

Mentor Focus Group/Interview Responses

SoCal BSI 2007 (n = 12 mentors attended meeting or responded by email (n=1); 5 individuals were the actual laboratory directors)

- 1) What part of your involvement in the SoCal BSI Program met or exceeded your expectations? Please explain why or how.**

N=3=100% of mentors interviewed individually or via email; no time to cover in focus group

Quality of students - “The student operated at the level of a mid-level graduate student in terms of skills, productivity, and self-motivation.”; the student’s performance exceeded what the mentor thought they would be able to accomplish; “focused”; did not need “hand holding”; wanted to learn

- 2) What part of your involvement in the SoCal BSI Program disappointed you? Please explain your response and/or suggest ways to improve the program with respect to the issue that you have identified.**

N=8=67% of mentors

More mentor involvement in creation/critique of final project presentation – would have attended Friday sessions for ~2 hours if had known +/- when their student was scheduled to present, would have enjoyed hearing other students as well, but could not attend for the whole afternoon; many students (~3/4) chose NOT to make formal presentations to research mentors/lab groups before final presentations; at least one mentor felt that the Program PIs had indicated that students should not let them review presentation and that there “were many errors in the final presentation”; perhaps mentors should be required to formally “sign-off” on the presentation twice during the internship

N=1 for each reply below=8% of mentors

Length of internship too short

None

- 3) What would you suggest would be a valuable second year experience for returning SoCal BSI students?**

N=9=75% of mentors

Invite 2nd year students back immediately – this process would give the students a whole year to think about and plan a project with their research mentor (see below)

Have 2nd year students plan their project before returning to BSI – also have them explain what they expect to get out of the 2nd year experience

Have 2nd year students attend complete didactic phase – important if 2nd year students are truly to serve as mentors to 1st year students

N=1=8% of mentors for each of the following responses

Have students help with manuscript preparation – “it might be possible to introduce semi-formal assignments like writing up relevant sections for Materials and Methods, or maybe a final figure and legend for a manuscript”

Questions value of 2nd year experience – sees 1st year program as a chance to have students exposed to scientific research in bioinformatics and sees no additional advantage to a 2nd exposure; would prefer to see more individuals exposed to this research area versus bringing a few individuals back for an additional year

4) The SOCal BSI program is unique among BSIs in that it offers a didactic instruction phase. How familiar are you with the content of the didactic instruction phase of the SoCal BSI?

N=10=83% of mentors

Moderately familiar – knew from Ronnie’s memo about basic structure; did not know that many materials were available on the program website; coverage of more molecular structure would be useful; perhaps have 2 weeks of core material and then 1 week when individual students get in depth training for their research topics – maybe mentors could be invited to give lectures/workshops to subgroup of BSI students with similar needs in their projects, could be at CSULA or in the mentor’s research lab

What topics do you feel are appropriately covered in the didactic phase of the institute?

“My student came in with a good working knowledge of sequence comparisons and databases.”

5) The SoCal BSI program also contains a professional development component. How familiar are you with the content of the professional development phase of the SoCal BSI?

N=7=58% of mentors

Knew about component, but not the content – knew mainly from Ronnie’s memo and their students

N=1=8% of mentors

Not at all

How useful do you feel the professional development phase of the institute is to your student’s overall growth as a professional scientist?

N=9=75% of mentors

Presentations/Critiques every week is too much – perhaps divide students into 2 groups who present every other week?; perhaps have professional development sessions only every other week or even just twice during the 7 week research phase since every Friday afternoon takes too much time away from the research project; if every week is necessary, perhaps consider evening sessions

N=1=8% on mentors

Unsure

6) Would you recommend to a colleague that they accept a student in the SoCal BSI Program? Please answer either NO, YES, or YES WITH RESERVATIONS. Please explain your response.

N=3=100% of mentors interviewed individually or via email; no time to cover in focus group

YES – high quality students

7) Do you have any other comments about the SoCal BSI Program that you would like to make at this time?

“I think the program is doing a fine job, and filling an important role in providing undergraduates with experiences that will make them highly competitive for graduate studies.”

N=9=100% of mentors at focus group wanted more involvement in student selection process –

- 1) each mentor (or an assigned individual from the lab group) should give 15 minute presentation to the students during the 1st week (maybe 1st few days?) of the didactic phase and then talk with them at lunch
- 2) students would then write a short essay explaining how they would solve the problem identified by the research mentor; these essays would “really help with the ranking of students” by the research mentors
- 3) mentors should also upload at least one appropriate paper from their lab group to the SoCal BSI website for student use