

A Multi-Institutional Mentoring Program for Developing Inclusive Excellence

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Introduction/Need for Innovation

There has been relatively little progress regarding the participation of underrepresented minorities (URMs) in agricultural careers (APLU, 2009). Moreover, although some single efforts have been made, large-scale institutional strategies are needed to address this topic holistically and inclusively (National Research Council, 2009). To do so, a multi-institutional mentoring project was created in 2020 (Esters & Knobloch, 2020). The MENTOR (Multi-institutional mEntoring Network for Transforming Organizational cultuRe) project is a collaborative capacity building partnership between 1862 and 1890 land-grant Universities (LGUs), in which faculty leadership teams (FLT), at each of these LGUs, develop campus-based mentoring programs. By doing this, these teams are able to provide mentoring support to university students, especially URMs in the food, agricultural, natural resources, and human (FANH) sciences disciplines. The long-term impact of the project is to help students be academically, socially, and professionally successful.

This collaborative effort can be aligned to and described using the Inclusive Excellence Change Model (IEM). The IEM is a 5-dimension model, in which diversity, equity, and inclusion components are key elements for achieving institutional excellence (Williams, Damon, Berger, Shedrick, & McClendon, 2005). The five dimensions define inclusive excellence holistically and beyond the academic perspective: (1) Systemic—colleges and universities are open systems that interact with external forces; (2) Bureaucratic—organizations exist primarily to accomplish clearly articulated and rational goals; (3) Collegial—embodies two enduring values of academia: professional autonomy and a normative compliance system; (4) Political—universities are segmented entities (e.g., departments and schools); this segmentation can lead to conflicting interests; and, (5) Symbolic—diversity and excellence have always meant different things to different people. The objective of this poster abstract was to explain how the multi-institutional mentoring project components were aligned with the IEM framework and how its components are interrelated to address excellence, diversity, equity, and inclusion in our institutions.

How It Works/Methodology/Program Phases

During the Spring semester 2020, the MENTOR project director called other 11 LGUs to participate in a multi-institutional mentoring project. After that, a core team (lead by 3 LGUs) was created to coordinate the project and evaluate progress made and outcomes achieved. To develop the project activities, it was divided in three 1-year stages: Stage 1: During the first stage (year 1), three main activities were planned. First, LGUs that were called to participate were asked to write and present mini-grant mentoring proposals focused on URM. These proposals were revised by the core team to be approved for funding (this revision followed a rubric that was aligned with the objectives of the project). After the approval, each proposal received \$15,000 for conducting the project activities. Second, during this period six mentoring webinars were conducted. Topics were related to the project objectives (e.g., inclusion, mentoring, program evaluation). Third, the mentoring project was linked to the North Central regional conference for AAAE. During this event, LGUs' proposals were presented using a 5-minute video presentations, as well as the overall project (i.e., objectives, participants, timeline). Moreover, some conference's talks were focused on mentoring issues. Stage 2: During the second year, LGUs have been

developing the mentoring activities that were included and approved in the mini-grant proposals. In addition, the core team developed monthly check-in meetings to provide feedback to LGUs to advance the goals of the multi-institutional project. Stage 3: On-going project activities and results achieved will be presented during the second year (and after finishing the project) in conferences and professional development events.

Results To Date/Implications

The grant proposal (GP), five webinars (W1 – W5), and 10 campus-based mentoring projects (LGU1 – LGU10) were analyzed using the five dimensions of the Inclusive Excellence Model (Table 1). The table lists the number of indicators that each project proposal and webinars addressed and the overall percentage that the different project collectively addressed the total indicators for each dimension. Table 1 shows to what extent the project activities are aligned with the IEM dimension indicators. The activities were most aligned with bureaucratic (79%), political (69%), and systemic (56%) dimensions. These results helped the mentoring project team determine the extent the various project activities were addressing inclusive excellence, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Table 1. Multiple dimensions of organizational behavior as relate to Inclusive Excellence

IEM dimensions	GP	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5	LGU1	LGU2	LGU3	LGU4	LGU5	LGU6	LGU7	LGU8	LGU9	LGU10	Mean %	
Systemic (7 indicators)	5	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	56
Bureaucratic (6 indicators)	2	6	6	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	79
Collegial (5 indicators)	2	1	3	3	0	0	2	3	2	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	45
Political (5 indicators)	3	4	4	4	0	0	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	69
Symbolic (4 indicators)	1	0	1	2	0	0	1	2	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	33

Future Plans/Advice to Others

During 2021, evaluation strategies (based upon the IEM framework) will be implemented by the core team and LGUs to report short-term impact and outcomes. In addition, some LGUs’ mentoring projects will be shared at the 2021 NC-AAAE conference (and other national conferences). LGUs’ projects and more information related to the multi-institutional project can be found on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCNQoal>) and the project website (<https://www.asec.purdue.edu/mentor/>). Evaluation results will provide LGUs with common language for developing mentoring and/or professional development programs. This language will allow a more effective communication to promote inclusive excellence among FLT’s, administrators, and program coordinators.

Costs/Resources Needed

FLT’s were awarded \$15,000 seed grants to develop their projects: \$10,000 in Year 1 and \$5,000 in Year 2. This work was supported by the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture, Higher Education Challenge (HEC) Grants Program Project #1017889, and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture. Moreover, for the purpose of this poster, the IEM’s dimension indicators table was used (this is a no-cost tool). A graduate student spent 10 hours to conduct this analysis using the IEM.

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