

Study: Peer mentorship is key to achieving equity in higher education leadership

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Researchers from across the Arnold School have completed a study on the importance of peer mentorship in creating diverse leadership representation in higher education settings. They published their findings

in *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*.

"Academic leadership positions are rarely occupied by [faculty](#) from underrepresented gender and minoritized groups," says Daniela Friedman, chair of the Arnold School's Department of Health Promotion, Education, and Behavior and lead author on the paper. "Inclusive mentorship practices are necessary to equip and support administrators of diverse backgrounds and identities, yet access to mentorship opportunities is one of the inequities underlying underrepresentation in leadership."

"Previous research has identified additional barriers and challenges faced by faculty members who identify as female, members of minoritized races and ethnicities, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and [faculty members](#) with disabilities," says Brooks Yelton, research associate and co-author. "As complex political environments, [academic institutions](#) pose unequal pressure and expectations on faculty with intersectional identities."

The retention and satisfaction of underrepresented faculty is further impacted by unwelcoming environments. Effective mentoring can combat these experiences by improving faculty perceptions in areas such as role satisfaction, productivity, well-being, and decreased turnover and burnout.

While the cultures of some academic units may strive to provide mentorship opportunities for early- or mid-career-level faculty, advancement to administrative positions often reduces leaders' opportunities for mentorship. This is especially true with respect to race or other underrepresented identity-aligned mentor-mentee relationships.

Academic administrators in the Arnold School conducted a qualitative study examining access to mentorship opportunities in their shared field

(public health) and location (southeastern United States). Faced by the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with this geographic region's extreme health-related disparities, intentional strategies to ensure inclusive [public health](#) leadership are essential to ensure that research and service efforts are aligned with the communities they serve.

"Administrative mentorship ensures that academic leaders are better equipped, informed and emboldened to advance their fields and lead meaningful change," Friedman says. "Peer mentoring relationships can provide critical professional and personal support as administrators experience the push and pull of administrative obligations, research, teaching, service and work-life pressures. I am so very grateful for my peer mentors. I cannot imagine being in an academic leadership position without having their insights and perspectives and the opportunity to share experiences and ideas."

Based on the input they received from leadership participants and findings from other studies, the authors have issued a call to action for all academic administrators. It is essential that we commit to peer mentoring that embraces diversity, equity and inclusion, and that we encourage and provide opportunities for the advancement of underrepresented scientists into [leadership](#) roles.

"As we continue to strive for excellence in diversity, equity and inclusion, it is important to focus efforts in areas of recruitment of minoritized faculty, integration of coordinated programmatic efforts, and resources to address retention and promotion," says Toni Torres-McGehee, Associate Dean for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and co-author. "For example, we need to identify barriers, conduct ongoing assessment of campus climate, and provide mentorship across varying levels of a faculty member's career, etc. We also need to offer professional development and mentorship for leaders at all levels."

More information: Daniela B. Friedman et al, Value of peer mentorship for equity in higher education leadership: a school of public health focus with implications for all academic administrators, *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning* (2021). [DOI: 10.1080/13611267.2021.1986795](https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2021.1986795)

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