

Student Mentoring in MN TWS: Time for a New Approach

James Berdeen - MNDNR
Mark Hanson - MNDNR
Stacy Salvevold – USFWS

<http://www.uncrookston.edu/tws/mn/mentoring.html>

The Problems

- Lack of engagement in professional societies by students & young employees
- Difficulty in attracting & retaining productive young employees
- Aging professional work force; high turnover expected soon
- Substantial increase in number & seriousness of resource management challenges

Potential Solution

- Establish a formal Mentorship Program
- Mentoring can take many forms
- Advice → senior thesis → internships
- Depends on student interests, motivation, mentor availability, personal skills, etc
- Flexibility is key

Goal of Mentoring Nat'l Academy of Sciences (1997)

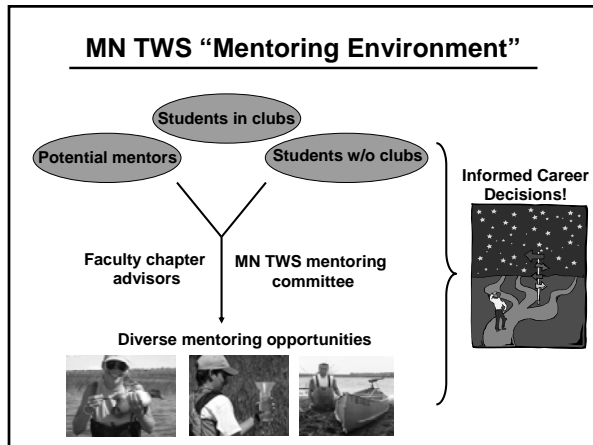
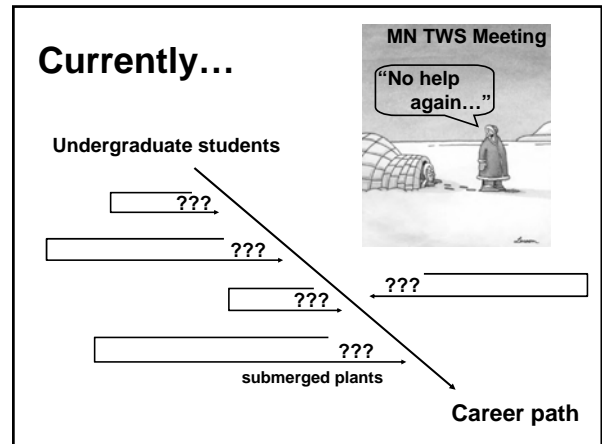
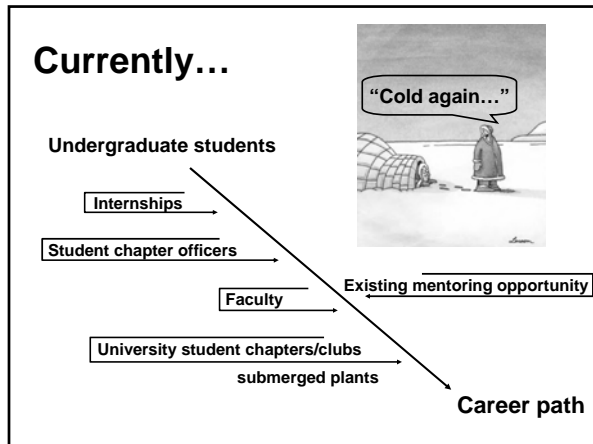
- Optimize educational & developmental experience
- Provide socialization into disciplinary & organizational structure
- Find suitable employment

MN TWS Program Goals

- Provide engaging relationship between students & mentors in out-of-classroom settings
- Provide students with information & insights to make prudent career choices
- Transmit “institutional memory”
- Recruit students to natural resource management positions
- Mentorships should lead to the improved management of natural resources & more viable profession

Structural Needs of MN TWS Mentorship Program

- Students (undergraduate, graduate?)
- Mentors w/ different areas of expertise
- University facilitators
- Potential employers (e.g., agencies, universities, NGOs)
- Feedback from students, advisors, & mentors areas of success & areas needing improvement



- ## Operations
- ### “How do you make it work?” (5 Steps)
1. Students – decision to pursue mentoring experience:
 2. Students – contact mentoring “advisor” & discuss opportunities:
 - >Chapter / Club Advisors
 - >Academic Advisors
 - >TWS Mentoring Advisors
 3. Student directly contacts ≥ 1 potential mentor:
 4. Students & mentor define and develop specific strategy: Write it down; somewhat binding!
 5. Students complete evaluation form, “exit interview”: Was it helpful? Specific recommendations?

- ## “Frequently Asked Questions...?”
1. What do you mean by “mentoring?” What sorts of experiences are appropriate?
 2. What if my school has no one who can advise me?
 3. How long should it last?
 4. Who is eligible?
 5. What if we decide to change our “formalized strategy”?
 6. Is it possible to receive college credit or receive payment?
 7. What if I want to work with a mentor who is not on your list?

- ## Benefits for Students
- Improve communication skills
 - Receive career-coaching
 - Learn to work cooperatively
 - Develop network of professional contacts
 - Gain unique perspectives and insights
 - Learn about getting into & succeeding in graduate school

Benefits for Mentors

- Identify capable people; attract them to your organization
- Learn new skills
- Promote professional engagement
- Improve institutional memory
- Provide pathway to improved natural resource management
- Cost-effective labor on projects

Personal Reflections from Mentors?

- Describe typical work day, week, year
- Work challenges (e.g. multi-tasking)
- Clarify vocation versus avocation
- Being knowledgeable v. being effective
- Balancing work & personal life

Tips for Students

- Work through faculty & TWS advisors *first*
- Polish interpersonal skills during contacts with potential mentors
- Be prepared to make some sacrifices
- Venture out of your "comfort zone"
- Prioritize - these are learning experiences

Mentoring Information

- Locating potential mentors...how?
Via website, data base maintained by MN TWS committee and club advisors, can find contacts in newsletter
- Time frame...when can we start?
We hope to be operational in time for students to locate mentors by end of spring semester 2008