

NATIONAL MENTORING PROGRAM IN PUBLIC HEALTH

By: Cynthia Summers, MPH

If you want one year of prosperity, grow grain. If you want ten years of prosperity, grow trees. If you want one hundred years of prosperity, grow people.

--Ancient Chinese Proverb

The National Mentoring Program in Public Health (NMPPH) is a project of the Public Health Student Caucus (PHSC), which is affiliated with the American Public Health Association (APHA). The project links public health students with public health professionals across the nation and across many disciplines, and then helps facilitate the development of effective and beneficial mentoring relationships. The Public Health Student Caucus believes that it is essential to connect students with field professionals early in their studies and careers. The resulting national network continuum can strengthen the field of public health by fostering multidisciplinary relationships among and across fields and by promoting the growth and development of strong and committed leaders. Furthermore, it can facilitate the unification of public health professionals with a wide array of skills and talents, and encourage public support and understanding of public health issues, initiatives, and visions.

The NMPPH began with a pilot program in 1998, and successfully matched 52 public health graduate students with 52 public health professionals who shared similar professional interests or fields of study. The results were very promising; 71% of respondents in an exit interview felt that they had met their personal objectives for the program upon completion. In addition, 76% of students reported that their mentors had helped them strengthen their interest in their chosen fields, and 100% of respondents said that they would like to be mentors in the future.

The program is currently preparing to begin its fourth full year. Students are matched with mentors based on: (1) general area of interest, (2) specific sub-area of interest, (3) three rank-ordered mentoring objectives, and (4) vision of an ideal match. Last year's cohort of 45 student participants came from 31 U.S. states and territories, two countries outside the United States, five races/ethnicities, and seven general areas of interest within public health. There were kick-off events at the APHA annual meetings in Chicago (1999) and in Boston (2000), and all participants received materials to guide them in building their effective mentoring relationships, and to remind them to stay in touch with their mentoring counterparts.

Mentors and Mentees at a Glance

Where did they come from?	◆	3 countries outside of the U.S.A.
	◆	31 U.S. states and territories
	◆	5 racial/ethnic groups
What are their interests and professional affiliations?	◆	17 APHA sections
	◆	Environmental and occupational health
	◆	Epidemiology
	◆	Health administration
	◆	Health education
	◆	Health policy
	◆	Maternal and child health
	◆	Medicine

An exemplary example

One of the many notable success stories has been between John Moore (mentor) at CDC in Atlanta and Andrew Dzurisin (mentee) at University of Massachusetts Boston. They were paired for the 2000-2001 year based on their similar interests in HIV/AIDS. They e-mail frequently and met face-to-face at the annual APHA meeting. Andrew has been able to rely on John for guidance, support, and insight into the public health arena, and feels he "could never get this kind of insider information without John, and I want it known that I appreciate this help in more ways than can possibly be imagined." Similarly, John has found the mentoring experience to be very rewarding thus far, even though he was a little hesitant in the beginning. "I had to question whether my own eclectic background would prove useful to someone else," he said. He remembers how fortunate he was to have good mentors while he was in graduate school, and how important this experience was to his own career. Once he began working with the members of the Public Health Student Caucus, he was moved by their dedication and enthusiasm, and decided to become involved at a more personal level.

The Public Health Student Caucus continues to aim to improve the relevance of academic training for public health students, and to increase the professional success and productivity of public health students and professionals. The objectives for the 2001-2002 year are: to expand the program to at least 100 public health students, to promote both professional and personal growth among all participants; and to continue to adapt and improve the program through ongoing evaluation and feedback from participating students, professionals, and institutions.

If you would like more information on the National Public Health Mentoring Program, please contact Cindy Summers, Program Chair, at csumme1@uic.edu, or visit the Caucus web site at www.phsc.org/mentoring.html, or go directly to registration at www.apha.org/ppp/mentoring/. Registration for the 2001-2002 NMP will be available online at the end of July 2001.

Cynthia Summers is Chair of the Mentoring Committee of the Public Health Student Caucus.

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