

Promoting Workforce Equity: Examining a Case Study of VHA Undergraduate Training with a Focus on Hispanic Students

VISN 17 Center of Excellence for Research on Returning War Veterans

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1

Review case study of undergraduate training program within VHA

2

List important components for undergraduate mentoring to meet challenges for Hispanic/Latino(x) students

3

Describe benefits of tiered mentoring for undergraduate training

4

Explain how undergraduate mentoring could positively contribute to VHA

Learning Objectives



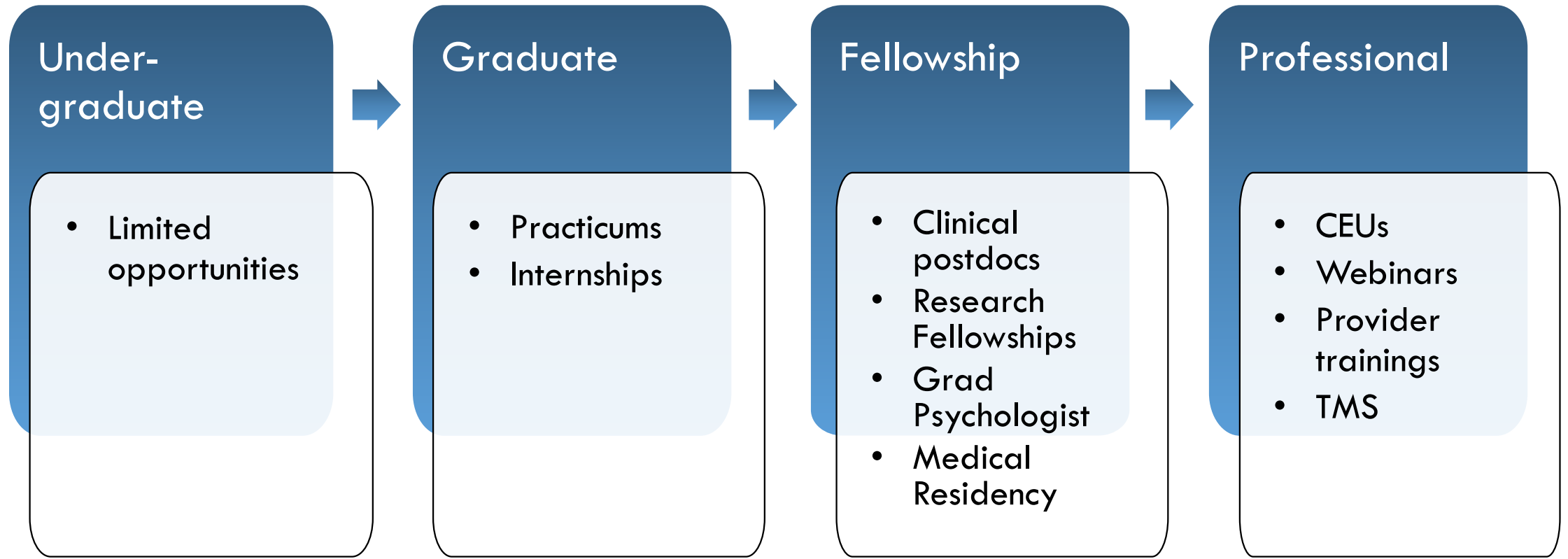
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VHA as a training institution

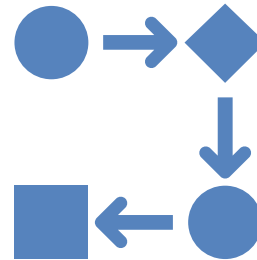
- > 100,000 trainees annually
- > 60 - 70% of VHA psychologists and physicians participated in VA training programs
- Academic affiliations with 99% of U.S. medical schools



Critical juncture in training

Core element to enhance and diversify health service pipeline

- Early excitement for careers in the field
- Graduate school preparedness
- STEM programs



