A Continuation of the Women in Construction Club’s Industry Mentorship Program and a Measure of Its Effectiveness

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The Women in Construction Club’s Industry Mentorship program at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo (Cal Poly) is nearly a year old, yet the only data collected on the program was taken directly after it was created. The creation of the Industry Mentorship program, and subsequent data collection, were a previous senior project. But there were no measurements on how effective the mentorship program was, or if there was a benefit for the students involved. Because this program has the potential of creating long-lasting relationships and connecting women in a men-dominated field, knowing if the mentorship program needs to be evolved is vital. This paper delves into how beneficial the Industry Mentorship program is and what current students would do to improve the program to make it more effective. Once those responses were analyzed and implemented to improve the program.

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

Introduction

A previous Cal Poly student and former Women in Construction club member, Linnea Lavorico, created the Industry Mentorship program in spring of 2018, for the Women in Construction (WIC) Club at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo (Cal Poly). The WIC Club’s is to empower and support women through connections and collaboration, making the Industry Mentorship program a perfect fit. Industry mentors can offer advice to students on common practices in the industry, or alternative way to do something taught in class. Or, if the student needs advice on what to wear to an interview or what companies have better reputations, their mentor can be someone to ask outside of the Construction Management faculty. Being in a male-dominated industry as a woman can be daunting. Creating a relationship between mentors and students can help grow confidence and build a support system of others who understand what it’s like to be a woman in a man’s field. Currently, the number of female students being admitted in the construction management department is increasing. The goal of the department is to have the amount of men and women equal.

The Women in Construction Club isn’t made up of solely construction management majors. There are also students with majors in architecture, architectural engineering, and civil engineering. These students, while not being in the construction management program, are still part of the construction industry, and would benefit from having an industry mentor. Also taking into account that the construction industry is multi-faceted and highly collaborative, and that mentors can stem from a variety of backgrounds, being inclusive with WIC members is a benefit.

Methodology

This project started with a survey, which is attached in the appendix. The survey was distributed via email to current members of the Women in Construction Club who were part of the industry mentorship program when it began in Spring 2018. The purpose of this email was to determine if the mentorship program was beneficial, and what could be done to improve the mentorship program for future recipients. This data was collected over a period of two weeks.

While the survey was open for club members, emails were sent to potential industry mentors from the Women in Construction Club’s industry contacts email distribution list, asking if they were interested in becoming or if they were still interested in being a mentor; for those not chosen in the initial round of mentor selection in spring 2018. If the potential mentors were not already surveyed in spring 2018, then attached to their email was the questionnaire used in spring 2018 by Linnea Lavorico in when she started the mentorship program. Once the mentors finished
their surveys and emailed them back; the surveys were saved and given to WIC Club members looking for mentors. With the initial survey feedback on improvements in mind, the WIC Club members were able to keep the surveys with their chosen mentors, unlike in spring 2018 when the members did not keep their mentor’s questionnaire.

By letting the WIC Club members keep their mentor’s survey, it will enable members to easily recall information regarding their mentor, and if they fall out of contact, making it that much easier to reignite contact. Falling out of contact with their mentors due to lack of structure was the most common answer in the WIC Club member survey to members with mentors. This solution, of members keeping their survey, will hopefully combat that particular issue by giving the WIC Club members more to speak to their mentors about.

**Deliverables**

For this project, evaluating the benefits and potential areas for the Women in Construction Club’s Industry Mentorship program via survey was used to evolve the mentorship program to be more helpful for the WIC Club members. There were eight surveys completed by the WIC Club members who already had mentors from spring 2018, when the mentorship program began. This small number is due to only thirteen WIC members attending the inaugural mentor-selection meeting, and not all of them chose mentors. Some members with mentors have already graduated from Cal Poly, and in all likeliness, have not checked their university email since graduation, which was the only listed way to contact them. According to Linnea Lavorico’s data when she began the mentorship program, only nine students chose mentors. The one who did not respond to the WIC member survey was a student who had already graduated. See the below figures for data.

**Figure 1:**

Have you contacted your mentor(s) since the WIC BBQ meeting to set up the mentorship?

8 responses

- 25% Yes, we talk regularly
- 62.5% Yes, but we haven’t talked in a while
- 12.5% Once, that was to just introduce myself
- 0% No

**Figure 2:**
Has having a mentor helped you academically?
8 responses

![Figure 3: A pie chart showing 87.5% Yes, 12.5% No, and 0% Maybe.]

Has having a mentor helped you navigate the construction industry?
8 responses

![Figure 4: A pie chart showing 62.5% Yes, 37.5% No, and 0% Maybe.]

Figure 5: WIC Club Member suggestions on how to improve the mentorship program
1. Maybe facilitate the initial contact or help set up standards for a mutual understanding of what the mentorship will be (so how often you will talk/see each other, form of communication that will be used, what topics will be discussed, etc.)
2. It would be cool if some of the mentors were from the San Luis Obispo area that way we could meet up in person during the year.
3. I like it so far, perhaps adding more mentors and what they can specifically help with
4. Have something organized that helps kick start and set the tone of the relationship. Or on the survey that members fill out, include a section that has them describe how involved they want to be with the students as well as desired forms of communication and how often.
5. I would suggest somehow making it more streamlined so that communication is much easier between mentor and mentee, such as meeting them in real life, or setting up a specific time to meet/video chat.
6. Organize events so that students and mentors can meet in person; have an in-person meeting to select a mentor; help members reach out to their mentor - can be a little intimidating; have informal, on-campus events for members and industry to just hang out - a no-pressure environment to just get to know each other and develop a relationship so members are more comfortable reaching out, maybe even to someone who is not their mentor
7. Maybe invite the mentors to an introductory meeting/potluck/BBQ with the mentees in SLO before the summer starts. Maybe facilitate the initial contact or help set up standards for a mutual understanding of what the mentorship will be (so how often you will talk/see each other, form of communication that will be used, what topics will be discussed, etc.)
8. n/a (surveyor’s response)

Conclusion

Despite only having eight WIC Club members available to survey to measure the benefits and offer opinions on how to improve the Industry Mentorship program, the results are clear: there needs to be more structure and ways to keep in contact with chose mentors. In the inaugural round of choosing mentors, WIC members did not keep their mentor’s survey of interests and accomplishments. By keeping it, members will always have access to their mentor’s information. Giving the students more information about their mentors will increase their communication, and that will lead to an increase in the benefits of the mentorship program.

At the time this project was undertaken and documented, only one WIC Club member expressed interest in choosing a mentor. Completed mentor questionnaires were forwarded to her to select a mentor of her choice. Once again, like in Linnea Lavorico’s project, the number of interested industry professionals vastly outnumber the amount of students interested in having a mentor.

A suspected culprit in this low amount of students looking for mentors is that college students already have hectic schedules and busy lives, and adding staying in contact with yet one more person is a challenge. Emails get lost, or forgotten, and before the student realizes it, it’s been nine months since they’ve spoken to their mentor. Keeping their mentor’s questionnaire will hopefully lessen this; however, the questionnaire itself that is sent to mentors could easily be overhauled to improve relations between mentor and student to make it less-likely that they fall out of touch. That would be a good project for whoever continues the WIC Club’s mentorship program next year. Currently the club president intends to keep the program going and there is a foreseeable future where this program expands if students put effort into cultivating a relationship with their mentors.
References

Lavorico, Linnea. *Creating and Implementing an Industry Mentorship Program Within the Women in Construction Club*. Digital Commons, 2018