

A different kind of mentor

June 30 2011

Mentoring is a recognized tool in career development and advancement. It brings a personal element to what might otherwise be a confusing process. Mentors can provide insight into the unwritten rules and culture of the professional workplace. With the click of a mouse, a student can have access to an ementor, a career professional who can expand the student's career horizon and help navigate their collegiate experience.

An ementoring program was designed in 2002 for first-time freshmen in [animal science](#), conducted within a required freshmen orientation course at Texas A&M University-Kingsville. Alumni and professional contacts of the instructor employed in USDA agencies, industry, and organizations were recruited to serve as ementors.

According to Doreen Kinkler, a Texas A&M University professor, perceptions of careers in agriculture and natural resources are generally of production types of positions. Many students are unfamiliar with career possibilities in agriculture/natural resources outside of their immediate geographical area. Websites, career fairs, and guest speakers expose students to some of these career options.

"It's a start. But there's no mechanism to sustain a student's interest, allow for deeper exploration, or provide support in the process of career decision making," explained Kinkler, the corresponding author of the ementor study.

Many incoming college freshmen in colleges of agriculture, natural resources, and related fields enter with limited knowledge of careers

beyond traditional paths, such as farming, ranching, and food processing. However, many interesting and exciting opportunities exist that aren't specifically production related.

For this study, a variety of [mentors](#) were chosen, ranging from young professionals to more experienced individuals. Students and ementors completed online training to better understand what to expect from the program, and how to get the most from their online relationship. This program was funded in part by Pioneer Hi-Bred International, a DuPont Company; and a USDA-CSREES Hispanic-Serving Institutions Grant.

Based on pre-mentoring assessment of students, students' knowledge of careers in their discipline or major was limited. Many were reluctant to the idea of relocating to another part of the country for a job. Fewer than 50% of the students had job shadowed or worked in the career area they were pursuing as they entered college.

Students and ementors exchanged emails on average once a week for 10 weeks. Included among their email exchanges was an assigned informational interview. This provided students with greater insight into their ementor's day to day activities and career, both the enjoyable and the more challenging aspects of their job. The ementors developed relationships with the students, discussing personal matters and helping them manage their college lives.

Based on post-mentoring assessment, ementors had a beneficial impact on students' career awareness, expanding the students' views of career possibilities. The effect on students' willingness to relocate for career purposes was especially notable. Students were so satisfied with their ementor experience that the vast majority wanted to continue their relationship. In fact, some have maintained contact for as long as five years.

The ementoring experience was likewise gratifying for ementors based on post-mentoring assessment. They felt they had an impact on their student, accomplished through providing insight into not just careers but other facets of the students' lives. Nearly all ementors indicated a willingness to participate with a future student and wanted to continue their interaction with their present student beyond the formal program.

The full results from this program were published in the 2011 issue of the *Journal of Natural Resources and Life Sciences Education*.

Provided by American Society of Agronomy

Citation: A different kind of mentor (2011, June 30) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-06-kind.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.