

Alumni-student mentoring program for the Department of Political Science

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Abstract:

Undergraduate degrees in the social sciences open doors to all sorts of careers. Some involve further study; most do not. Students face a bewildering array of choices, few of which provide obvious “next steps” on their life development. Our graduates are successful in fields ranging from public service at the federal, state, and local level to non-profit work to corporate management. Thanks to efforts of our faculty, we remain in touch with a remarkable number of alumni. We already leverage our network to provide one-off panels focusing on career or graduate school paths, but these answer at best a few questions but do not provide follow-up guidance or connection. The alumni student mentoring program will connect current students to alumni to help our students understand their options as they move beyond Rutgers.

Key Steps/Activities:

We have already undertaken several key steps. First, last November, was to use William Field’s LinkedIn profile and the Political Science Department’s Facebook page to recruit alumni interested in participating. We solicited a basic survey from one of our graduate students, posted it, and received over 100 quality responses.

Further steps require convening a small working group/task force to decide on the balance between types of activities (panels vs. one-on-one connections that we determine vs. building a database that would be open to current students) and running a few tests to see which approach works best with both groups. We also need to advertise for more alumni participants. This working group, or steering committee, will include current faculty and interested alumni. This will require face-to-face meetings, not only in New Brunswick but also in DC and New York.

Proposed Timeline:

- Completed: first round of recruiting alumni
- Summer '22: development of events for fall and spring semesters.
- Fall '22: At least two career panels for alumni, meet-up in New York and DC. Identification of alumni willing to engage on individual mentoring.
- Spring '23: At least two career panels, recruitment of students who would benefit from mentoring, assignment of individual mentors

Funding:

The majority of support for this project will come from existing resources: already-employed faculty and staff and alumni volunteers. I have requested a budget of \$2,500 to facilitate face to face gatherings in NY, NB, and DC to help meet and train alumni. Renting some meeting space in New York and DC will provide a great launch platform in the fall. Without this we will have to rely on more willing donors who don’t need a conversation, training, and pep talk.

Primary Stakeholders:

- 1. Current students:** students spend a short part of their lives here at Rutgers before launching out into the world. Many of our students have benefited or would benefit from the friendly guidance of alumni mentors.
- 2. Alumni:** a surprising number of our graduates express the desire to “give back” to Rutgers, and their idea of giving back is to stay in touch.
- 3. Department faculty and staff:** Building a mentoring program will require time and energy from our faculty and staff. The program needs to be time- and cost-effective.

Effectiveness Measures:

We will measure our effectiveness in terms of the number of students reached. We have 750 majors and 500 minors. The more we can draw to the panels, the better. We cannot do one-on-one mentoring with every undergraduate but reaching 15-20 in any year will be excellent.

Communication/Engagement:

The department uses an undergraduate list serve to reach our current majors and minors. We also have a variety of social media pages. For alumni, we have social media and LinkedIn. Using every tool, we have will maximize our chance to reach interested alumni and needy students. We’ll develop an alumni mailing list/listserv and a Canvas page we can use to keep people connected. How we use the Canvas page is still to be developed.

Leadership Competencies:

- Stakeholder analysis
- Planning, vision setting, and strategy
- Problem-definition/problem solving
- Influence and persuasion