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HONR 299

Final Reflection

My second semester as a mentor presented me with new challenges and thus helped me to grow as a mentor. My first experience as a mentor gave me a group that often got off topic due to a student prone to distractions. This group was much different; there was hardly a conversation that did not pertain to the group discussion. However, this group had more arguments and controlling students. This combination led to fiery, powerful discussions, but often smothered certain students’ ideas.

Looking back at my past reflections, I found that the goal that I set for myself following the first recitation was to foster a more positive and inclusive environment for discussions. I believe that as time went on, I was able to improve the group dynamic, but not to the standard that I had hoped for. The change between the first and last recitations that I facilitated was immense with respect to the amount of respect that had developed between group members and the time spent on educated discussions instead of arguments over trivial matters. However, I do wish that I had more time to work with them and further help them grow in the pillars of interdisciplinary academics and leadership development of the honors college. I also had a student that I wish I had more time to understand and address. He was argumentative and disruptive during discussions, though he was very enthusiastic about the content. Following the peer review meetings, I saw that he softened a bit, but could still come off as harsh as every now and then he would cut off his peers or present an opposing argument in a way that seemed to shut down his classmates, which tended to isolate him within the group. I feel that with more time I could have understood him better and helped him better integrate himself into the group.

As for my personal development, I believe I became more aware of the group dynamics with respect to gender. My last group of mentees had only two males in a group of seven, so males dominating conversations was a non-issue for the group and I felt that every woman in that group was respected by the men. However, in this group, there were only two women in a group of eight. Throughout the first recitation, the men dominated the conversation and the women really had to work to get their opinion heard by those men who had the loudest voices. I had to interrupt the group conversation from time to time to allow them to speak after having been cut off. I did not recognize this as a gender issue, just as an issue of too many voices trying to be heard, until the peer reviews came in. I evaluated each of the students before looking at their peer feedback and found that the two women were given lower scores than I had expected, especially compared to some of their male peers who did less work or less quality work than they did. One male student did not even evaluate his female peers, which I found strange.

From then on, I noticed more and more that the women were disproportionately delegated the recording tasks and thus were less able to verbally participate than their male colleagues as they were trying to listen and take down everything that they could to help the group. For the final recitation, I had to ask one of the male group members to take on a recording task and encourage the singular woman who attended class to speak up and share her voice. I even noticed in her participation that she called some of her ideas stupid. Following that recitation, I tried to emphasize respect for others’ ideas more in my messages to the group and when I stopped by their group meetings. Despite this, I know that some of the group members grew in respect and began complimenting others’ ideas and encouraging others to speak up.

Another strength I have developed is harmony. I am not one who is good with confrontation or arguments; I try to avoid it as much as possible. However, avoiding conflict was nearly impossible throughout the first few weeks of working with this group. As such, I had to come up with strategies to bring more harmony and respect to the group. In order to settle arguments between group members, I would ask the other members of the group to share their thoughts to bring new perspectives and ideas and find areas where the group could find common ground. I believe that this prevented arguments in later recitations and allowed for more time for educated, productive discussions.

Now that the class is over and my group has submitted its final project, there is not much left to do except encourage them to continue growing throughout the rest of their time here. I hope that they have gotten a lot out of working with this group and that they can use the lessons they learned, not only in their next HONR 199 class, but also in their other classes, inside and outside of the honors college. I have told them to let me know if they have questions or need advice on anything from honors classes to life in general. I hope they will continue to reach out to me and each other. I also hope that they will consider applying to be mentors next year, as I know they would have a very rewarding experience. I have personally told two of my students that I highly recommend that they apply, as I believe that they will make excellent mentors. They served as great leaders within this group and grew a lot throughout the eight weeks I have known them.