A summary report of the iHEA Mentoring Program, 2019-2020

7th June 2020

Thorhildur Olafsdottir, James Buchanan, David Bishai

The first round of the iHEA Mentoring Program took place from June 2019 to June 2020. A total of 55 mentor-mentee pairs participated in the program, with 55 mentees and 47 mentors (eight mentors each mentored two mentees). All mentor-mentee pairs were sent a midstream survey in February 2020 for which the results have been collected and summarized. A second survey will be sent to participants at the end of the first round of the Mentoring Program in June 2020. These surveys provide information on potential future improvements to the program, signal to participants that iHEA are actively monitoring the program, and serve as a reminder to the mentor-mentee pairs to evaluate the direction of their relationship, and review/construct aims and action points as needed.

Mentoring program overview

138 mentee applications were received, of which 64% were from females. Of the accepted applicants (40% acceptance rate), 67% were female. The number of matched pairs was limited to 55 because the demand for mentors exceeded the supply. The proportional division of applicants and matched pairs by UN region is summarized in Table 1, along with information on iHEA membership by region. The proportion of mentee applicants mostly reflects the regional division of membership, although proportionally higher application rates were observed for mentees from Africa and Oceania. Mentor distribution differed from membership distribution in that a larger proportion was from Africa and North America and a smaller proportion from Asia and Latin America. Matched mentees were more likely to be from North America and Africa relative to mentees who applied and less likely to be from Europe. This deviation occurred inadvertently in an attempt to achieve a closer match of interests to the pool of mentors. Next year the matching process may again face tradeoffs between the quality of a match and ensuring that geography is uncorrelated with the likelihood of a match.

Mentor-mentee pairs were matched based on their responses to an intake survey in which participants provided information on their research areas, goal for participation in the mentoring program, early-career researcher/mid-career status and field of specialty (economic, health policy, public health). Principal component analysis was then used to generate bins for best match of mentors and mentees. The matching of mentors and mentees within bins was then done manually by the three members of the matching team, taking into consideration geographic preferences, diversity with regards to gender, country, and highest educational degree completed (MSc and PhD).

Table 1. Proportional division of iHEA membership, mentee applicants, mentees and mentors by continent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Proportion</th>
<th>Mentee applications</th>
<th>Matched pairs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mentees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>32.4%</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
<td>41.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Midstream survey results

The response rate of the midstream survey was 39% (40/102), with 20 mentors (43%) and 20 mentees (36%) answering the survey. A summary of the main points taken from the questions with answer options are as follows with answers to open questions summarized later in the document:

- Weighted average of whether the program matched expectations is 3.8 (on a 0-5 scale).
- 32% of respondents read the resource material and discussed the contract.
- 35% of respondents wrote down the goals of the mentoring relationship.
- 50% of respondents agreed on action points (of which 95% acted on those points).
- The majority of respondents found the mentoring handbook helpful (weighted average = 4.92 on a 0-5 scale).
- Many of the issues raised by participants in open questions are addressed in the resource material (see summary of answers below).

Results from a bivariate association analysis:

- The more meetings that mentors/mentees reported having:
  - The greater the reported sense of direction;
  - The more likely that mentoring met expectations.
- Those who read/discussed the mentoring contract reported a greater sense of direction to the relationship (mean score 3.5 vs 2.3, p=0.045).
- Those who agreed on action points reported a greater sense of direction to the relationship (mean score 3.6 vs 1.7, p=0.0001).
- Neither use of the contract or the handbook were associated with mentoring meeting expectations.

Answers to open questions included in the midstream survey

The answers from the two open questions on the pros and cons of the program are summarized below, excluding comments that might risk confidentiality or are more or less the same as other comments:

What do you like most about the mentoring experience so far? (comments grouped by mentor/mentee as suggested by the answers)

Mentees

- The access and knowledge that there is someone outside from my immediate department that I can consult and get solid and candid input about career related issues.
- The open discussion of different issues, to hear the point of view of a person that is not involved in the projects, to hear about the experiences of a more senior person.
- Commitment from my mentor to take time out from his busy schedule to provide guidance.
- Randomized matching is the best part. It is a great opportunity to know people and share information. I have benefited a lot from the mentor who is really supportive of my job application and research.
- My mentor provided me with very useful tips to improve relationships with my supervisor at work.
- Face to face meeting during the iHEA conference.
- We have had the opportunity to discuss both the technical aspects of health economics and the soft aspects of leadership.
- Helpful in solving doubts regarding the expectations/ steps in my career. Availability.
- I think it is a great match between mentor and mentee in terms of experience and skills.
• Stellar - I'm lucky to be paired with a great mentor, who has been incredibly helpful, provided opportunities to present, network, etc. He has really gone above and beyond.