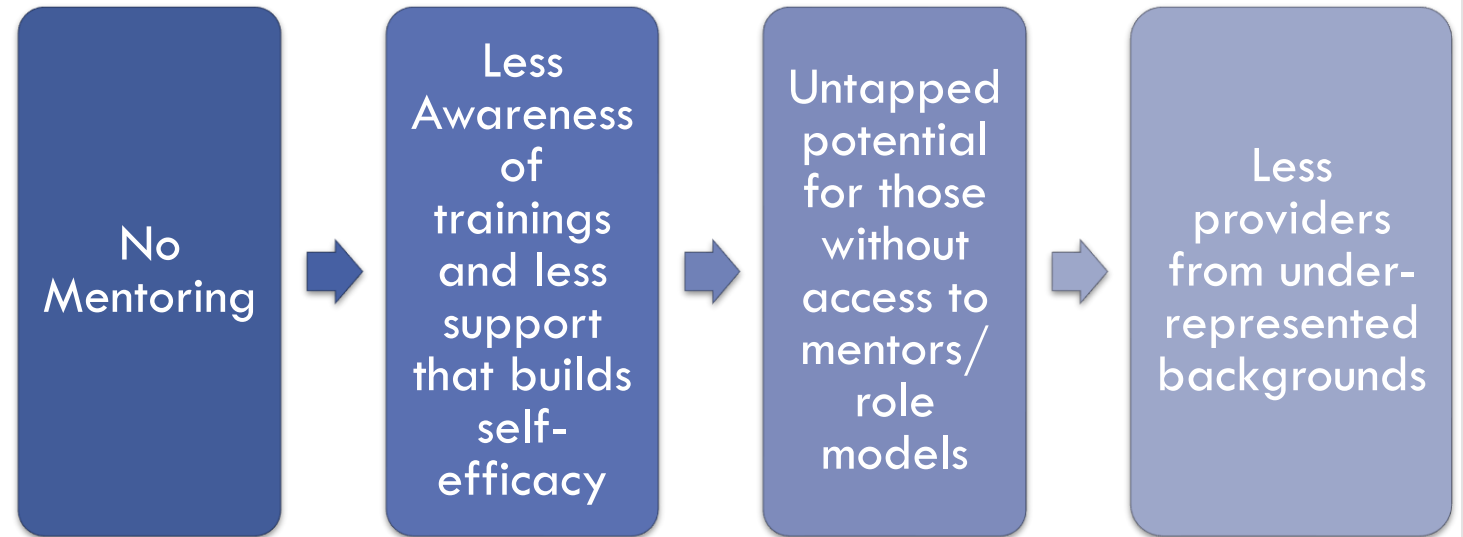
YET, review of programs over the past 60 years found that <45% of programs lacked crucial mentoring component

Value of under-graduate training

Mentorship

- Career decisions predicted by having mentor or role model in field
- Mentorship
 - facilitates entry into academia
 - hastens academic advancement
 - elevates research productivity and retention rates
 - improves career satisfaction
 - pathway to leadership

WHAT HAPPENS TO THOSE FROM UNDERREPRESENTED OR DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS?



In public sector, NIH funded series Building Infrastructure Leading to Diversity (BUILD) programs. Within VA growing efforts.

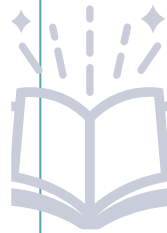
Challenges & Experiences among Hispanic/Latino(x) trainees

What were some of the challenges & experiences for our trainees?



Role Models

- Lack of access or availability of mentors in desired field is common challenge for many who are FIRST GENERATION students



Information & Resources

- Limited access to information that many take for granted
- Susceptibility to misinformation (e.g., expensive or uncredentialed programs)



Appreciation

- Acknowledgement of sacrifices
- Motivation to make best of situation, forward, & for others



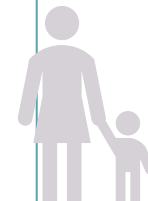
Experience & Opportunities

- Less opportunities available at more accessible universities (e.g., community colleges & minority serving institutions)



Confidence

- Impostor syndrome
- Skeptical about own abilities (e.g., ability to obtain a graduate degree)



Family Support

- Geographic restrictions at times
- Great source of support and encouragement

Limited Access to:

Support/Drive:

What can
undergraduate
training do to address
these issues?

