

Focus Topics

Effective Student Mentoring

The University of Illinois at Springfield has traditionally relied on informal mentoring practices to help students achieve academically. The campus, however, has recently approved funding to establish its first formal mentoring program, the Minority Scholars Mentorship Program (MSMP). Scheduled to begin in the fall of 1998, MSMP will be administered by the Division of Student Affairs in collaboration with faculty and staff from several campus offices. There will be 10 undergraduate mentors and 10 undergraduate students who receive mentoring.

Goals. The ultimate goal is for the mentorship relationship to foster maximum achievement of academic, personal, and professional potential through experiential learning experiences. As the mentoring relationship develops, students will become more aware of the requirements for academic success and career preparation, and they will gain knowledge of operations and resources at UIS. In addition, students will become part of a network of other faculty and students in their discipline and other significant UIS personnel.

Criteria for Participation. Those being mentored must be minority students and must have a minimum GPA of 2.8 (4.0 scale) and must be accepted into both UIS and an academic program. Mentors must be minority students who have successfully completed at least two semesters at UIS with a GPA of at least 3.0.

Financial Award. Both the mentors and the students receiving mentoring will receive a stipend of \$1,000 (\$500 per semester) upon demonstrated successful participation in the mentorship experience and completion of academic expectations.

Participant Responsibilities. All mentors and those receiving mentoring must:

- attend training sessions, workshops, and other sponsored events;
- submit a statement of specific goals and objectives for each semester;
- attend and participate in the program's evaluation activities (i.e., focus groups, interviews, and surveys) that will be held throughout the year;
- submit an abstract of the mentorship experience; and
- maintain regular contact with program staff, faculty, and each other.

Program Evaluation. The program will evaluate these areas: 1) academic success of participants, 2) career development, 3) graduate and professional school preparation, 4) self-awareness, and 5) involvement in the UIS community. Measurement devices will include retention and graduation data, survey and interview results, focus groups, and résumés. The program will also record for review the number of students involved in academic organizations and who attend academic conferences, as well as the number of UIS activities the participants attend together.

Serving Students with Disabilities – Thinking Small

- A peer note taker program was established. The program uses students already enrolled in the class as volunteer note takers. The use of volunteers allows funding to be directed to other areas of need. (*Note: Disability Services will provide a paid note taker if a suitable volunteer is not available.*)
- The office held a disabilities awareness week during which daily email messages were sent to all campus addresses. A particularly helpful message contained a discussion of stereotyping/labeling language. The week ended with a wheelchair basketball game.
- Disability Services has become a member of the Association on Higher Education and Disability. Membership in the association has provided access to resources not previously available at UIS (e.g., mentoring programs, ListServ alternatives, text reading services) that have increased the unit's responsiveness to the community.
- Students formed a registered student organization, Delta Sigma Omicron. The mission of the club is to serve as a social, support, and advocacy group, as well as to address the needs of students within the campus community.
- When a student's service animal was killed in an auto accident last year, the campus community supported its owner in her loss by planting a tree to honor the dog's service.
- Disability Services worked with Academic Computing to set up two workstations for the visually impaired.
- In each of its computer classrooms, UIS has work areas specifically designed to accommodate people using wheelchairs.
- A web page was developed for Disability Services to provide easy access to information.

Programs Integral and Unique to the Campus Mission: Minority Leadership in Public Service Program

The Minority Leadership in Public Service Program (MLPS) advances the campus' mission by providing access to higher education for minority students who wish to pursue a program of study leading to a career in public service. In support of UIS' special emphasis on public affairs, one of the criteria for acceptance into the program is a "demonstrated interest in public service through leadership experience with extracurricular activities and/or contributions to volunteer service in nonprofit and civic organizations." Last year a requirement for participation in public service was added as a component of the program.

Meeting Students' Financial Needs. Since cost is often the largest obstacle to higher education for

minority students, program participants receive a full financial aid package. To receive the monetary award, however, students are required to apply for need-based financial assistance through the Office of Financial Assistance. The award package combines federal and state grants with institutional funds equal to the cost of attendance for a single student living on campus (i.e., tuition, fees, housing, insurance). In addition, participants receive a \$3,000 stipend each academic year for miscellaneous educational expenses such as books, transportation, and living expenses.

Meeting Students' Needs through Program Structure. Research indicates that students involved with structured, progressive programming tend to be more successful in college. With this in mind, MLPS participants are required to reside on campus, maintain full-time enrollment each semester, maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.00/4.00 or better each semester, and adhere to campus policies and procedures outlined in the catalog and student handbook. They must also attend leadership seminars twice a month that include workshops in areas such as writing, résumé preparation, conflict resolution, communication skills, leadership style, and interview techniques.

The program director has a doctorate in counseling education and is a full professor in UIS' human development counseling program. Program participants are required to meet with him twice a semester for academic and vocational counseling. They may call to schedule appointments any time for personal counseling. If a student is not achieving academically, the program director contacts the student's adviser and instructor to try to develop an approach to remedy the situation.

Graduation Rates. The MLPS program is achieving its goal of helping students earn a baccalaureate degree. There have been 87 participants since the program's inception in 1985. Data collected from transcripts indicate that, as of the spring semester of 1998, 48 of the 87 students had graduated from UIS and 12 were still enrolled.

