

**11-MONTH MBA  
MENTORSHIP PROGRAM:  
THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN  
DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS  
AND COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE**

**RESEARCH IN LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES**

Instructional Design Leadership  
Information Learning Technologies  
IT 5840

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In this project we will be examining the 11-Month MBA Student-Alumni Mentorship Program at the University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center's Business School. The 11-Month MBA is an accelerated, cohort program catering to early and mid career professionals. Students are drawn to the program who are looking to brush-up on the skills and/or quickly retool themselves in order to make major career transitions.

In my role as the Manager of Professional and Career Development Training, I support students in bridging the gap between their professional goals and their past professional experience. The Mentorship Program is one offering in a much larger portfolio of programming aimed at helping students develop the knowledge, skills, abilities, experience, and attitudes to make a successful transition.

The Mentorship Program was initially piloted in 2003-2004, based on U.S. Business School mentorship program best practices. While each year it has undergone some modifications, it continues to face challenges regarding facilitating bonding and on-going engagement between participants. More guidance and better tools and resources may help encourage more meaningful interactions.

## **BACKGROUND**

The mentorship program at the 11-Month MBA exists to improve learning outcomes and support professional, personal and career development. The program is structured so that each student is paired with an alumni from the program who currently works in an area of strong interest to the student. Each alumni may have between one and three students that they are working with. Participants are encouraged to communicate and meet as often as they would like, but the formal structure requires them to get together at least once a term (each term is eight weeks long, there are five terms over the course of the academic program).

The mentorship program is in its fourth year. While the fundamental structure hasn't changed, we have experimented with different processes and procedures. The first year we had a formal training session for mentors and a formal orientations session for students prior to the beginning of the actual mentorship program. It was mildly received. The second year we again did the formal training session and the formal orientation session and we added a mentor get-together about half-way through the program so mentors could share their experiences and what was working/not-working for them. The mentors gave us strong positive feedback on the mentor get-together, but the training session and orientation session still seemed to flounder. Last year we dropped the training session and the formal orientation session. In lieu of those two points of contact, we met with each student individually and discussed their particular needs in depth and how the mentorship program might be able to help them. Additionally we instituted a new "Fall Kick-Off Luncheon" where we brought all the students and mentors together to meet and begin their relationship.

Feedback from the mentors and students was overwhelming positive about the kick-Off Lunch and we are continuing to do it and the individual discussions on student needs again this year.

While incoming students articulate their interest in participating in the mentorship program, most students do not follow through or attend to their mentorship relationship over the course of the program. The problem we face is how to get students engaged in the mentorship program, particularly in the beginning when rapport is built. It is unclear at this point whether structural, procedural, or resource changes would improve the situation.

Academically the mentorship program is most useful in the first term of the 11-Month MBA program, when students are grappling with meeting graduate level expectations and developing their academic teams (approximately 30% of the work done in the program is done in teams). Professionally the mentorship program is most useful in the final two terms of the 11-Month MBA program, as students are getting ready to make their next big professional step.

As this program has one administrator and no other staff members, there are few institutional political struggles. There is a risk in the program as all the mentors are alumni who volunteer their time, so while the students are our direct clients the mentors also make up an important constituency to consider when making changes.

## POTENTIAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS

### Models and Best Practices in Mentorship Programs

- How are successful mentoring relationships created and sustained?
- What best practices, strategies, and tools do other programs use to foster relationships?
- How do models differ in academic and corporate environments?

### Attitudes, needs, value, and barriers to participation in the Mentorship Program

- What attitudes and needs to students report about mentoring relationships?
- What value do past students report getting from the Mentorship Program?
- What barriers do past students report in regard to engaging in the Mentorship Program?
- What attitudes and needs to mentors report?
- What value do mentors report getting from the Mentorship Program?
- What barriers do past mentors report in regard to engaging in the Mentorship Program?
- What recommendations do past participants have for improving the Mentorship Program?

### Transferable Practices and Tools vs. Special Case Issues

- What adaptations and considerations would make the existing Mentorship Program best practices and tools fit into an accelerated, cohort, graduate-level professional degree program?
- What is unique to this group and what is universal?