Mentoring Disabled Students

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Basic Question

• Is there anything different about mentoring disabled students?
My Personal Background

• The Early Days (1943 - 1961)
  – I grew up in Berkeley, California as one of four children of deaf parents.
  – Both my parents had successful careers as teachers of the deaf at the California School for the Deaf.

• College and Grad School (1961 - 1971)
  – St. Mary’s College of California (Math)
  – UC Berkeley (Math)

• Career in Computer Science (1971 - present)
  – University of Washington, Seattle
Background Continued

• Involvement in Deaf Community began 1980
  – American Sign Language courses (1980-81)
  – DBNet (1985)
  – Gallaudet University (1986)
  – MobileASL Project (2005 – present)
  – DHH Cyber Community (2007 – present)

• Involvement with Disabled Students began 1993
  – DO-IT Project (1994 - present)
  – ASL at University of Washington (2005-present)

• Involvement with Blind Students began 2002
  – Blind graduate student, Sangyun Hahn (2002-present)
  – Tactile Graphics Project (2003 - present)
  – WebInSight Project (2005 – present)
Vertical Mentoring Workshop for the Blind in STEM (2006)

- 45 Blind high school, college, graduate, and professionals including 6 Ph.D.s
- All speakers were blind
- All breakouts organized by blind participants
  - College students mentored high school students
  - Grad students and professionals mentored college students
- Technology was highlighted for accessibility
Academy for Advancing Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Computing (2007)

- 10 Deaf and hard of hearing students
  - Intro programming class (9 weeks)
  - Animation project – more than 130 hours
  - Visits with deaf and hard of hearing mentors
  - Research talks
  - Career building and mentoring

- Staff includes
  - Deaf program coordinator
  - Deaf TA
  - Deaf program assistant
National Federation of the Blind Youth Slam (2007)

- 200 blind youth and 40 blind mentors
- 4 days in early August 2007
- Computer Science Track
  - 15 blind high school students with 5 blind mentors
  - Build Instant Messaging Chatbots in C#
  - Learn about computer science
No Difference

• The role of the mentor is to help each student reach his or her potential in research.
• Each student is an individual having his or her own keys to success.
• It is usually best to try to fit a research project to the student, not the other way around.
• Challenge the student to be creative and not rely on the advisor for answers.
• Always be encouraging and recognize accomplishments.
Yes, Difference

• Do’s
  – Check accessibility needs
  – Be inclusive in group meetings
  – Learn about the particular disability from the student and from others who have the disability.
    • This is actually not that simple because of confidentiality of medical information.
  – Recognize that you do have to change your behavior some with a disabled student

• Don’t’s
  – Don’t pity
  – Don’t overcompensate
  – Don’t hide disappointment with poor performance
Policy

• National, or at least regional, programs to build up the pipeline are needed.
  – Large enough numbers do not exist at the institution level.
  – Mainstreaming of disabled students in the past 30 years has spread them thinly around the country

• Partnerships must be developed between adult organizations of disabled persons and these programs.
  – National Federation of the Blind
  – National Association of the Deaf
Mentoring Resources for Students with Disabilities

- DO-IT
  - http://www.washington.edu/doit/

- AAAS Entry Point
  - http://ehrweb.aaas.org/entrypoint/

- NFB National Center for Blind Youth in Science
  - http://www.blindscience.org/ncbys/
Organizations for Minorities

• National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE)
  – http://national.nsbe.org/

• Society for Advancement of Chicanos and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS)
  – http://www.sacnas.org/

• Tapia Conference