College Program in Exemplary Mentoring
Mentoring for Success in Research and Leadership
Graduate Learning Community

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Background and History

This began as a one-year Graduate Student Learning Community founded originally by a grant from the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies at Texas A&M University. After two successful years, the program was expanded to a two-year program was and submitted for a Sloan Foundation Program in Exemplary Mentoring (PEM), which was successful and funded the program for another three years. The program is now sustained by the College as a College PEM. The focus of the PEM is to: 1) Recruit and matriculate outstanding underrepresented minority (URM) and diversity graduate students, especially those populations at higher risk of success, 2) Establish a learning community to assure retention, successful integration into graduate school, decrease time to degree, and develop leadership and mentor/mentee skills, and 3) Provide cohort-based and targeted professional development.

What is a Learning Community?
(from http://cirtl.net/pillars_LC.html)

Learning Communities bring people together for shared learning, discovery, and the generation of knowledge. Within a learning community (LC), all participants take responsibility for achieving the learning goals. Importantly, learning communities are the *process* by which individuals come together to achieve learning goals. These learning goals can be specific to individual courses and activities, or can be those that guide an entire teaching and learning enterprise. The following four core ideas are central to the Learning Community process:

- Shared discovery and learning
- Functional connections among learners
- Connections to other related learning and life experiences
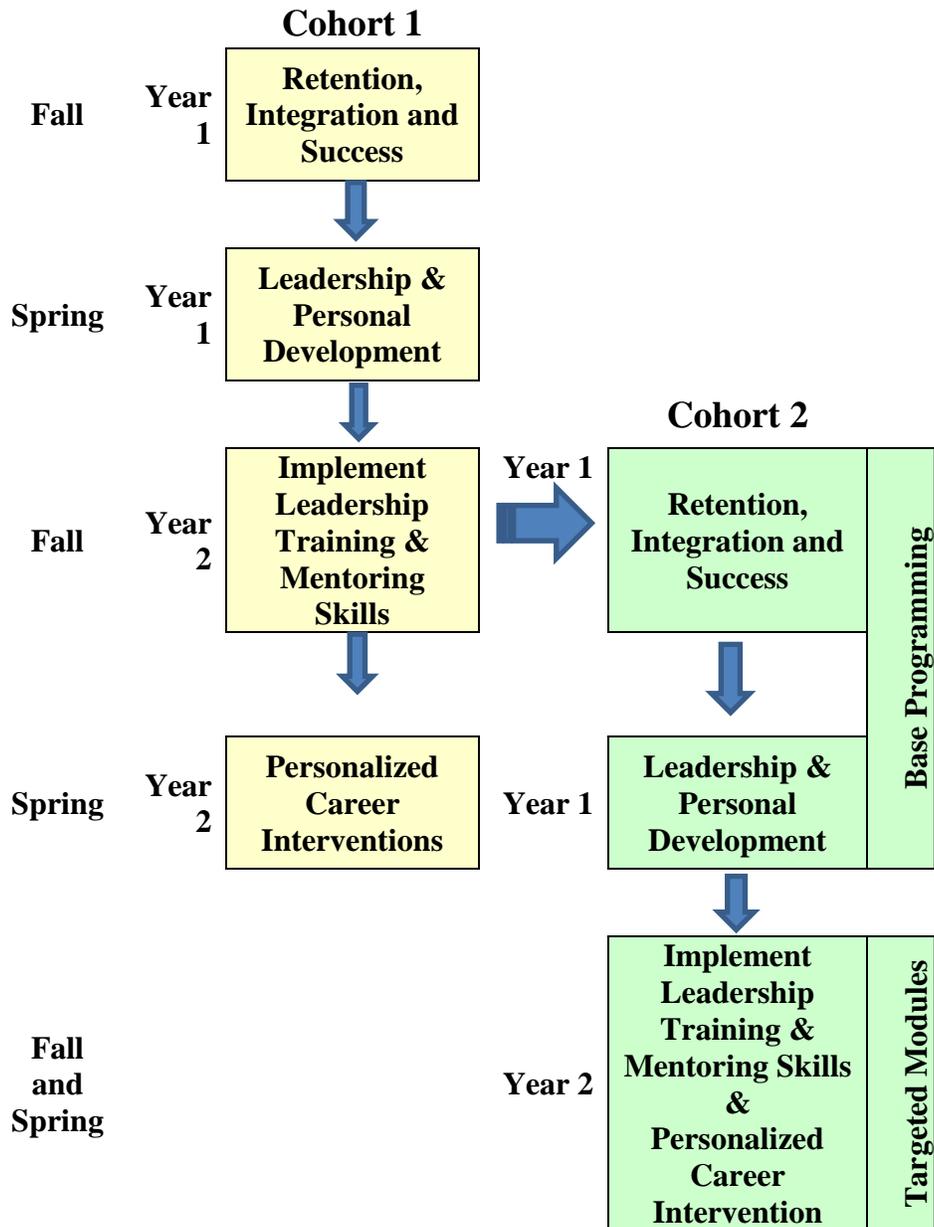- Inclusive learning environment

Learning Outcomes:

- To understand the culture of graduate school.
- To understand the "written" and "unwritten" expectations of graduate students.
- To grow as an individual by taking ownership and responsibility of one's graduate training.
- To develop an appreciation for different research approaches and the scientific method.
- To develop and appreciation of research-based and professional graduate programs.
- To develop team and leadership skills.
- To realize that graduate school is not just research and courses, but also is the developmental phase of the next step in one's career.

