported that they belong to an underrepresented population and 72% reported otherwise. Also, roughly 57% reported that they were employed, and the remaining 43% were unemployed. (See demographics data in Table 2)

Survey

Students responded to a paper survey (the Survey, henceforth) consisting of 18 questions administered in their prospective classrooms. (See the entire Survey in Appendix)

Data Preparation and Analysis Plan

All Survey responses were numerically recoded to make quantitative analyses possible. Survey item #13 assessing the awareness of mentoring services – as perceived by the students – was recoded into new dichotomous variables such that students who responded "Yes" to the question about mentoring services for the underrepresented received a '1' coding for that question and students that responded "No" received a '2' coding. Also, survey item #11 that deals with a student's perception of his/her population status, (Under-represented or Well-represented population status) was assessed. Therefore, a second new dichotomous variable "Underrepresented?" was created where the response "Yes" received a '1' coding and a "No" response received a '2' coding. The same coding pattern was employed with regards to survey items #6, #14, #16 with a "1" coding for "Yes" or "Employed", a "2" coding for "No" or "Unemployed" and "3" for "N/A". Lastly, for analysis purposes, the 28% that reported belonging to an underrepresented population was separately explored and converted into a new 100% category in order to successfully cross tabulate their responses across survey items #6, #7, #13, #14, #16 to come up with correlations. (See Tables 3,4,5,6 and 7)

Results

All 4 survey items were cross tabulated to determine the correlations. With the new variable set, 44% of the underrepresented population reported that they were employed. Of the 44% that were currently employed, 39% reported that they felt well-prepared for the work position they

currently held and about 5% reported otherwise. Also, only about 6% of the 44% did reported

ETSU as their employment source. However, 56% of the total underrepresented population

reported that they felt adequately exposed to work opportunities while at ETSU and 44%

reported otherwise. Lastly, only 33% reported their awareness of a mentoring program for

underrepresented students at ETSU. (See Tables 3,4,5,6 and 7)

Discussion

Based on survey responses and the benchmarking report data gathered during the course

of this research, research shows that there is a lack of adequate mentoring resources for

underrepresented populations at ETSU. However, survey results also demonstrate that a majority

of the ETSU population believe they have been adequately exposed to various work

opportunities during their undergraduate education at ETSU. Furthermore, the majority of the

ETSU underrepresented population that are employed believe they have been adequately

prepared for the current employment position they hold. The survey results also demonstrate that

of the 28% of the survey population that reported that they were of an underrepresented

population, a majority of the underrepresented populations that are employed did not obtain the

employment through ETSU sources. This might be the area in which a new mentoring program

might prove useful.

Limitations of this study

This study made use of a convenience sample and not a random sample of ETSU as a whole. Furthermore, the sample population was restricted to individuals within the College of Business and Technology. Hence, the results presented might not provide an accurate depiction pertaining to the overall ETSU population.

Conclusion and future study

In order to fully determine the need for a new program with regards to the College of Business, a new study should be conducted to determine the level of underrepresented student's involvement with the current career services that exist. Once this is established and analyzed, the need for a new program can be explored and the results from both studies can be incorporated in the design of the new mentoring program for underrepresented students within the College of Business and Technology. The new program could provide an avenue for ETSU underrepresented graduates to be provided with employment sources that relate to their field and would be matched appropriately through mentoring.

Appendix

Survey Questions

1. What is your status at ETSU?
    o   current student
    o   past student
    o   current staff
    o   current faculty

2. With which ETSU department are you associated?
    _____

3. What is your age range?
    o   20-24
    o   25-29
    o   30-34
    o   35 and over

4. Kindly indicate your Sex:
    o   Male
    o   Female

5. What is your Ethnicity/Race? _____

6. Are you currently employed?
    o   Yes
    o   No

7. If employed, how did you hear about your current work position?
    o   Through ETSU
    o   Other
    o   Not currently employed

8. If employed, how would you describe your current work position?
    o   "White Collar"
    o   "Blue Collar"
    o   Not currently employed

Note: The following two (2) questions pertain only to past ETSU students.

9. For past students, what year did you graduate from ETSU? _____

10. For past students, how many years did you study at ETSU as an undergraduate?
_____

Note: The following questions pertain to both current and past ETSU students.

11. Would you describe yourself as a member of an underrepresented population at ETSU?
    o Yes
    o No

12. Are/Were you aware of any career/mentoring services available to you during your time at ETSU?

    o Yes
    o No

13. Are/Were you aware of a career/mentoring program specifically available to underrepresented populations during your time at ETSU?

    o Yes
    o No

14. While at ETSU, do you believe you have been exposed to various opportunities that increased your awareness about work positions that might be a good fit for you after graduation?
    o Yes
    o No

15. How would you describe the level of diversity at the organization for which you currently work?

16. Do you feel like you were well-prepared for the employment position you currently hold?
    o Yes
    o No

17. If you felt well-prepared for your current position, please explain how you gained said preparation.

18. If you do not feel you were well-prepared for your current position, how do you think you may have benefited from the existence of a mentoring program specifically geared at preparing students for the workplace?