A comparison of graduation rates of MLPS students to those of all UIS students suggests that MLPS students graduate at a higher rate than their peers. A total of 53 students were admitted to the program for the years 1985 through 1992 – the last year for which five-year graduation data were available. The aggregated five-year graduation rate for those students was 66% (35 students). For the same period, the five-year graduation rate (cumulative percentage graduated) for all UIS students varied from 43% for the cohort entering in 1991 to 51% for the cohorts entering in 1988 and 1989.

Note: The majority (typically 55-60%) of UIS students attend part time. These students take several years longer to graduate than full-time students. However, the cumulative percentage of UIS students graduating changes very little after five years, making the five-year graduation rate an appropriate basis for comparison between MLPS and all UIS students.

Preparing Participants for Careers in Public Service. Graduates of the MLPS program are choosing programs of study related to public affairs, thereby fulfilling an important second goal of the program. Of the 48 graduates during the review period, students received degrees in child, family, and community services (8); political science (5); criminal justice (2); health services administration (2); and legal studies (2). Less clearly related to public service, but useful all the same in the public sector, were degrees awarded in management (7), communication (4), accounting (4), psychology (4),

economics (2), clinical laboratory science (2), and business administration (2). Although sociology/anthropology (2) and biology (2) were among the areas of study chosen, graduates chose no other traditional arts and sciences programs.

As they progress to graduate education, participants continue to demonstrate a keen interest in public affairs. Of the three program participants who earned a master's degrees at UIS, one chose to study public administration, another chose human development counseling, and the third chose management information systems. Of six students who are still actively pursuing a master's degree at UIS, three are studying public administration.

Campus Leadership. Minority students appear to be more involved in campus affairs at UIS than would be expected for the small proportion of the student body they represent. The Minority Leadership in Public Service is believed to be partially responsible for this involvement for two reasons. First, MLPS students are recruited and selected for their demonstrated leadership experience with extracurricular activities and volunteer service. Second, MLPS students are full-time, residential students. They thus have the inclination and the time to assume leadership roles in campus affairs, and they live on campus so that they are readily available to do so. An examination of some of their contributions to elected campus governance positions confirms the original speculation.

- Nine program participants have been elected during at-large elections to the following positions in the Student Governance Association: student body president (3), vice president (2), treasurer (2), and secretary (2). In addition, eight others were elected as student senators. (These are unduplicated counts; MLPS students tend to serve in more than one position during their time at UIS.)
- One participant was elected as the student representative to the Board of Regents, and one is currently serving as the student representative to the Board of Trustees.
- Many have served as officers for campus clubs and organizations, particularly the African American Student Organization and the Organization for Latin American Students.

Community Service. MLPS participants often volunteer in the Springfield community. Examples of their activities include a mentoring program for young males through the Springfield Urban League, the HIV/AIDS Educational Outreach, Martin Luther King Unity Day March, Big Brother/Big Sister, the Springfield Project, UIS' Women's Center, and Campus Health Services.

Summary. Clearly, the Minority Leadership in Public Service Program is meeting its goal of providing access to higher education for minority students who wish to pursue a program of study leading to a career in public service. Students are consistently graduating at a higher rate than all students at UIS, and they are selecting areas of study that relate strongly to public affairs. They are also pursuing graduate degrees in public-service related fields. Further, MLPS students are developing their leadership skills through service to the campus and the Springfield community.

Since the program has passed its 10-year mark, the need for a survey of students is essential. Although staff maintain informal contact with former students, a survey would provide valuable

information in several areas, such as education at other institutions, employment, income, and career successes. The responses would also provide an opportunity for former students to provide feedback to staff about the program and to make suggestions for improvement. The program director is currently developing a survey questionnaire to gather these data.

Identifying and Serving Students with Disabilities – Follow-up Topic

Last year's statewide discussion of services for students with disabilities raised important questions for the IBHE. How are campuses developing some sense of the size and diverse needs of students with disabilities when these students are not required to identify themselves? How can campuses respond effectively to the needs of this population without a clear sense of the types of needs these students have?

At UIS, students who do not self-identify are not eligible for disability services. A problem with this approach would arise only if a large number of students with disabilities chose *not* to self-identify at registration, but requested services later. UIS is responding proactively to the possibility of such a planning challenge in three ways. First, Disability Services, a relatively new unit on campus, has been collaborating with UIUC to standardize its forms, documents, and procedures. This improvement has enhanced the office's efficiency in its service to students who *have* identified themselves and will enable it to adapt more readily to the challenges of serving students who identify themselves and request services after registration.

Second, Disability Services has worked with Lincoln Land Community College to develop a process to allow students with disabilities to transfer from LLCC to UIS with the assurance that accommodations will be in place before the beginning of the entry semester. This provides much needed information about future service needs.

Finally, UIS is taking an approach that involves educating the campus about the availability of disability services with the hope that more students will choose to self-identify early in their stay at UIS. Admissions packets now contain information about Disability Services, and professors are being urged to put a standard paragraph in their syllabi indicating that students who anticipate a need for assistance should contact them within the first week of class.