

Creating and Implementing an Industry Mentorship Program Within the Women in Construction Club

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The construction industry has made great strides in terms of catching the attention of and accepting more women. The industry has historically been dominated by men and, for the most part, that is still true today. But there are more and more women expressing interest in construction and construction management related career paths. California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo (Cal Poly) continued that trend when the Women in Construction club was formed. The goal is to help women realize that they can participate in the industry and then encourage them to do so. A previous senior project was done to determine if there was an interest in having a mentorship program that would connect club members to industry professionals. The responses from that research indicated that there was in fact an interest. This paper details the steps taken to create and implement a mentor-matching program between Women in Construction club members and people from industry, as well as preliminary thoughts on the program. The responses from industry outnumbered club members which is a good sign for getting the program started. Mentors were chosen about two weeks ago, so the program is still very young, but so far the feedback has been very positive.

Key Words: Mentorship, Women in Construction, Cal Poly, Construction Management, Collaboration

Introduction

A previous Cal Poly student and former Women in Construction club co-president, Savannah Gauna, gauged club and industry interest in having a mentorship program. Because the demand was there, action was taken to actually implement it. The club's mission is to empower women through collaboration, so developing a mentorship program fits right in with this; students collaborating with members of industry will help them be more comfortable and confident. This program will allow women to connect with members of the construction industry early in their college careers and into their first jobs. Students will have someone to talk to who has been where they are and who can help them navigate their way. Being in the construction industry as a woman can be intimidating so having someone to offer support and talk to can be very helpful and ease the nerves. The incoming freshman class of construction management students has a much higher percentage of women, about 25%, than has been present in the past. This increase in women is very encouraging for the club to continue to help women succeed.

Construction management majors are not the only ones who make up the club though. There are also architecture majors, architectural engineers, and civil engineers. With construction being a very collaborative industry, it makes sense to have people from a wide variety of disciplines coming together into one club. Some of the mentors also come from backgrounds other than construction management which allows for women from other disciplines to find a mentor that shares their interests.

Methodology

Mentors and students were paired up through a questionnaire. This questionnaire, attached in the Appendix, was emailed to the members of industry on the Women in Construction club distribution list with a brief description of the objective. Two separate emails were sent out to two different groups of people. One was sent to people who had indicated to Savannah that they would like to be a mentor and explained how we were moving forward with the program. The other email was sent to the entire email list with an apology for those who received it twice. Members of industry were informed of the purpose of the mentor-matching, to connect students and members of industry, and they were also told that it would be the students who would be reaching out to them. Their responses on the

questionnaire would give members some information to look through to determine who they, the students, would like to reach out to and develop a relationship with. The next step was to have a meeting with club members so that they could go over the questionnaires. To help get them started, they were given a list of all responses that listed the mentor name, the industry they work in, and their location. From this list, members then pulled specific profiles and could further screen potential mentors.

Once members had made their selection, their next step was to reach out to their industry mentor or mentors. Each club member contacted the mentor or mentors that they had chosen and introduced themselves. Once members had chosen a mentor the only requirement asked of them was to reach out and connect with them. There was no formal meeting obligation or anything like that in order to make sure everyone gets the most out of this mentorship program. The mentor and mentee can choose the best course of action for their relationship. This was to make sure that industry professionals did not feel overwhelmed with regular meetings and so that club members would not feel pressure to always have a question prepared.

Deliverables

For this project, a formal mentorship program was created between members of the construction industry and members of Cal Poly's Women in Construction club. There were 35 completed questionnaires, representing five different industry sectors as shown by Figure 1, returned from industry professionals, and nine students selected mentors. There were more industry member responses than there were club members, so a follow up email was sent to industry asking if they would be okay with the club keeping their questionnaire for use in the fall with the start of the new school year. Only one mentor requested that their profile be removed, so there is still a good amount of mentors lined up for the future. Hopefully, the number of club supporters will continue to grow, along with the number of industry members wanting to be a mentor, which will allow this program to continue.

