

Learning from the Experiences of Women of Color in MentorNet's One-on-One Program

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CEOSE Mini-Symposium on
Women of Color in STEM
October 27-28, 2009
Washington, D.C.

MentorNet Experiences

1. Findings: Experiences of women of color participating in MentorNet's One-on-One Program
2. Implications
3. Recommendations
4. Discussion

% Students of Color Participating in MentorNet's One-on-One Program, '98-'03

Academic Year	'98	'99	'00	'01	'02	'03
Black	4	8	7	7	9	12
Asian	31	29	25	24	23	23
Latina/ Hispanic	2	3	3	4	4	5
Native American	1	1	1	1	1	1

Findings from 2001-02 MentorNet One-on-One Program Evaluation

- Higher proportions of student-protégés who are Black (76%) and Hispanic (79%) were satisfied overall with their program experience, compared with those who are Asian/Asian American (69%) or White (72%).

Experiences of Women of Color in MentorNet's One-on-One E-Mentoring Program

- Data source: MentorNet's annual evaluation questionnaires for two consecutive years
- Statistically significant differences in the needs, experiences, and perceived benefits
- Evaluation study conducted by SJB Consulting (NY)

Student Findings: Differences in Needs

Based on responses from 286 MentorNet student-protégés who are U.S. women of color:

- Students of color want to discuss issues of race/ethnicity.
- African American students want to be matched with a mentor of the same race.

Number of Students in Same-Race vs. Cross-Race Mentoring Pairs

	Black	Asian	White	Hispanic / Latina
2001-02:				
Same race	4	12	315	2
Different race	49	61	66	29
2002-03:				
Same race	9	8	327	2
Different race	28	60	56	16

Student Findings: Differences in Benefits

- Despite few same-race matches and White mentors being less comfortable in discussing issues of race, protégé satisfaction was unrelated to having a same-race mentor.

Mentor Findings

- The most dramatic difference between mentors of color and Caucasian mentors was the increase in self-confidence reported by mentors of color.

Mentor Findings

Mentors of color were also significantly more likely to report as a result from their e-mentoring experience:

1. Improved supervisory skills
2. Better networking skills
3. Renewed commitment to their field
4. Reflection about their own careers

Implications

- Value of mentoring experiences will depend upon individual needs, and opportunities to connect with a mentor who can address those needs
- Women of color frequently seek mentors of the same race and gender, for understandable reasons
- Other additional mentors, however, can also be beneficial

“Before my mentorship experience, I had only met two African American engineering faculty members...This was very discouraging, since I aspired to become a professor. Not only did my mentor tell me about her experiences as a graduate student and faculty member, but she introduced me to other faculty members of color that can serve as a support system for me.”

– Arielle Drummond, Ph.D. student,
Carnegie Mellon University

Mentoring Benefits

“Mentoring is a means to provide the ‘cultural capital’ that people require to be successful in science but may not [otherwise] have the opportunity to accrue.”

– Maria Elena Zavala, Ph.D.

The Value of Mentoring

Value will depend upon the extent to which the protégé gets what she seeks and needs from the relationship

Understanding Mentoring

- Individualized learning relationships, varying by the needs and capabilities of both protégés and mentors
- Many possible mentoring activities – advising, role modeling, active listening, sponsorship, encouragement, criticism, friendship
- Ask: what does a particular individual need?

Recommendations

How do these findings help us to improve opportunities for women of color in STEM fields?

1. Examine assumptions
2. Recognize value of multiple mentors
3. Consider individual needs in recommending mentoring as a solution
4. Identify clear mentoring objectives for each situation

Recommendations

- Encourage articulation of needs to define mentoring objectives as clearly as possible
- Expect and seek multiple mentors:
 - “Deep” commonalities
 - Internal/external
 - Role models
- Support and enhance coaching to enable discussions of race within mentoring relationships, especially cross-race pairings

Recommendations

- Coaching discussion of race within mentoring relationships:
 - Identify research-based findings related to racial differences
 - Identify common beliefs that are not backed by research, and encourage discussion of personal *and* alternative perspectives

Discussion

- All hold some implicit biases
- All perpetuate stereotypes
- Though mandatory diversity training rarely proves effective, two-way learning through voluntary mentoring relationships may be otherwise
- Accountability at each level does make a difference

Acknowledgements

- MentorNet and its staff, many sponsors, stakeholders, and constituents (www.MentorNet.net)
- Engineering Information Foundation
- Sylvia J. Barsion, Evaluation consultant
- Stacy Blake-Beard, project advisor