MODEL

College Program in Exemplary Mentoring (PEM)
Mentoring for Success in Research and Leadership Graduate Learning Community

Two Year Program

Cohort 1

Fall — Year 1
Retention, Integration and Success

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Spring — Year 1
Leadership & Personal Development

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Fall — Year 2
Implement Leadership Training & Mentoring Skills

↓

Spring — Year 2
Personalized Career Interventions

Cohort 2

Year 1 — Fall
Retention, Integration and Success

↓

Year 1 — Spring
Leadership & Personal Development

↓

Year 2 — Fall and Spring
Implement Leadership Training & Mentoring Skills & Personalized Career Intervention

Base Programming

Targeted Modules

<div align="center">**Detailed Structure of Learning Community**</div>

Programming

Programming-Year 1 - Fall

The Cohort will kick-off the fall with a social function and team forming activity. There will be monthly meetings that address three target areas.

  a. Retention and Integration into Graduate School
- Unique challenges of diverse graduate students
- Work ethic and culture of graduate school; considerations for success; the written and unwritten expectations of graduate students
- How culture and expectations differ by fields of study and type research.

  b. Academic Career Competencies
- Appreciation of different research approaches, ex. quantitative vs. qualitative, wet bench vs. field, biological vs. social science, etc.

  c. Assessment of Self
- Introduction to self-assessments and SWOT personal career analysis
- Complete the Gallup StrengthsFinder assessment and Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI).

Programming-Year 1 - Spring

The spring activities will focus on self-development.

  a. Leadership Development
- Analyze StrengthsFinder and MBTI personality type and relate to self-efficacy and a foundation for leadership development.
- Discuss outcome expectations; create personal goals using social cognitive career theory.
- Learn about effective teams and participate in a team building activity.

  b. Introduce training on effective mentoring processes; students will identify a mentor.

Programming-Year 2 - Fall

Year 2 will continue personal development and leadership building, continue development of mentor/mentee skills, and implement skills by working with the new cohort of students.

Mentor New Cohort
- Mentor/mentee relations and leadership characteristics unique to diverse populations.
- Mentor the new cohort for a "graduate student's eye view" on culture and expectations

Programming-Year 2 - Spring

The programming for the spring of year two will focus on individual personal development tailored to each student's live vision and career interest.

Personalized Career Interventions
- Focus on individual development: Each student identifies a specific area to pursue their personal development; ex. policy, teaching, international, research, POWER writing, etc.
- Targeted modules will focus on career development, ex. enter the Professorate, Federal agencies, International development, industry, etc.

Evaluation

Dr. Summer Odom will evaluate the program via formative and summative evaluation processes. Learning outcomes will be evaluated through qualitative and quantitative data both as the project is implemented and after its completion.

Student Personal Development Grants:

Students will be eligible to apply for $1,000 Personal Development grants. An application process will be developed. Examples of grants would be, but not limited to, the following.

- Travel funds to attend a scientific society/professional meeting (even if not presenting).
- Travel to visit an external faculty lab to get experience in area of thesis/dissertation research.
- Registration and/or travel to a methodology workshop, training, or short course.

Taking Ownership of your Graduate Program

To be eligible for the Personal Development grant, you will have to meet the TAMU expectations of graduate students relative to the following:

- Maintain a minimum overall GPR of 3.0.
- File degree plan by the deadline.

Fall 2017

2nd and 4th Wednesdays, 5:30-7 PM, AGLS 129 and/or AGLS 125
Food always ready by 5:00 p.m.