• My mentor is very friendly and has a great deal of patience to listen to my all queries. Simply answering to the questions of mine could have an easy way for a resourceful person like her. Still, she always tries to enable me to search for the answers to my questions independently so that I can become confident and independent in my career and life. She is genuinely the best mentor in my life I have ever met.

• Connecting people.

Mentors

• The opportunity to help a junior colleague with their professional concerns.
• I got a new acquaintance.
• See what the "young turks" are up to.
• Working through and setting up a plan with mentee.
• My mentee is doing amazing work and I feel good about the direction they are going.
• Opportunity to hear from researchers who are working in different areas and countries, and whose career goals are not necessarily similar to mine.
• The mentee has been open about what information she wanted and we have enjoyed keeping in contact.
• I enjoyed the mentoring lunch at the conference, where I met with 9 mentees in groups of 3. That went well.

From your experience of the mentoring program so far, do you have any suggestions for improvements?

• I would recommend a better match between the research interests of the mentor and mentee.
• I really think there needs to be a better match between the research areas of the mentor and the mentee. Given that she and I were so dramatically different in terms of research areas, my ability to give her ideas and direction were minimal.
• Maybe supply copies of that mentoring handbook; I was not aware that it existed.
• Remind us about the mentoring support materials. Repackage them as a YouTube video or podcast.
• Make the handbook and contracts easier to find? I don't recall anything about them, as the whole thing commenced at the iHEA conference they may have been lost in the emails.
• this survey needs to include options like 'we didn't meet", rather than assuming at least 1 meeting. It's generally a good idea, just the IHEA fields may not be the right way to find matches. And the mentoring lunch program seemed to work fine.
• The program is fantastic in its current form.
• Mentoring rules should be kept to a necessary minimum otherwise they feel like a straightjacket that limits discussions.
• Hope everyone has a mentor pairing as fantastic as I do.

The following are examples of concerns raised by participants that are discussed/addressed in the resource material:

• Commitment from the mentor and clear direction.
• More structure, better match.
• To my understanding, the mentoring program starts with an oral agreement of the mentor and the mentee. What to do if one of the parties fails to fulfill their obligations or loses contact?
• Start engagements early on so that we don´t lose time given that we only have a year.
• Perhaps encourage the mentees to be a bit more proactive? I am having to chase my mentee to arrange meetings etc., and would prefer if she did that!

Lessons and action points based on the midstream survey

Given that relatively few mentees or mentors read the resource material before participating in the program, and that some of the suggestions for improvements are directly addressed in the resource material, it is worth considering whether the program would better match expectations if a larger proportion of participants would study the material. It is apparent from the survey results that some participants were not at all aware that the resource material exists. A simple association analysis revealed that mentee/mentor pairs who organised more meetings reported a greater sense of direction and increased likelihood that the mentoring program met expectations. Among suggestions for improvements were improved matching on research areas as too much discrepancy in that sense can reduce a mentor’s ability to give the mentee ideas and directions. Suggestions for improvement thus include:

1. Include a link to the resource material (mentoring handbook, mentoring contract and ppt-slides) in all communications to the membership regarding the mentoring program. This includes recruitment, matching results, meeting reminders, midstream survey, endpoint survey and newsletter announcements.
2. Send a reminder to participants after matching and before the midstream survey to nudge mentor-mentee pairs into communicating (See Table 2).
3. For the mid-term survey: Add “never” as an option in the number of meetings question and add a choice question for mentees a) ECR b) mid-career.
4. Consider options for improved matching on research areas. Note that although preferences on research areas is included in the intake survey that is used for matching of mentors and mentees, 100% satisfaction cannot be guaranteed among participants in this respect.

Additional discussion/action points for the PDS subcommittee

• Compile and review all key documents for the mentoring program for easy reference when needed. This includes: the resource material, the mentor-mentee intake survey including the strategy for the manual part of the matching process, the list of mentee applicants on the waiting list (for prioritisation in the next round), the midstream survey, the end-term survey, summary reports, the time-frame for action points in each round (to post on the website) and a strategy for change of hands in the matching/reporting team.
• Upload this document to iHEA’s website, after approval of the board of directors, for future reference, and write a short summary for the newsletter.
• See bullet no. 4 above.
• Start month to be shifted to September this year (start of the academic year in Northern Hemisphere)? Then we would endeavor to make June the annual start month each year starting in 2021 as the biannual conference is in July. Mentors and mentees can then meet in person at the conference.