

# Student Perspectives on the Women in Construction Club's Industry Mentorship Program

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The Women In Construction Club's Industry Mentorship program at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo (Cal Poly) is nearly a year old, with the only data collected on the program taken directly after it was created. The creation of the Industry Mentorship program, and subsequent data collection, were a previous senior project. Currently, no data exists on the long-term benefits or shortcomings of the program. This paper attempts to fill in the data gaps on how students feel towards the Industry Mentorship program, and propose methods to continue or improve it.

**Key Words:** Mentorship, Women in Construction, Cal Poly, Construction Management, Student Perspectives

## Introduction

Men continue to dominate the construction industry. In 2008, women made up just over 8% of construction managers (Garber, Molle, 2018). With the construction industry recovering from the recession, more women entered the construction industry. The ratio of men to women has shrunk, but women remain the minority (DePorto, 2018). To support women, The Women In Construction (WIC) Club was founded in winter of 2017 at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. A large focus of the club is to empower and support women through connections and collaboration. The club offers membership to not just construction management students, but also other construction industry majors such as architectural engineers, civil engineers, and architects students, due to the interaction and collaboration between disciplines out in the field. There are monthly meetings and workshops to offer training with various computer programs or to plan meet-and-greets with industry professionals.

In spring of 2017, a student undertook a senior project to determine if there was an interest in creating an Industry Mentorship Program for WIC (Guana, 2017). The student surveyed WIC Club members if they would rather have mentors in the construction management program compared to industry mentors. The majority of students disagreed with having a student mentor or were indifferent. More data collected by the student showed that WIC Club members would have preferred to communicate with potential mentors monthly, compared to weekly. The conclusions drawn were for WIC Club members to communicate at a minimum monthly and career guidance being a major topic of discussion (Guana, 2017).

By the spring of 2018, the Industry Mentorship Program began (Lavorico, 2018). The process of gaining an industry mentor began with WIC Club members reviewing potential mentor questionnaires, organized via which section of the industry the professional was in. Once the club member selected a mentor, the student starting the Industry Mentorship Program would email the club member their selected mentor's contact information. A few weeks later, a survey was distributed to the WIC Club members asking for feedback on how they felt about the Industry Mentorship Program (Lavorico, 2018). Since then, no data has been collected on long-term effects of the program.

## *Purpose of the Study*

The focus of this study is to determine the long-term effects of the Women In Construction Club's Industry Mentorship Program. There has been 9 months for WIC Club members to contact and build a relationship with their mentors. The research contained in this study was through a personally-created survey with past surveys serving as inspiration and a source for topics.

## Methodology

The survey was distributed via email to current members of the Women in Construction Club who were part of the industry mentorship program when it began in Spring 2018. The purpose of this email was to determine if the mentorship program was beneficial, and what could be done to improve the mentorship program for future recipients. This data was collected over a period of two weeks. A survey method of data collection was chosen due to the recipients being college students. An emailed survey would let them take it at their leisure.

The survey emails were not anonymous. This enabled it to be seen who had not taken the survey, and then that particular WIC Club member could be sent a reminder email to fill it out. Nine WIC Club members were sent emails with the survey. These students were selected because they had chosen mentors in spring of 2018 (Lavorico, 2018). Eight students responded. The sole student who did not respond had graduated in spring of 2018 and the only contact information available for her was her college email.

Questions were designed to determine if WIC Club members were in contact with their mentors, and if so, how often; or if there was an academic benefit of having a mentor. Other questions were phrased to determine what the mentor/student was like; and what the mentor was helping the student with. As stated in a previous project, the Mentor Industry Program was supposed to be primarily about helping WIC Club members with career guidance (Guana, 2017). These questions are to discover if that is the effect of the mentorship program.

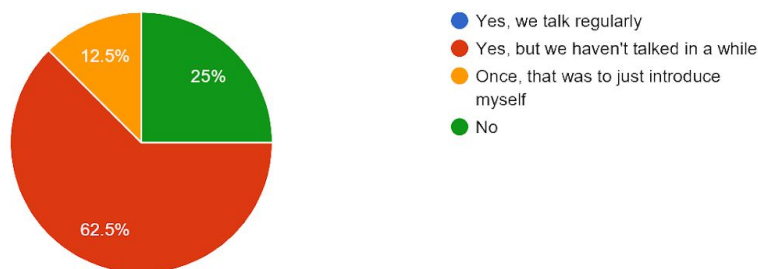
## Analysis of Results

Data was collected over a period of two weeks via emailed survey. The results were mixed, as seen below. Since eight of the nine WIC Club members with mentors responded, the data potentially could not reflect the majority of opinions regarding the mentorship program. However, it does give a large insight into how the students are implementing the program.

