

Creating a Mentoring Program for New Physics Graduate Students

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Outline

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- Our Goals/Motivation
- Our Student Population
- The Program Format
- The Topics of Discussion
- The Topics Which Were Not Discussed
- Conclusions
- Future Work/Improvements

Who We Are

- Idea originated in Women In Physics and Astronomy (WIPA) student group
- Presented to greater student population and asked for volunteers:
 - Alexander Scott, 3rd year, High Energy Expt
 - Brian Lang, 4rd year, High Energy Expt
 - Emily Maher, 5th year, High Energy Expt
 - Joocho Park, 6th year, Condensed Matter Expt
 - Joseph Skinner, 4th year, Biophysics Expt
 - Xiaohua Lou, 2nd year, Condensed Matter Expt

Our Goals/Motivation

- We perceived through our experience a need for more direction during the first year.
- We wanted to convey information to them which we had learned since our first year.
- We wanted to provide a resource for the first years. We wanted them to feel comfortable enough with us to ask us any questions they encounter throughout their grad school experience.
- We wanted to strengthen the community of the department
- We want to help smooth the transition from college to graduate school

Student Population

- first year students/ all students in department
- 25 students/ 121 total students
- 16% of women / 17% of women total
- 60% are american / 44% are americans total

Program Format

- Met 7 times during the academic year
- Meetings included lunch and lasted ~1.5 hours
- Each meeting had a designated topic
- Panel discussion, mentors discussed the topic and encouraged questions throughout discussion
- Each student was assigned a specific mentor according to shared characteristics (women, international students)
- Mentors met with each of their students once a semester

Topics of Discussion

- Introduction/Everyday Stuff
- Qualifying Exam*
- Research Groups (2 parts)
- Finding Summer Research*
- Oral Examination
- Evaluations

*These were the most important topics; they came up during most of the meetings

Topics We Thought Would Come up, but Never Did

- What to do for fun
- Benefits/Salary/Living Expenses
- Office Space/Computer Access/Email
- Teaching Assistant Duties*
- Courses

*There is a weekly seminar that addresses these issues.

Conclusions

- 70% participation
- Overall very positive
 - Helped see what to expect
 - Liked hearing about switching groups/everyday activities
 - More comfortable having grad student to ask questions later
- Everyone had summer work
 - 67% of students who attended meetings regularly had research appt.
 - 50% of students who did not attend had research appt.

Future Work/Improvements

- Want more social interaction with professors outside of building (picnics)
- Want more one-on-one interaction with mentors (coffee, lunch, drinks)
- Want to hear more about outside options
 - Other departments (material science, engineering)
 - Jobs outside of academics (industry)