

It Takes Two to Make a Thing Go Right: Black Mentoring Matters

Submitted by:

Carmen Reese Foster, LMSW, LSSW, Assistant Professor of Practice, Online MSSW Field Coordinator, UT College of Social Work

Adrianna Carter, MSSW candidate May 2019, UT College of Social Work

Presentation Description: This presentation will focus on the Social Justice Innovation Initiative Grant (SJII) that was awarded to the College of Social Work in 2018 with a focus on Challenging Racism. Students and faculty across all programs (BSSW, MSSW, PhD, DSW) in the College of Social Work submitted proposals that challenged racism in a variety of ways. Eleven proposals were submitted and four received funding. The projects focused on the following topics: voting empowerment, art mentorship, bystander intervention, and organizing a Coalition of Black Social Workers. Specifically, the Coalition of Black Social Workers (CBSW) connects students of color with professional social work mentors, which increases the students' sense of belonging and purpose and further enhances their educational and professional experiences. By engaging in a mentoring relationship, students and professionals of color will "illuminate their power and unveil the truth." When this occurs, the student is stronger, the professional is stronger, and the black community is stronger.

Thomas, Willis, and Davis (2007) reported that minority graduate students "often experience more isolation and less access to mentors and role-models than their non-minority peers" (p. 178). Therefore, one of the goals of the CBSW is to provide quality professional mentors of color to students in order to provide them with the resources to increase their social work network. By connecting with mentors, minority students will receive more support and this will increase their chances of success. Due to the lack of access and resources, minority students are stifled and have a more difficult road to reach their full potential. When they are connected with a professional mentor of color, the playing field begins to level out and the student is allowed to thrive. The student is able to realize the truth and their talents and abilities are celebrated. Soledad O'Brien is quoted as saying, "We need more mentors and leaders of color to help shepherd our youth as they navigate the highly competitive job market where coveted skills, access and professional networks are critical to success" (O'Brien, 2017). We a student of color is connected to a mentor of color, then the magic happens.

The College of Social Work also has one of the oldest online MSSW Programs in the country. Online students report feeling lonely and disconnected from the larger student body. Croft, Dalton, and Grant (2010) reported findings from the Higher Education Academy that approximately 22% of distance learning students identified "the risk of feeling isolated as a challenge" (p. 33). The Coalition promotes social justice by providing an opportunity for online students to engage with other minority students, and it creates space for online students to participate in virtual mentoring with social work professionals of color. This increases both the online students' peer network as well as their professional network and positions them for future success in the field of social work. Again, when students of color are provided with the appropriate access and resources, then they realize their potential and begin to thrive.

The SJII Grant creates an opportunity for students and faculty to creatively demonstrate ways to challenge social injustices in the community. The outcomes are a decrease in student loneliness,

provision of professional mentors of color, and subsequently, an increase in minority student moral, confidence, and success.

References:

Croft, N., Dalton, A., and Grant, M. (2010) Overcoming Isolation in Distance Learning: Building a Learning Community through Time and Space. *Journal for Education in the Built Environment*, 5:1, 27-64, DOI: 10.11120/jebe.2010.05010027.

O'Brien, S. (2017, October 13). We need to have more mentors for young, minority students. Retrieved from <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/10/13/we-need-more-mentors-for-minority-students-soledad-obrien-commentary.html>

Thomas, K., Willis, L., Davis, J. (2007). Mentoring minority graduate students: issues and strategies for institutions, faculty, and students. *Equal Opportunities International*, Vol. 26 (No. 3), p. 178-192.