VA Center of Excellence Research Program (VA-CERP)



Established in 2015,
with previous iterations
since 2010

>120 trainees



2 semesters, 10-12
hrs/week

8 hrs hands-on
research experience
1 hr didactic seminar
1-3 hr assignment
working time



University Partners

University A:
Private R1 University
University B:
Satellite Campus of
State University with
Community College

Limited Access to Role Models → Mentorship Opportunities

Director of Training

Associate Director of Training

Didactics Instructors
(Fellows)

Investigators

Preceptors

Tiered Mentorship

- Several sources of mentorship
- Train-the-trainer model
 - Supervision and program administration experience to fellows
 - Promote leadership opportunities for early career professionals
- Detailed feedback on prof. development
 - Fellows
 - Undergrads

Hands-on Experience*

*While for our internship hands-on experience took the form of participating in research activities, format can be adapted depending on setting and field of interest

Limited Access to Experience/ Opportunities → Hands-On Experience



Activities relevant to field of study that foster understanding of processes, population, and subject matter



Opportunities for interactions with interdisciplinary teams



Promote skills for collaboration, communication, and professional development



Support growth of intellectual curiosity in applied field



Professional Development

Overview of Research



Veteran Culture & Cultural Competence

Research Ethics



Grad/Med School Applications

- CVs
- Personal Statement

Research Writing

- Lit. Search
- Critically Analyzing
- Designing Posters
- Composing Lit Reviews



Fall Semester

- Research Topic Proposal
- 12 Annotated Bibliographies
- Assigned Readings
- CV
- Personal Statement

Spring Semester

- 8 Annotated Bibliographies
- Research Poster
- Paper Outline
- Lit Review Paper
 - 1st 5 pgs, 1st full draft, final draft

Didactic Curriculum

- Led by early career/fellows under supervision
- Demystify graduate application process with assignments with feedback
- Early opportunity to begin developing essential multiculturalism skills or other critical skills relevant in the field

Limitations & Challenges in Confidence → Skill Building via Presentation Experience

Presentation Experience

Mentored work towards a measurable achievement or final product

- key source of knowledge acquisition,
- building necessary skills
- more competitive applications

Although the product can take many forms its relevance to the field is crucial

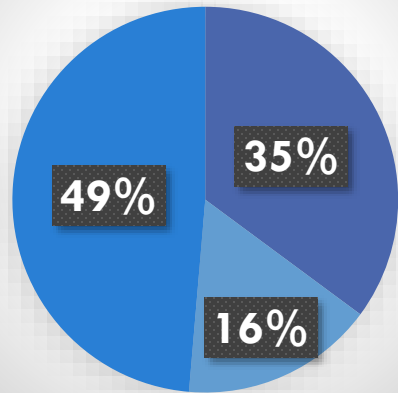
- poster, literature review paper, experiential reflection, program evaluation, quality improvement

- Tiered Mentorship
- Hands-On Experience
- Didactic Curriculum
- Presentation Experience

