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Environmental Studies Peer Mentor

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COLLEGE OF THE ENVIRONMENT



Internship Title: Department Environmental Studies Peer Mentor

Student Name: Mia Lumbley

Internship Dates: 3/29/2022 - 12/12/2022

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STUDENT SIGNATURE Mia Lumbley

DATE: 3/12/2023

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Abstract

The internship that I participated in was a peer mentor program through the Department of Environmental Studies. I helped co-create the program with the chair of the department and the diversity recruiter and retention specialist. The goal of the program was to help environmental studies students feel welcomed, comfortable, and assisted with navigating the College of the Environment. My personal goals were to learn how to effectively communicate, become more involved within the College of the Environment, and be an advocate for people. The activities that I did during my internship were done in three steps. The initial step was to collaborate with students, faculty and staff to identify the needs of students. Through research and outreach, we discovered that students want to develop their academic, social, and professional identities. The second step was finding mentees, which was done by creating posters, speaking in classes, and getting the word out to students. The third and final step was developing, planning, and attending events with assigned mentees. The activities done within the internship helped to achieve the mission of making students feel seen and heard. I feel as though I successfully helped to create a program that was tailored towards the needs of the students. I became more confident in learning about my strengths and weaknesses. The people who made this program a reality were my bosses, Shalini Singh and Rebekah Paci-Green. I am grateful for my time working with them as they contributed to my academic, professional, and social development. The other people who I want to acknowledge are the professors who allowed me to speak in front of their classes and gave announcements about the program.

Introduction

The internship that I have completed was through the Department of Environmental Studies at Western Washington University. My internship supervisor was Shalini Singh, who is the diversity recruiter and retention specialist for the College of the Environment. I worked alongside Shalini and Rebekah Paci-Green, who is the chair of the Department of Environmental Studies and my faculty advisor.

I was hired by Shalini and Rebekah to help co-create a peer mentorship program that would serve environmental studies majors, pre-majors, interested students, and transfer students with the goal of helping them transition into the College of the Environment. The objective was to collaborate with students, staff, and faculty to identify potential needs through research and outreach. Initially, the goal was to work with students who are within marginalized groups; BIPOC, LGBTQI+, and those with mental and physical disabilities. Further on into the internship, we decided to focus also on students who were first-generation students, new

students, transfer students, and those who are eligible for pell-grants. The reason that we had a specific focus was to help students who were in need of the most help with navigating college.

My major is environmental studies with an emphasis in community resilience and justice. The jobs within this field require the need to have people skills, be able to communicate effectively in group settings, and be an advocate for those who need it the most. Having no experience with advocacy work caused me feel like I was in the wrong major. I wanted to work on feeling confident in my career path as my passion is creating a world that is more acceptable and just for everyone.

My goal was to learn how to help people who are from all walks of life, especially those who are most vulnerable to oppressions and discrimination. I also wanted to learn crucial life skills that would significantly benefit myself after I finished my college career. The skills that I wanted to learn was effective communication, being able to work independently, and how to immerse myself within an organization. I wanted to find an internship opportunity that had objectives that aligned with my personal goals.

Prior to this internship, I did not partake in any extracurriculars and felt disconnected to the College of the Environment. My aim was to help students feel welcomed and included within the college while also helping myself become more involved within the College of the Environment. I wanted to be able to connect with faculty and staff that I normally wouldn't communicate with as I had anxiety talking to professors. This internship required that peer mentors must work independently, which I haven't had the opportunity to do, which was an avenue that I wanted to gain skills in. The life skills that I hoped to gain from this internship was similar to the job description duties.

Internship Activities

The activities that I did during my internship as a peer mentor had a wide variety of duties. The mentors, Shalini, and Rebekah met each week to discuss our game plan for how we should proceed with developing the program. In the beginning of the program, I did public outreach to students, staff, and faculty to learn what students needed the most to help design the program. I did the outreach by speaking in environmental study classes to ask for volunteers to give insight on their current needs. The reason we did it was to get opinions from a wide range of students as we wanted to create activities that were tailored towards their needs. We discovered that students needed the most help with developing their academic, professional, and social identities. After doing public outreach, we began our search for mentees. Finding mentees consisted of speaking in classes, making posters that we put around campus, and asking professors to post Canvas announcements about our program.

After finding the mentees, we paired them with mentors who would be most fit to help them on their journey of self-discovery. We conducted activities that were both face-to-face and virtually. Our in-person activities ranged from large group outings to individual meetings. The group settings allowed them to get to know each other and build an interpersonal relationship with their peers. We did group study sessions, toured the campus to familiarize them with resources, and went to Lakewood to go kayaking. Within the individual meetings, I got to know my mentees on a more personal level to be someone that they could go to if they needed specific help with problems that they were facing.

Internship Achievements

By creating, developing, and facilitating activities that were tailored towards the needs of students, I feel as though I contributed to achieving the program's values. I put in a significant amount of effort to help my mentees develop their academic, professional, and social identities. The effort that I put in to help create this program resulted in fostering a community that felt seen and heard. I was able to connect with my mentees on both a professional and emotional level as I became someone that they could go to if they needed help or someone to talk to.

Discussion and Evaluation

The effectiveness of my work varied between winter quarter of 2022 and spring quarter of 2022. In the winter quarter, the development of the program was easier as we relied heavily on outside sourcing to gain knowledge about what our program should be tailored towards. Spring quarter was more difficult as receiving input was far easier than maintaining active engagement from mentees. Since being a mentee didn't require a contract, some stopped being part of the program due to various reasons. The main reason was that they were too busy with school work that they didn't have enough time to partake in extracurriculars. Improving the effectiveness of this internship is difficult as trying to keep mentees relies heavily on outside factors. We tried tailoring the activities more towards social events as they seemed to be more effective in having mentees show up and participate; However, final deadlines for classes, the engagement was reduced due to lack of time and energy that they could devote to activities outside of school. Possible improvements for the program could be to ask professors if they could give students extra credit for becoming a mentee and having active engagements.

I am pleased with the outcomes of the internship as I feel as though I accomplished the original goals and objectives. Being able to communicate with a wide range of students, faculty, and staff allowed me to feel more connected to the College of the Environment. The program allowed me to learn about Western's resources which helped me strengthen my own academic, professional, and social development. I learned how to work independently as I needed to complete various tasks during the week to report back during our weekly meetings. The lack of engagement from mentees actually helped with my growth as it enabled me to continue finding ways to improve and develop the program.

Acknowledgements

There are a number of people who contributed to the development of my internship that I want to thank and recognize. Shalini Singh and Rebekah Paci-Green were the backbone of the program as they provided assistance and resources to help our program flourish. Without them, we wouldn't have a peer mentor program. The other people who I want to thank are the professors who gave me the time and space to speak about the program during their class. Many of them sent announcements about the program which contributed heavily to students finding out about our program.

Appendices

There are no appendices as my internship didn't require the use of publications, data sheets, or other products. The majority of the internship was geared towards in-person discussions and meetings that weren't tracked on paper.