Gender & IT Education

"The Only Person Who Cares" Misperceptions of Mentoring among Faculty and Students In IT Programs

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Summary of Study

Despite the studies of women that presume a strong positive correlation between mentoring and the recruitment and retention of women in non-traditional fields such as computer science, it is not clear that the mere provision of mentors to students will lead to greater numbers of women graduating in information technology fields. We examined this issue through comparison of students' and professors' perspectives on mentoring in five research universities where information technology is taught in several units. We analyzed undergraduate and graduate student experiences in being mentored and faculty's experiences in networking and mentoring. Students do not perceive that faculty provide the mentoring services faculty say they are providing. Even though mentoring was a significant predictor of undergraduate student satisfaction in the major, the impact was minimal when compared with their sense of belonging in the unit, which was largely dependent on the number of friends they had made in the program. Students in applied IT disciplines reported a higher sense of belonging leading us to believe that such units are somewhat more women friendly.

Results

- Students at all levels report low levels of mentoring
- Doctoral students report the highest levels of mentoring across most indicators
- Faculty have positive memories of being mentored.
- Female faculty report receiving more psychosocial mentoring than do male faculty.
- Most faculty mentoring is at the graduate level.
- Student satisfaction in major is derived from a sense of belonging that comes from making friends with classmates.

Take Home Findings

- Cultural change in IT education is needed with emphasis placed on mentoring of undergraduates.
- Faculty need to consider better or more effective methods of mentoring: further study is needed of what faculty think they are doing with regard to mentoring, and whether students regard these actions as helpful.
- Rewards need to be given to faculty for effective mentoring
- If we want to recruit and retain more undergraduate women, we must also determine new and more effective ways to make them feel like they belong in our programs.