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ABSTRACT
                To increase the supply of mental health researchers from
ethnic minority groups, in 1981 the National Institute of Mental Health
initiated the Minority Access to Research Careers (MARC) program which was
renamed Career Opportunities in Research (COR). In this paper, the Program
Director of the MARC/COR Program at California State University, Long Beach,
focuses on the process of operating this program day-to-day, rather than on
the program structure. Lessons learned are summarized as follows: (1)
Students change their minds a lot or do not know what they want in the first
place; (2) Student motivation and morale waxes and wanes; (3) No single model
for mentoring exists; (4) The task of matching students with mentors is not
easy; (5) Not all mentors are created equal; (6) Program management is a
daily task; (7) Getting students into graduate schools is not always easy;
(8) Getting out of graduate school may be harder than getting in. Benefits of
the program are discussed under "The Big Payoff: What Makes It all
Worthwhile." (EMK)

Summary of Comments Presented At A Symposium at the American Psychological

Association, San Francisco, Aug. 17, 1998.)

Trials, Tribulations, and Triumphs of A COR Mentoring Program

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To increase the supply of mental health researchers from ethnic minority groups,

in 1981 the National Institute of Mental Health initiated the Minority Access to Research

Careers (MARC) Program which has since been renamed as the Career Opportunities in

Research (COR) Program. After 17 years of serving as the Program Director of the

MARC/COR Program at California State University, Long Beach, what have I learned

that may be helpful for anyone wanting to develop a similar mentoring program? Since

my colleagues who preceded me on the panel have already provided excellent overviews

of their COR programs, I will not bother to describe our curriculum and organization

since most COR program sites aim at the same goals with similar methods. I will focus

more on the process of operating a program, rather than on the program structure. What

are some of the lessons I have learned from the day to day operation of our COR

program.?

Of course, let me hasten to say that my experience may not be applicable to COR

programs at other institutions since each COR program is different in many ways,

reflecting the characteristics of the sponsoring institution, the disciplines represented,

availability of graduate programs, ethnic mix, and other factors that differ across

programs, not the least of which is the personality of the program director.

When we first began back in 1981, it all seemed so simple. The formula seemed

to be: Just select strong students, match them with mentor role models who would

provide them with good research experiences, send them all off to graduate schools, and then wait and proudly watch them get their PhD degrees. Was I ever wrong!

Lesson #1: Students change their minds a lot or never knew what they wanted in the first place.

It is unrealistic to expect 19 and 20 year old students to know what they want for the rest of their lives. It is more normal for students at this age to be searching and discovering what they want to be than to have certainty. One year I had a sophomore who had his life plan all mapped out in some detail. Within a year he had changed direction drastically. Thus, while many students will sincerely say they are interested in research, some just don't have a realistic view of what that really involves. Some will even say it, not really believing it, simply because they want to be in the program. You can expect attrition for this reason alone, no matter how academically qualified the students you select are.

Lesson #2: Student Motivation and Morale Waxes and Wanes

The enthusiasm of students just after they are accepted into COR can quickly dissipate once the work begins. It can occasionally be rekindled, only to flicker again. Students can help motivate each other. Frequent contact among peers is essential to develop an esprit de corps especially on a commuter campus such as ours. We had twice a week seminars to ensure that such contact occurred. A large lab was exclusively dedicated to the program and students had keys so they could come in at any time.

Competition among students in the program is inevitable, and it can be healthy. At the same time it is important to also promote cooperation by methods such as giving team assignments and projects. Social support and mutual aid is of utmost importance in maintaining a sense of unity and affiliation among program members.

<u>Lesson #3: No single model for mentoring exists; some of the types I noted were:</u>

a. Just Do It : A hands off approach in which you let the student develop on his/her own

b. Just watch me: Do as I do (Mentor knows best)

c. Just do as I say, not as I <u>do</u>

Surprisingly, no one model seemed best for everyone. Or, what worked well for one student did not work well for another. One learns to be tolerant, accept and recognize these differences, and take what works.

<u>Lesson #4</u> It seems ideal to match students with mentors. This task is not as easy as it sounds. What criteria do you use? interest area? personality? gender? ethnicity? There are few degrees of freedom to match on a 1: 1 basis, given that we had nine students who varied widely on each criterion, but only about 15 participating faculty and who also varied widely on factors other than ethnicity. A lot of juggling and switching of matches had to be done, and in ways that are tactful and diplomatic.

<u>Lesson #5 Not all mentors are created equal.</u> There are some incredibly effective mentors out there. However, other faculty, who are qualified as researchers, will go through the motions, but not be able or willing to devote the personal attention needed to motivate and encourage students. I actually had one faculty who was disparaging and demeaning to her protege; needless to say, I had to intervene and not use this faculty member again. There is no easy way to teach faculty how to mentor. Faculty are set in their ways and harder to change than students are.

<u>Lesson #6: Program management is a daily task</u>

It's easy for problems to develop unless you are able to monitor on a weekly, if not more frequent basis. Students can manage time poorly, get behind, or just coast along. The question is how to keep an eye on students, without really being too

conspicuous which could create its own problems. Because all students work in the same general area, and I spend lots of time visiting there, I have been able to "manage by walking around" rather than micromanage. However, it is more difficult to know what the mentors are doing or not doing for their proteges.

<u>Lesson #7 Getting Students into Graduate School is Not Always Easy</u>

Dealing with the realities of getting your students into graduate schools is a challenge. How much do you play the GRE game with prep classes, coaching, etc? It is an anxiety producing, energy sapping task that diverts students from more productive activities, but it is a necessary evil if students are to do well on it.

How do you help students to make realistic choices of schools to apply to: Schools with bigger reputations are not always better learning environments but it's human nature for most students to choose the prestige schools.

It is inevitable that some students fail to get accepted at any school or at the school they want. This can be devastating to the student, especially as other students are getting accepted. It is important that these students be given guidance and support that will enable them to survive this threat to their self-esteem, be able to reapply next year, or change career objectives.

<u>Lesson #8 Getting Out of Graduate School May Be Harder Than Getting In</u>

Based on interviews with former COR students, many students who get accepted to a competitive graduate school find themselves wondering later, do I deserve to be here? This happens to the best of students. Will they be able to survive the "rat race" of the Big Time after being in a highly nurturant environment of a COR Program? We need to prepare our students adequately for coping with the "imposter phenomenon" and other crises that they might experience after they leave COR and enter rigorous graduate

programs. We need to devote more attention to preparing our students on how to cope with graduate school life such as by developing social networks with other graduate students.

The Big Payoff...What Makes It All Worthwhile

It took a lot longer than I thought it would to get our first Ph.D. But when it did happen, all the time and effort in running a COR Program became validated, and increased our motivation and confidence in our program.

The success of the COR students is of obvious benefit to them, but in addition, their success has provided benefits for others that are no less important. For other minority students in our Department, the success of COR students serves as a message that they too might be able to do it. COR students have been among the leaders in our Department, both academically and in student leadership. For "majority" students, COR student success was also important because they recognized that students from other backgrounds can also succeed. Finally, the success of COR students sends an important message to the "doubting Thomases" among the faculty, of which unfortunately there are still many, even in this day and age.

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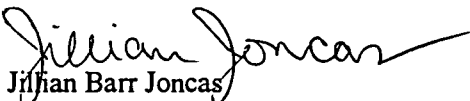
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