

#### 2.2.4 List of Useful University Publications

“Facts about the University of Illinois”  
“Some Facts About the College of Engineering”  
Bulletin and appropriate departmental directories and bulletins  
Student/staff telephone directory  
Department Research Summary  
Undergraduate and graduate study manuals and programs  
Course catalog  
Faculty newsletters  
Benefits information  
Interim Guidelines and Procedures on Conflicts of Interest Policies  
“Take Action”: a brochure on avoiding sexual harassment

### 2.3 Peer Mentoring Program for First Year Female Graduate Students

The National Science Foundation has voiced a widely-held concern that women be encouraged to participate in research and education in traditionally male-dominated fields such as science and engineering. To this end, we recommend that the College of Engineering at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign establish a peer mentoring program for first year women graduate students as they enroll in Engineering College Programs.

The mentoring program's main purpose is to increase the retention rate among female engineers by aiding first year students to find their niche in overwhelmingly male departments. In addition to increasing the retention rate, we anticipate that this support will also encourage more undergraduate female students to attend graduate school in Engineering and to continue their research after receiving a master's degree. Says a recent female PhD in Engineering:

I am a firm believer in the mentoring process - without other graduate students['] support, it would have been very hard for me to complete the PhD. They are there just when you get discouraged and that is often at the beginning and towards the end of the graduate career. It is at the beginning that you have not made friends yet and don't know where to turn with all of your questions. Mentors can be lifesavers!

The mentoring program's goals can be achieved by matching first year female graduate students with volunteers from among the current female graduate student population. This matching will be aided by the completion of a brief survey by the new students and volunteers indicating their research interests and background. The volunteers will be briefed on the peer mentoring program and their responsibilities. Once the new students arrive on campus, there will be a gathering to introduce the students and mentors. Ideally, there will be one incoming student per mentor. Following the introductions, mentoring will proceed informally, with each mentor acting as a new student's unofficial guide to the department. The mentors will be available to give advice on a wide range of topics that the new student might not be able to discuss with just anyone. In order to sustain the momentum gained in the first year, the program will also sponsor periodic informal social meetings of all incoming and established women graduate students to nurture networking both during student years as well as after graduation and departure from the University.

The remaining sections of this proposal provide the details of operation for the Mentor Program. Section 2.3.1 provides the semesterly activities which must occur for success of the program. Section

2.3.2 describes the Engineering College responsibilities. Sections 2.3.4, 2.3.3, and 2.3.5 provide a sample survey and sample letters.

### 2.3.1 Peer Mentor Program Activities

The first major activity for the incoming students in the peer mentoring program will be a college sponsored gathering. This meeting is called the *introductions meeting* as it is intended to acquaint each new graduate student with the College of Engineering, her new department, the women faculty, and the women graduate students in her new department.

The introductions meeting will begin as a gathering of all participating new female graduate students and volunteer mentors within the college. They will be welcomed to the college and introduced to the mentoring program and other relevant aspects of campus life. This college wide meeting will adjourn to departmental gatherings of the women faculty, continuing women graduate students, department head, and graduate program director. Since we do not expect the peer mentors to have all the answers, the individual departmental gatherings will aid new students in developing contacts with other established females in our predominantly male departments.

In addition to attending this introductions meeting, each mentor will be responsible for contacting her assigned new student before arrival, to answer any preliminary questions. After arrival, the mentor is responsible for being generally available for answering questions from her protege.

As each new graduate student is different and will have her own needs and concerns, the peer mentoring program provides no formal requirements on mentoring pairs other than attendance at the introductions meeting. The following list of potential mentor activities will serve as a guide to further interaction.

- Offer aid to new student in relocating to Champaign-Urbana.
- Make personal contact with protege weekly during her first semester.
- Take protege to dinner/entertainment with other graduate students monthly during her first semester.
- Explain the department's graduate examination structure to the new student.
- Give 'inside information' on relevant course offerings for the new student.
- Give tips to the new student on study group formation and time management.
- Explain important departmental rules to the new student.

The peer mentoring program will also aid recruitment of new female graduate students. By sending personal letters to a *potential* new female student, and hosting the potential student during campus visits, the mentoring volunteers can convey the College's encouragement of women in engineering and offer assistance in making the decision to attend the University of Illinois. While not included in the breakdown of activities in subsequent sections, this recruitment activity is strongly recommended to College departments.

### 2.3.2 Engineering College Support

The peer mentoring program will require an administrator at the College level to organize volunteers, oversee activities, and arrange the necessary meetings. In addition, departmental level

activities must be organized by the department's graduate recruitment officer. Since students enter graduate school in both the Fall and Spring semesters, the peer mentoring program will have the following college-wide activities each semester:

- Training meeting for new mentors.
- Introductions meeting for new students.

In chronological order, the detailed activities required for each semester are:

- Organize the College-wide introductions meeting (done by College administrator). This meeting entails:
  - welcoming new students to the college (Dean of Engineering),
  - speeches by various other university persons (Mary Ellen O'Shaughnessey, etc.),
  - presenting an overview of the college and the mentoring program, and
  - adjourning to the departmental meeting.
- Organize the departmental introductions meetings (done by departmental graduate recruiting officers). It is held directly following the college meeting and includes:
  - welcoming new students to the department (Head of Department),
  - introducing each new student to her mentor, and
  - providing refreshments to all women in the department.
- Solicit volunteers as mentors. (Done largely by department recruiting officers; overseen by College administration.)
  - Maintain list of all female graduate students in the Engineering College. (Done by departments.)
  - Send mail asking for volunteers (include outline of mentor responsibilities). (College provides form letter; department distributes it.)
- Distribute and collect the surveys from volunteers. (Department)
- Plan and organize the training meeting for volunteers. (College)
- Distribute and collect the surveys from new students. (Department)
  - Obtain the names and addresses of arriving students from departmental academic offices.
  - Send each new student an overview of the program, a survey, and a return envelope.
- Match students and mentors. (Department)
- Plan and organize next introductions meeting. (Department and College)
- Interview/solicit comments from participants about the success of the program. Update activities and program guidelines based on feedback. (Departments and College)