Forestalling the Problems of REU Students

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Not stressing-out students with money problems

The Problem: Many students, and especially the first generation college students we want to attract to the program, are from families with modest income ($40K or less) and have limited access to cash and lack a credit card.

Our Solutions:
1. Students fill out employment paperwork immediately after acceptance.
2. Students receive their first stipend check 1-2 weeks before the program starts, so they have money for incidental travel expenses and for initial living expenses.
3. Students are not expected to front large expenses (travel, meeting fees); the program pays them directly.

Developing a working relationship with a mentor

The Problem: Students with too little interaction with their mentor are likely to have problems with their research project.

Our Solutions:
1. Before they arrive, mentors have phone/email conversations with their students that assign and discuss papers.
2. Once they arrive, students meet with their mentors daily.
3. Research Focusing sessions, where students discuss their work with peers and the program staff, light a fire under the mentors, who want their students to do well.
4. Mentors review multiple drafts of the student’s Abstract and Final Paper, fostering a sense of achievement.

Getting excited about a research project

The Problem: Students who are uninspired by their research topic are unlikely to devote the time and energy to it needed to obtain a superior result.

Our Solutions:
1. The suitability of proposed projects are evaluated by an experienced committee of previous mentors.
2. Projects that lack clear scientific goals (e.g. routine data entry or sampling) or are otherwise boring are not allowed.
3. Projects are matched to a students skills and interest and they participate in defining its scope and goals.
4. PhD-level scientists take the time to discuss a student’s progress with him or her and to convey interest and approval.

Maintaining interest past program’s end

The Problem: The impact of a REU Program is diminished if the students loses all contact with the program once it ends.

Our Solutions:
1. Parents are invited to the Final Poster session to foster their awareness of, and appreciation for, their child’s academic abilities.
2. Students are encouraged to continue their research at their home institutions and to present it at scientific meetings.
3. Mentors are encouraged to tell students that they can rely on them for letters of recommendation (e.g. for grad school).
4. The program staff keeps in contact with graduates over the years, asking for input on program changes and enhancements.

Being welcomed on their first day  
Self-discovery during a field trip  
Explaining results at the Poster Session