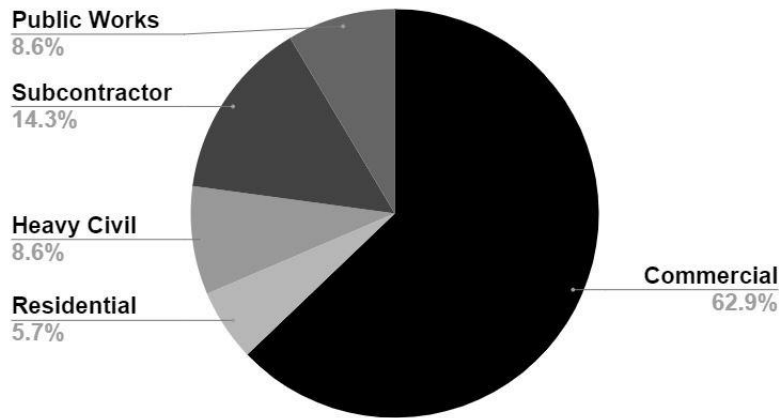


Figure 1: Industry sectors represented by mentors.

Conclusion

Even though the mentor selection took place just a few weeks before the end of the school year, some students already felt like they have benefited from it. Eight out of the nine students completed the follow up survey about their experience so far with the mentorship program and of those eight, four said that they feel they benefited from the program and four said that it was still too early to tell. On the plus side, no one felt outright that there was no benefit associated with the program.

I learned that members of industry, both women and men, were very eager to be a part of this program. When responding with their completed questionnaires, many offered to help if further assistance was needed; they expressed great enthusiasm about the idea, and many said they wished something like this would have been in place when they were in school.

In the feedback I got from club members, as shown in Figure 2, location and personality were the top reasons for why they chose the mentors they did. And, although connecting student and mentors did not happen very long ago, most students have determined how they would like to stay in touch with their mentors: a mixture of hone, email, and in-person meetings as shown in Figure 3.

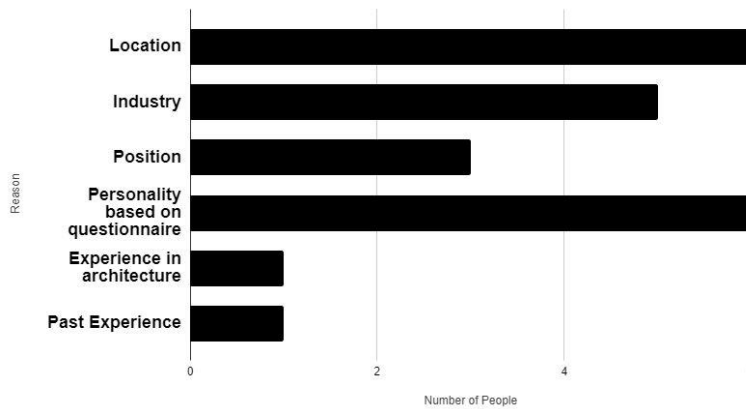


Figure 2: Why students chose their mentors.

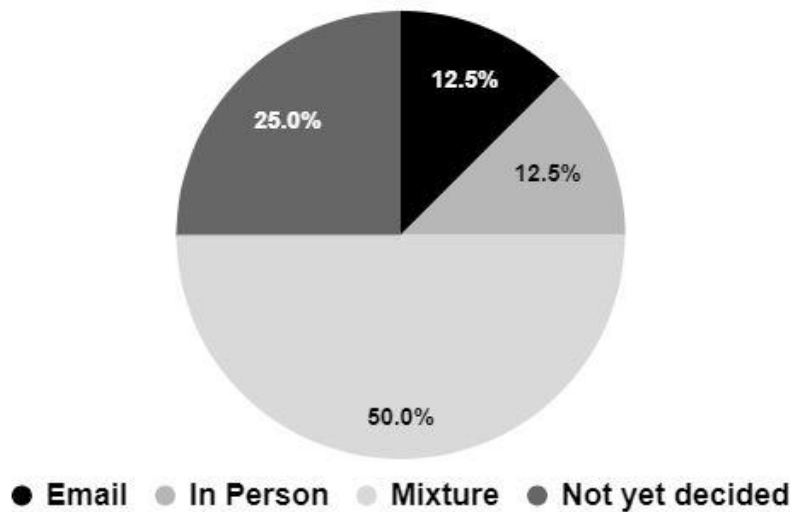


Figure 3: How students and mentors will stay in touch.

Overall, I would say this project was a success. There are nine students who now have one or more industry mentors that they can reach out to when they have a question, and there are many additional industry member profiles for club members to access in the future. I have spoken with the club’s president for next year and she plans to have another mentor-matching event in the fall and keep the program going.

References

Gauna, Savannah. *Creating a Mentoring Program for Members of the Cal Poly Women in Construction Club*. Digital Commons, 2017