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
  - Jooho 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 then to feel comfortable enough with us to ask us any questions they encounter throughout their graduate 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)