

Mentee to Mentor Approach: How Drexel University can Create a Sustainable Women Leadership Program

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1. INTRODUCTION

Drexel University's College of Computing and Informatics (CCI) recently launched a Women in Computing Initiative (WiC) which requires an engaged student body and faculty in order to succeed. The primary goal of the WiC initiative is to increase female enrollment over the next five years by fifty percent [1]. This ambitious program has CCI investigating ways to support this initiative and is looking to do so in the form of a college sponsored female-centric mentorship program. Our focus as students is to develop a program that will sustain itself through community engagement and create a sense of belonging. These two components should in turn increase female enrollment and retention in undergraduate CCI degree programs.

2. PROBLEM AND MOTIVATION

As female students of CCI we are passionate about advancing the WiC initiative. Students and faculty who are presently active in the community are overloaded and have increasingly less bandwidth to assist with WiC activities. Additionally, in our experience underclassmen women take longer to become involved since they do not have a clear sense of belonging within the CCI community. These two issues have lead us to design a mentorship program that encourages and rewards participation targeted towards undergraduate women. Presently, in our current state we experience a lack of students, faculty, and staff volunteers. This prevents the goals of this initiative from coming into fruition. This program will

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help bridge the gap CCI is currently struggling with by producing more engaged students and faculty leaders. A program such as this would grow the CCI's active student and faculty leaders by getting new people engaged in the community. Through this program we would like to measure and monitor the following:

- What elements of peer mentorship develop within a given class of scholars?
- Do program participants have a higher retention rate than females not in the program?
- Do feelings of acceptance and belonging increase over the course of program enrollment?

3. BACKGROUND AND RELATED WORK

In order to create the foundation for a successful mentorship program, we examined existing mentorship programs specifically throughout Drexel University's colleges. The Pennoni Honors College has created a program called *Aspire Scholars* that serves to pair undergraduate sophomore students with mentors. The program recruits scholars pursuing a degree in any major that meet the 3.3 GPA requirement through Drexel staff and faculty nomination. As a result, ten to fifteen students are selected to be part of the program in which they attend bi-weekly meetings to discuss academic and professional goals, discuss mentorship goals, and work to develop skills as a mentee for successful

mentor relationships. Discussions among scholars and invited guests require scholars to reflect upon the meaning of their goals and why they chose those specific goals in order to better understand and clarify their goals to create not only a career path, but a life path that is inline with the scholar's vision [3].

Another program we examined was the College of Engineering's peer mentorship program. This program gives incoming undergraduate freshmen students the ability to take a special class and get paired with an upperclassmen engineering student mentor. Many mentees have transitioned to serve as a mentor because they recognize the benefits of being involved in a mentorship program. Short term benefits for the mentee include having a more informed upperclassman to answer questions about college life, both academic and social aspects. Long term benefits for both mentee and mentor include cultivated skills in written and oral communication, the ability to think critically, and increased leadership opportunities inside and outside of the classroom [2].

Therefore, in examining these programs, we believe The CCI should leverage these existing programs and utilize the available external knowledge to foster college-wide participation and effect change on a larger scale.

4. APPROACH AND UNIQUENESS

We propose creating a program that identifies female underclassmen leaders. This will serve as a feeder program for a larger mentorship program. CCI faculty and staff will nominate underclassmen they feel demonstrate leadership potential. Interested underclassmen students will also have the ability to self-nominate through an online application process.

Fifteen to twenty female scholars will then be selected after an interview process. These scholars who are selected will receive two years of WiC funding for their participation in the program. By investing time

and resources in female underclassmen you create trained mentors that can work with the next class of Scholars and help sustain the program. The WiC scholarships are a way of compensating students for their time while also rewarding them for building The CCI community.

5. Approach

Our mentorship approach is unique because this program is designed by female students for female students. CCI Scholars creates a formalized network of female students, faculty, and staff. Each aspect of the program has been designed to fulfill the needs of undergraduate women within CCI. Additionally, organizational factors strengthen our likelihood for success. The WiC initiative and the Dean's commitment to creating an inclusive environment for incoming and current female students gives our program the momentum to get off the ground.

The three main objectives from the CCI mentorship program is to retain female students, create an inclusive CCI community, and create interdisciplinary programs across the University. Table 1 outlines Key Performance Metrics (KPIs) to quantify the results of the program [4].

Table 1. Results of CCI Mentorship Program [4]

Organizational Objective	Initiative	Key Performance Metric	Target
Retain female students	WiC mentorship program	Retention rate	90% of participants
		Participant feedback	80% positive
		Confidence in Major (Previously 44%)	> 60%
Make CCI Community more inclusive		Student Involvement (Number of program applicants)	20% increase from previous interest
		Faculty Involvement	20% increase from previous interest
Create interdisciplinary programs across University		College partnerships	Extension to Sociology (CoAS)
		Office partnerships	Extension to Career Development, Study Abroad, and Living Learning Communities
		CCI co-sponsored events	20% increase

The long term vision for the CCI Scholars program is outline in Table 2. We have highlighted features of the program we hope can be included as the program continues and grows overtime. All of these additions will help attract students to the program and strengthen its overall effect. Most notably, we would like to strongly consider including students from different minorities in the program like our non-binary students and students of color.

Table 2. CCI Mentorship Program Vision

	First Iteration	Second Iteration	Third Iteration
Target Demographics	Female undergraduates	Expand to include non-binary students and students of color	Include graduate students
Program Expansion	N/A	Integration to Living Learning Community	Intensive Course Abroad for Scholars
Bi-weekly Events	Facilitated by faculty and staff	First class of mentors takes initiative with planning bi-weekly events	Changes made to event programming upon feedback
Program Benefits	Leadership, professional, and mentorship training	Leadership classes for freshman participants	Growing network of program alumni

The CCI Scholars program will be beneficial to minorities by creating a community of inclusion and diversity. We believe this model can be laid out and replicated at other Colleges or Universities and have the same lasting positive effects.

6. REFERENCES

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