*Figure 1: Contacting The Mentor*

Have you contacted your mentor(s) since the WIC BBQ meeting to set up the mentorship?

8 responses

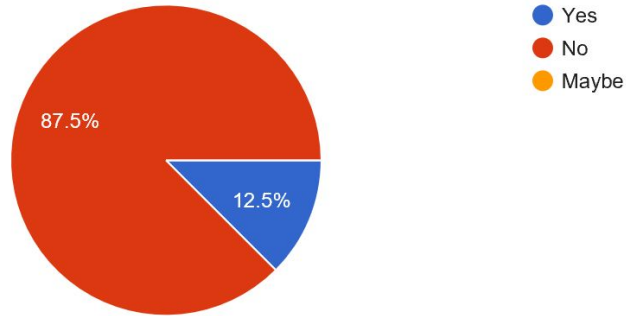


No students are currently in regular contact with their mentors. However five students (62.5%) have been in contact in the past and have communicated with their mentor.

Figure 2: The Relationship Between Mentors and Academics

### Has having a mentor helped you academically?

8 responses

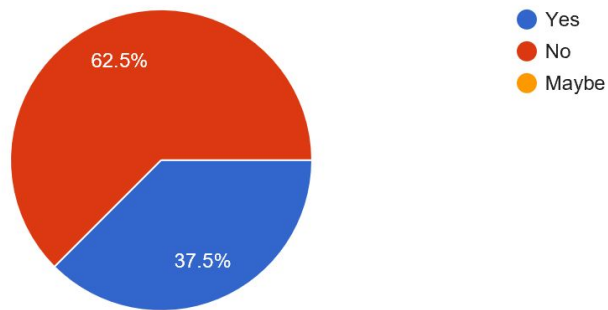


Only one student has had their mentorship be beneficial towards their college career. Therefore, only a minor relationship exists between having a mentor and academic assistance, if the student chooses to pursue academic assistance with their mentor.

Figure 3: The Relationship Between Mentors and the Construction Industry

### Has having a mentor helped you navigate the construction industry?

8 responses

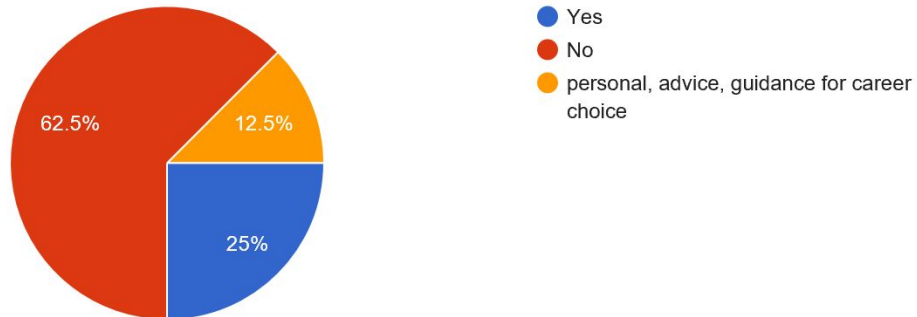


In Figure 3, it's shown that more students discussed industry-related topics in comparison to academic-related ones. No students are uncertain as to the assistance their mentors have provided, and the majority of students haven't gotten any academic or industry-related assistance.

Figure 4:

## Has having a mentor helped you in any other ways?

8 responses



As seen in Figure 4, the majority of students have not gained any form of assistance from their mentor. This coincides with the majority of the students not regularly talking to their mentor nor contacting them at all. Only three students have gotten any help from their mentors at all.

The last questions given in the survey were free-response, for WIC Club members involved in the Industry Mentorship to suggest their own ways to improve the program. A majority of the responses were about setting the tone of the mentor/student relationship to improve communication, or wishing to meet their mentor in person

### Conclusion

From the data collected, it's clear that most students in the WIC Club's Industry Mentorship Program aren't in consistent contact with their mentors, nor using the mentorship program to help them academically or through career guidance. With female students making up 24% of the fall 2017 freshman class (Guana, 2017), getting them a head start and introducing them to other women in the industry can lead to collaboration and support, and making the industry feel not so male-dominated.

### Future Research

With the knowledge that the current WIC Club's Industry Mentorship Program is not as beneficial as it could be, due to students and mentors not communicating frequently, perhaps designing and implementing a monthly calendar with topics to discuss could lead to improved communications. In early March is the Women In Construction week. This could be used as a topic to discuss with a mentor. Other topics could include favorite equipments, area of study, or hobbies. A calendar or schedule for speaking to mentors could help students build a better, longer-lasting relationship with their mentors, and therefore provide them with the assistance the program was designed to give them.

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