

*Project Abstract:* The Office of Pre-Health Advising is a newly established/relocated office in the College of Arts and Sciences. We work with students and alumni interested in a variety of health professions, most of which are known for being highly selective. We piloted a volunteer peer mentoring program during Fall 2022. Mentoring programs provide both mentors and mentees with an important opportunity to connect with one another, their communities, and develop important skills. Leadership, teamwork, and collaboration are highly valued in the healthcare admissions processes and working as a mentor develops these skills, providing valuable experiences for future professional school applications. In learning from the pilot program, the new program seeks to recruit diverse, historically underrepresented minoritized students as mentors, providing them a paid opportunity to utilize their strengths, social capital and knowledge of CU Boulder to help the next generation of pre-health students.

*Background and Project Description:*

The Office of Pre-Health Advising (OPHA) serves all CU Boulder degree-seeking undergraduate students, regardless of major, and recent undergraduate alumni who intend to enroll in a variety of health professional schools including dentistry, medicine, nursing, physical therapy, pharmacy, physician assistant, and veterinary medicine. OPHA provides counsel on how to prepare to become a strong applicant for these schools, and helps students navigate the application process. In order to be a competitive applicant, students need to maintain high GPAs, gain direct patient experience through work or volunteering, study intensively for entrance exams and showcase leadership. OPHA's Peer Mentor Program aims to better prepare our mentors for these applications by giving them valuable leadership experience and help our mentees become aware early on of the expectations of strong applicants.

Starting in Fall 2022, OPHA launched a volunteer peer mentoring program where sophomores, juniors and seniors mentored a group of five first-year students each. The goal of this program is to build a sense of community and belonging amongst pre-health students, foster the ability to learn from each other, and give mentors and mentees a meaningful experience they can share on future professional school applications. Mentor programs such as this promote increased self-confidence, access to a support system, enhanced understanding, exposure to diverse perspectives, and greater knowledge of career success factors in mentees.

The benefits of mentoring extend beyond the mentee. Mentors gain communication and leadership skills, increased self-awareness, and increased empathy, and cultural competency (Hastings, 2016). Additionally, many health professions schools look for applicants demonstrating leadership experience (Ghajar and Lofti, 2021; Kowarski, 2020) and this can be a way for students to stand out.

In our current program, mentors volunteer for approximately 35 hours over the course semester. These 35 hours consist of training, email communications with mentees, one-on-one

and group meetings with mentees, and working with OPHA staff. Through these interactions, mentors gain experience in written and verbal communication, leadership, cultural competence, and reliability; all of which are characteristics that health professional schools value. It can be challenging, though, for mentors to continuously engage in a volunteer-only position, without



AAMC Facts (2022).

<https://www.aamc.org/media/35756/download?attachment>