<table>
<tr>
<td colspan="2" align="center">Pre-Work: Community Building - Cohort Year 1 & Cohort Year 2
Challenge Works Program
TAMU College of Education and Human Development
Physical and mental challenges to foster team, trust, and camaraderie to build community.
September 9, 8 AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td colspan="2" align="center">September</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td align="center">Formal Presentation
September 13
AGLS 129</td>
<td align="center">Informal Presentation
September 27
AGLS 129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohort Year 1 –Reed / Odom
Mentoring Pre-work - Odom
Understanding the Expectations of Graduate School - Reed
Cohort Year 2 - Does not meet</td>
<td>Cohort Year 1 and 2 – Odom / Reed
Speed Mentoring / Mentor-Mentee pairing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td colspan="2" align="center">October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td align="center">Formal Presentation
October 11
AGLS 125</td>
<td align="center">Informal Presentation
October 25
AGLS 129 Cohort 1; AGLS 125 Cohort 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohort Year 1 – Reed/Odom
Assign and announce Mentor: Mentee Pairs - Odom
Faculty Expectations of Graduate Students in Different Research Cultures – wet bench, field and social science research. Invited faculty member from each research approach - Reed
Cohort Year 2 – Does not meet</td>
<td>Cohort Year 1 – Odom
Personal Development-MBTI (Personality Types)
Cohort Year 2 – Reed
Mentor/Mentee Relations – NIH Model AGLS 125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td colspan="2" align="center">November</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td align="center">Formal Presentation
November 8
AGLS 129 Cohort 1; AGLS 125 Cohort 2</td>
<td align="center">Informal Presentation
November 22
No meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohort Year 1– Dr. Hollie Leggette, ALEC
Develop Sustainable Writing Habits
Cohort Year 2 – Reed
Organize Dec meeting for Cohort Year 1 AGLS 125</td>
<td align="center">Thanksgiving Week</td>
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<tr>
<td colspan="2" align="center">December 4-7 Reading Days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td colspan="2" align="center">Reed's House,
Cohort Year 1 and 2
"The Real World According to Current Grad Students" Organized by Cohort Year 2</td>
</tr>
</table>

Mentor/Mentee meets independently

Spring 2018

Day and Time TBA, AGLS 129
Food always ready by TBA

Pre-Work: Community Building - Cohort 3 and 4 Informal Meeting of Mentors/Mentees in a social setting to re-establishing Community	
January	
• Mentees and Mentors touch base. • Informal meal at Jason's Deli.	
February	
February 14	**February 28** **129 AGLS**
Dr. Teresa Wilcox, OGAPS Ombudsperson Strategies for Engaging in Critical Dialogues	Dr. Summer Odom Strength Test
March	
March 14	**March 28** **129 AGLS**
Dr. Summer Odom Teamwork and Collaborations: Strategies for Success	Dr. David Reed and Ms. Julie Wilson Implicit Bias and Graduate School
April	
April 11 **129 AGLS**	**April 11** **129 AGLS**
Dr. Manuel Pina Grant Writing	Writing Center How to Prepare an Effective Poster/PowerPoint Presentation
May	
Social gathering to celebrate the year Café Eccel	

Mentor/Mentee meets independently

EVALUATION

An Examination of a Graduate Learning Community in a College of Agriculture
NACTA Journal, 60(4):398-404 2016

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Abstract

Graduate learning communities have the potential to assist graduate students in integrating both academically and socially into their graduate programs through curricular and extracurricular activities. At Texas A&M University, a graduate learning community was created in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences to help diverse graduate students integrate into their graduate program. This study sought to describe experiences of this first-year graduate learning community in a college of agriculture focused on retention of graduate students, successful integration into graduate school and leader- ship and research skills. Interviews were conducted with eight graduate students who completed one year of a graduate learning community to gain an understanding of what students gained from their experience. Graduate students described the learning community through two themes: most meaningful experiences and least meaningful experiences. Regarding suggestions for enhancement for future students, themes of structure/content and social interaction were found. Students reported social interactions were one of the most meaningful components of the learning community, but more social interaction was a recommendation for future learning communities.

Conclusions

Graduate students described the most meaningful activities as those activities that provided social interaction among the members and discussed more social interaction as a recommendation for future students. Social interaction appears to be an important benefit of being in the graduate learning community. It is recommended that future learning communities implement more activities designed to facilitate social interactions among the learning community members. A recommendation for informal meetings would be to offer a semi-structured environment where the instructors would give the learning community a framework that incorporated conversation starters so the students would feel comfortable opening up and getting to know each other. One example would be speed conversations (like speed dating). In this activity, students would have the opportunity to share their research topic, how graduate school is going for them, what they are most looking forward to, what they are dreading, struggles, accomplishments, etc. Whatever activity or structure chosen, the goal should be building community through informal conversations among the members of the graduate learning community.

The findings from this study indicate students found the personality assessments to be meaningful activities and ones they appreciated. However, the results of this study also suggest some learning community members did not find the personality assessments beneficial because they were repetitive. Future graduate learning communities should examine how to best

approach the implementation of a personality assessment. A needs assessment could be conducted to determine who has already completed the personality assessment prior to participating in the learning community so the learning community organizers can examine how to best approach the group.

Brower et al. (2007) posited that a sense of ownership over the community should be an outcome of a learning community. While it may appear that a loosely structured learning community allows students to take ownership of their group, the members of this learning community felt that structure was still needed to help them build community. Based on the recommendations discussed by the participants, learning community members would appreciate more structure within the formal meetings along with more accountability and follow-up to the activities they are required to complete. Learning community facilitators should implement more structure to aid in forming functional relationships and shared discovery and learning within the graduate learning community. Lastly, graduate students were not always aware of professional development opportunities such as professional meetings and conferences that they should attend. Learning community facilitators should gather more information about the graduate student's faculty mentor and assist when needed to recommend activities for participation.