

**AN UNDERGRADUATE EXECUTIVE MENTORSHIP PROGRAM FOR  
STUDENTS OF COLOR: DESIGN, IMPLEMENTATION AND LESSONS LEARNED**

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Presentation Track: Practice

Interactive discussion on the design, implementation and results of a mentoring program between executive mentors and undergraduate African American male protégés. The purpose of the program is preparation of students for top-level leadership positions, focusing on developing students' psychosocial identity and exposure to nuances of executive level roles and lifestyle.

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# **An Undergraduate Executive Mentorship Program for Students of Color: Design, Implementation and Lessons Learned**

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## **Abstract**

In 1994, the Morehouse College business department created the Executive Mentorship Program (EMP). The purpose of the EMP is to provide an opportunity for high-potential students to engage in a formal developmental relationship with top executives in business, government, and the non-profit sectors of society. The mentor/protégé relationship focuses on the psychosocial function of the mentoring experience and exposes students to the nuances of executive level organizational life. Since its inception in 1994, approximately 100 undergraduate African American male students have participated in the program. This paper will explore the design, implementation and outcomes of the EMP.

## **Introduction**

Over the past decade, mentoring has become one of the most widely used forms of leadership development in the organizational setting (De Janasz, Dowd and Schneider, 2002; Yukl, 2002; McCauley and Van Velsor, 2004). Mentoring is defined as a unique interpersonal relationship between two individuals: a mentor and a protégé. A high-ranking, experienced and knowledgeable individual serves as the mentor. A mentor's role is to provide guidance and support to his/her protégé (De Janasz, Dowd and Schneider, 2002, pg. 268).

For African Americans, the personal benefits of mentoring as a way to achieve career advancement and success may be more intensified than for their white counterparts. This intensity is explained in Maureen Jenkins' article, "Why You Need A Mentor."

A good deal of what's used to differentiate high-potential performers from good performers are unspoken cultural criteria like how you present yourself, work with people, and appearing to know how to behave at the next level before you get there. People of color are less likely to come out of family situations or networks where you have access to those things readily before you need them That's why mentors are especially critical for upwardly mobile African Americans (pg 82).

The purpose of the Morehouse College Executive Mentoring Program (EMP) is preparation of African American male students for top-level leadership positions, focusing on developing students' psychosocial identity and exposure to nuances of executive level roles and lifestyle.

The learning objectives of the presentation are:

- To share the design and implementation strategies of the EMP;
- To share lessons learned since the inception of the program in 1994; and
- Discuss qualitative research implications on the impact of the program on students of color.

## **Background**

Morehouse College is the nation's only private, historically black, four-year liberal arts college for men. The mission of Morehouse College is to prepare students for leadership and success in the larger society. The mission of the College's business program is "excellence in the preparation of students for business leadership" (Morehouse College 2003-2004 catalog). As part of the business program accreditation process in 1994, new co-curricular programs were implemented to assist in the achievement of the mission of the business program. One of these programs is the EMP.

In 1994, the department chair of the Morehouse College business program saw the need to provide a leadership development experience specifically designed to accelerate the career advancement of high-potential business students. The EMP was created as a formal mentoring program with high-ranking African American executives as mentors. The primary purpose of the program was enhancing students' psychosocial functions and ability to assimilate more easily into high-level leadership positions.

## **How It Works**

To be considered for selection as a EMP protégé, students must complete an application process. The selection criteria are GPA 3.0 or higher, sophomore level status, demonstrated leadership capabilities, and professor recommendations. A selection committee made up of business department faculty selects ten students from the application pool. The students are paired with their executive mentors at a formal dinner in April of their sophomore year. The mentoring relationship lasts throughout their junior and senior year.

EMP mentors are identified through corporate recruiting relationships, College alumni pool, and corporate supporters of the business program. Mentors are executive level professionals of color with a desire and willingness to spend time with the students. Mentors can be either male or female. Work industry and location are not used as criteria for selection, although local executives tend to be more accessible to their protégés. Mentors are not assessed a fee for participation in the EMP. However, they may be asked to sponsor a networking activity for the program, such as the April EMP dinner. Executives are asked to make a two-year commitment to the EMP. At the end of the two-year commitment, the executive can accept a new protégé or exit from the program.

Mentors and protégés are matched based on mutual interests and complimentary personality styles. The activities of the mentor and protégé pair are to be defined by the executive and student. The executive is expected to be available at least 2 hours per month. The protégé is

expected to initiate contacts and follow-through on the 2 hour per month minimum contact. Average contact time is 10 to 15 hours per semester.

Typical mentor/protégé activities include dinner at the mentor's home, attendance at professional sporting and cultural events, civic and community dinners, local and out-of-state business meetings, and outings with mentor's family.

## **Results to Date**

Since its inception in 1994, approximately 100 students have been selected as protégés and 60 executives have served as mentors. The gender breakdown of the mentors is 90% male and 10% female. There have been two (2) white male mentors and one (1) white female mentor.

Of the 100 students who have been selected, approximately 60% put in the time and effort to develop meaningful relationships with their mentors. Of this group, approximately half continued contact with their mentors after graduation from Morehouse.

Anecdotal data secured through discussions with mentors and protégés suggest the EMP is effective in providing mutually beneficial relationships for the mentor and protégé. Protégés say the ability to have someone at the executive level to provide words of encouragement and support, to provide opportunities for exposure, and to discuss career alternatives is invaluable. Mentors speak to the personal fulfillment and joy they receive by giving back to the next generation of African American leaders.

A qualitative study of five (5) mentor/protégée pairs from the first five (5) years of the program is currently underway to provide empirical research into the results of the EMP. The qualitative study will specifically address the perceived benefits of a formal mentoring program and the psychosocial impact of the program.

## **Conclusions and Future Implications**

The EMP celebrated its 10-year anniversary in April 2004 at a formal dinner at the Atlanta Downtown Ritz Carlton Hotel. 18 mentors, 20 current protégés, 5 former protégés and business program faculty and senior College administrators attended the dinner. Six of the 18 mentors had been with the program since its inception in 1994-1995.

All in attendance had only high praises for the program. Executives and students overwhelmingly agreed that the EMP was a highly successful program that made a significant contribution to the leadership development process of students of color. Participants in the EMP spoke to the need to establish a similar program in both historically black and predominately white colleges for high-potential students of color. It is expected that the findings from the qualitative research study of five mentor/protégé pairs from the early years of the Morehouse College EMP will provide empirical evidence to support the establishment of formal undergraduate executive mentoring programs for students of color throughout academia.

## References

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