Table 1

Benchmarking report Table Analysis

Colleges	Department	Faculty/student Mentoring	Program name	Criteria for Mentees	Brochure/Procedural guidelines
College of Nursing	All	Peer Mentoring	Mentoring for second degree accelerated students	Admission into the college of Nursing	No
Quillen college of Medicine	Surgery	Professional Mentoring	Medical Horizons	At least 18 years of age, Interest in Medicine, Admission into the surgery department, open availability	Website
Clemmer college of Education	All	Peer Mentoring	Black Counselors Organization Mentoring	Open to Everyone	No
College of Arts and Sciences	All	Some Mentoring	Advising	Admission to the college	No
College of Public Health	All	Some Mentoring	Student Advisors	Admission to the college	No
College of Business and Technology	All	Career Services	CBAT career services	Open to everyone	No
College of Pharmacy	All	Faculty Mentoring	Faculty Advisors	Admission to the college	No
Multicultural Affairs	All	Peer Mentoring	Best Mentoring Program	Min 3.00gpa, interest in Mentoring, Sophomore, Junior or Senior Standing	Website

Table 2
Demographic Data

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Sex	Male	42	64.6	64.6	64.6
	Female	23	35.4	35.4	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	
Underrepresented	Yes	18	27.7	27.7	27.7
Population?	No	47	72.3	72.3	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.00	
Employment	Employed	37	56.9	56.9	56.9
Status	Unemployed	28	43.1	43.1	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	
Job Description	White Collar	20	30.8	30.8	30.8
	Blue Collar	17	26.2	26.2	56.9
	N/A	28	43.1	43.1	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Table 3

Cross Tabulation of Population Status and Employment Status

			Employment Status		Total
			1	2	
Underrepresented Population?	Yes	Count	8	10	18
		% within Underrepresented Population?	44.4%	55.6%	100.0%
		% within Employment Status	21.6%	35.7%	27.7%
		% of Total	12.3%	15.4%	27.7%
	No	Count	29	18	47
		% within Underrepresented Population?	61.7%	38.3%	100.0%
		% within Employment Status	78.4%	64.3%	72.3%
		% of Total	44.6%	27.7%	72.3%
Total		Count	37	28	65
		% within Underrepresented Population?	56.9%	43.1%	100.0%
		% within Employment Status	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	56.9%	43.1%	100.0%

Table 4

Cross Tabulation of Population Status and Employment Preparedness

			Employment Preparedness			Total
			1	2	3	
Underrepresented Population?	Yes	Count	7	1	10	18
		% within Underrepresented Population?	38.9%	5.6%	55.6%	100.0%
		% within Employment Preparedness	20.0%	25.0%	38.5%	27.7%
		% of Total	10.8%	1.5%	15.4%	27.7%
	No	Count	28	3	16	47
		% within Underrepresented Population?	59.6%	6.4%	34.0%	100.0%
		% within Employment Preparedness	80.0%	75.0%	61.5%	72.3%
		% of Total	43.1%	4.6%	24.6%	72.3%
Total		Count	35	4	26	65
		% within Underrepresented Population?	53.8%	6.2%	40.0%	100.0%
		% within Employment Preparedness	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	53.8%	6.2%	40.0%	100.0%

Table 5

Cross Tabulation of Population Status and Work Opportunities Exposure

			Work Opportunities Exposure			Total
			1	2	3	
Underrepresented Population?	Yes	Count	10	8	0	18
		% within Underrepresented Population?	55.6%	44.4%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within Work Opportunities exposure	23.3%	42.1%	0.0%	27.7%
		% of Total	15.4%	12.3%	0.0%	27.7%
	No	Count	33	11	3	47
		% within Underrepresented Population?	70.2%	23.4%	6.4%	100.0%
		% within Work Opportunities exposure	76.7%	57.9%	100.0%	72.3%
		% of Total	50.8%	16.9%	4.6%	72.3%
Total		Count	43	19	3	65
		% within Underrepresented Population?	66.2%	29.2%	4.6%	100.0%
		% within Work Opportunities exposure	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	66.2%	29.2%	4.6%	100.0%

Table 6

Cross Tabulation of Population Status and Mentoring Services Awareness

			Underrepresented Mentoring		Total
			1	2	
Underrepresented Population?	Yes	Count	6	12	18
		% within Underrepresented Population?	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
		% within Mentoring Services for the Underrepresented	42.9%	23.5%	27.7%
		% of Total	9.2%	18.5%	27.7%
	No	Count	8	39	47
		% within Underrepresented Population?	17.0%	83.0%	100.0%
		% within Mentoring Services for the Underrepresented	57.1%	76.5%	72.3%
		% of Total	12.3%	60.0%	72.3%
Total		Count	14	51	65
		% within Underrepresented Population?	21.5%	78.5%	100.0%
		% within Mentoring Services for the Underrepresented	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	21.5%	78.5%	100.0%

Table 7

Cross Tabulation of Population Status and Employment Sources

			Employment Sources			Total
			1	2	3	
Underrepresented Population?	Yes	Count	1	7	10	18
		% within Underrepresented Population?	5.6%	38.9%	55.6%	100.0%
		% within Employment Sources	20.0%	21.9%	35.7%	27.7%
		% of Total	1.5%	10.8%	15.4%	27.7%
	No	Count	4	25	18	47
		% within Underrepresented Population?	8.5%	53.2%	38.3%	100.0%
		% within Employment Sources	80.0%	78.1%	64.3%	72.3%
		% of Total	6.2%	38.5%	27.7%	72.3%
Total		Count	5	32	28	65
		% within Underrepresented Population?	7.7%	49.2%	43.1%	100.0%
		% within Employment Sources	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	7.7%	49.2%	43.1%	100.0%

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