The Transfer Student Mentorship Program

University of California, Berkeley and Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory

Audrey G. Reeves and Amanda J. Bischoff

Program Overview

Incorporating Change

2020 Surveys
We surveyed both transfer students and mentors at the conclusion of the fall semester on the usefulness of the program and any concerns they had.

- What was your biggest concern before starting at UC Berkeley? "whether or not I would fit in"
- "making friends and succeeding academically"
- "the adjustment from community college to university given the online circumstances"
- What was the most valuable part of the program to you? "talking to the older graduate students"
- "developing a strong connection with my graduate student mentor"
- "it let me know that I am not alone when I struggle or fail, especially here at Cal"

Key Takeaways:
Students overwhelmingly appreciated one-on-one mentorship with a graduate student mentor. Most students rated the seminar on research groups as the most valuable topic for them. They appreciated the social aspect of the program and hoped there could be more informal gatherings in addition to the seminars. Mentors appreciated being able to help their mentees and the community the program provided, but hoped the program could become more formalized.

Changes:
With the transition from zoom only to in person, we had the opportunity to reformat the program to better align with what students said they wanted. We kept the main emphasis of the program on one-on-one mentorship, but changed the seminars to graduate-student-led. We introduced informal meeting opportunities by providing dinner for 30 minutes before the beginning of the seminars. Senior transfer students now assist more with program administration, including a lecturer, catering coordinator, communication coordinator, and website designer. We created a program-specific email and website to help formalize the program, and changed from one to two directors to help with program longevity. We also allowed senior transfer students to join the program to attend seminars, but without one-on-one mentorship.

2021 cohort
We saw massive interest in the TSMP in 2021. 34 junior and 9 senior transfer students in the CoC, including many chemical engineers, signed up for the program, and we hired 20 graduate student mentors. We also hired 4 senior transfer student mentors who had participated in the program during the previous year. While we had about 20 transfer students attend our initial meeting, attendance at seminars dropped off over the course of the semester. All but two junior transfer student had one-on-one meetings with their graduate student mentor.

Formal Study and Future Work

Study Design
We designed an IRB-approved, survey-based study to determine whether participation in our program helped transfer students find research positions, and increased the sense of belonging in the CoC for both transfer students and graduate student mentors in our program. Our assessment of sense of belonging included levels of agreement with statements and visual narratives, for which we drew heavily on work done by Dr. Chrissy Stachl and Prof. Anne Baranger to assess graduate students in an R1 STEM department. An example of one of the visual narratives used, which we also used in our survey, is to the left. We are surveying graduate and transfer students in the TSMP and a control transfer student group that did not participate in the program both at the beginning and end of the program. While the study is ongoing, we hope it will help us understand how our program affects the search for research positions and sense of belonging in the CoC.

Future work
Our program changed greatly between its first and second years and we anticipate this trend to continue as we a) incorporate more feedback to better serve the transfer student population and b) work on efforts to formalize and integrate the program into the college in a manner that is more conducive to longevity than its current setup.

Current longevity plans are weakened by the fact that the program is entirely graduate student-led, thus leaving it unstable when current directors graduate and transfer the entire program to new directors. Our ideal plan to improve longevity would be either to a) incorporate our program into a formalized class, or b) hire a part-time administrator responsible for booking administrative aspects of the program/serving as a pillar between these transitory states. We have been working with Jade Fostvedt to incorporate the TSMP as a facet of a potential formal class offered to incoming transfer students with much of the same themes as our program.

Acknowledgements
This program owes its existence to Daniel Brauer, who designed and created it in the summer of 2020. Anne Baranger and John Arnold have provided advice about the program structure and helped obtain funding. Brice Yates and Anne Baranger provided advice about improving and meaningfully assessing the program and designing the program-based study. Rachel Moran, Rachana Vyas, and Bridget Belcher have provided advice and support while running their industry-based transfer student mentorship program, CAMP. Jade Fostvedt has helped us formalize the program and increase its longevity. We are most grateful for the dedication of our graduate and transfer student mentors to their mentees and helping them find belonging and fulfillment in the UC Berkeley CoC.