CALS FACULTY PERSPECTIVES ON MENTORING UNDERREPRESENTED MINORITY STUDENTS IN RESEARCH

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“Our society can no longer afford to reserve ‘islands of innovation’ for a select group of students while others, often students traditionally underserved, receive an education more suited to the industrial age.”

McNair & Albertine (2012)
Programs aimed at increasing student success must address issues related to the diverse nature of students who are entering higher education today.

Student diversity includes multiple categories (Rendón, 2006)
Programs aimed at increasing student success must address issues related to the diverse nature of students who are entering higher education today

- At Virginia Tech, underrepresented minority (URM) students are underserved in agriculture
  - 40% of K-12 students nationally
  - 11% typically enrolled in Virginia Tech’s Colleges of Agriculture and Life Sciences and Natural Resources and the Environment
- 1862 Land Grants are predominantly white institutions
- Majority (white) faculty in CALS were often trained at similar institutions
We wanted to understand experiences of faculty members in an 1862 CALS when working with URM students in their research groups.

**Theoretical framework**
- Sociocultural learning theories (Brown et al., 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991)
- Faculty work itself as learning (Lattuca, 2002; Lattuca & Creamer, 2005)

**Approach**
- Qualitative study
- a priori table from literature
- Semi-structured interviews
- Purposeful sample
- Faculty with relevant experience for the study
- 6 participants

**Analysis**
- Category development (Corbin & Strauss, 2008)

Participants
- Faculty with relevant experience for the study
- 6 participants
Faculty did not want to ever have URM students think that they were not equal to other students in their laboratory.
Establish time and structure for one-on-one meetings with students to ensure confidence in their work and provide a space to ask questions.
Build relationships between all laboratory students.
Treat all students equally, to ensure no distinguishing differences between groups.
Few faculty are taking time to learn about the cultures of students different from theirs.

A component of cultural competency (Diller & Moule, 2005 as cited in NEA Policy Brief, 2008)
Few participating faculty were encouraging URM students to have multiple mentors.

Recommended by Schlosser and Foley (2008)
Preparation of majority faculty to mentor and support URM students at PWIs is crucial.

Mentors are likely replicating strategies they encountered during their training.

Sociocultural perspective → what faculty learned about mentoring strategies reflects the cultural context and social structures of their discipline and institutions.

Mentors may be unaware of the needs of URM students due to different lived experiences.

Climate on a PWI campus favors white majority students → mentors need to attend to the array of potential needs that URM students may have due to their unique experience of climate.
Preparation of majority faculty to work with URM students is crucial

Recommendations for continued professional education (CPE) experiences for college of agriculture faculty

1. Supporting student mentorship that engages multiple professional mentors who are able to support different aspects of URM student experiences.
2. Increasing individual appreciation for other cultures.
The Sustainability Scholars Program: Early Successes from the Pilot Year
Hannah H. Scherer, Kayla Harris, Peter Ziegler, Curtis Friedel, Donna Westfall-Rudd and Tiffany Drape
Friday, 10AM - 12PM, Poster Session 3

Cross-race Mentoring: Bridging the Gap
Kayla Harris and Hannah H. Scherer
Thursday 10:00-10:20AM, Fine Arts 133

Questions, thoughts, and ideas?