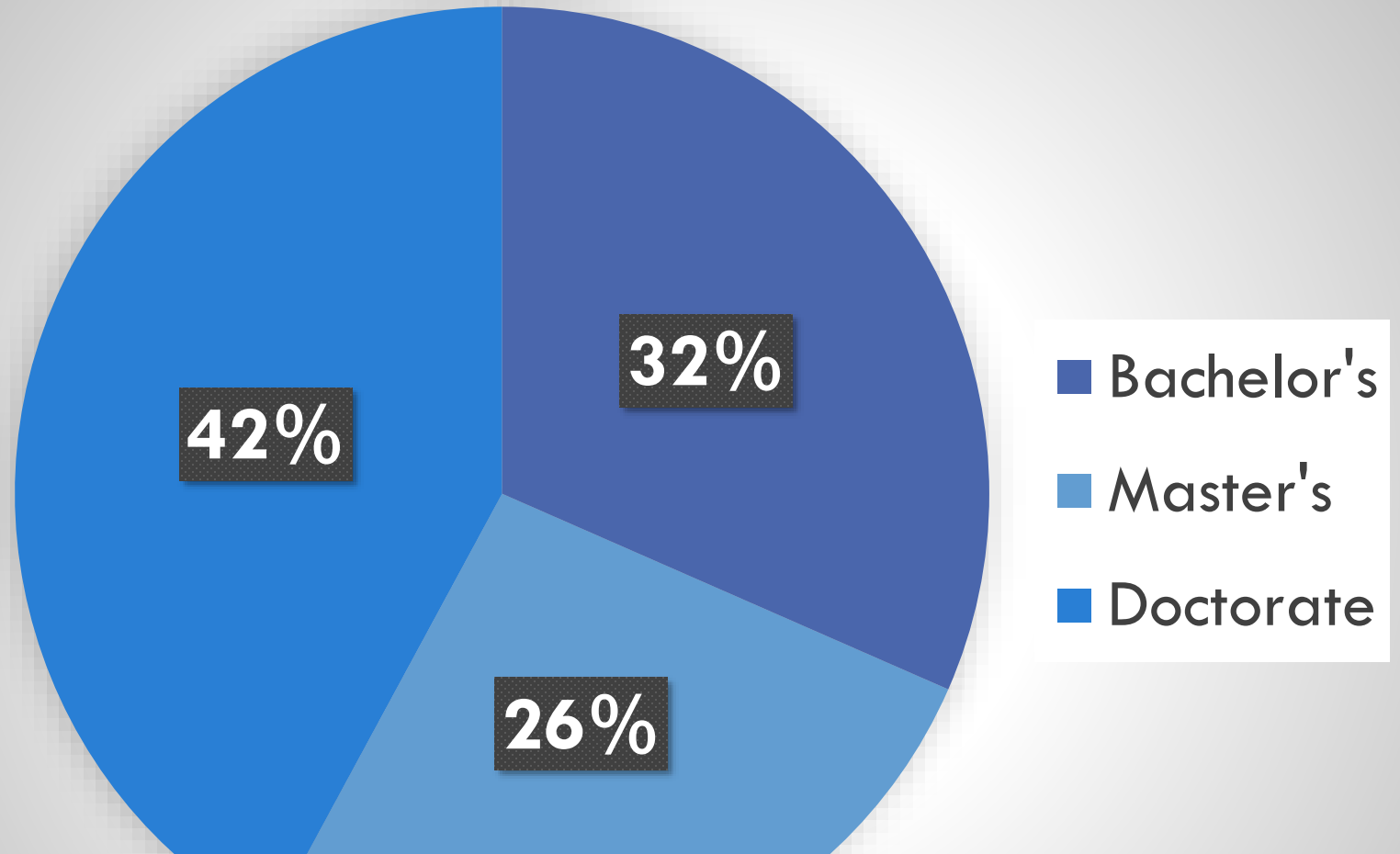
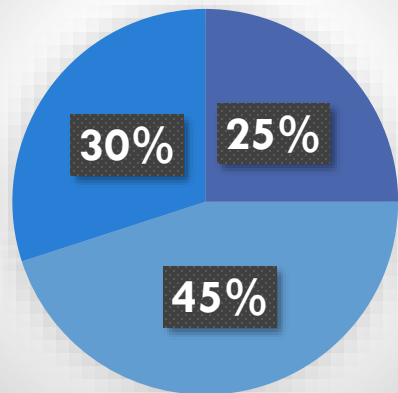
What was the impact of these components for our trainees?

HIGHEST DEGREE COMPLETED OR ENROLLED IN*

Univ. A



Univ. B

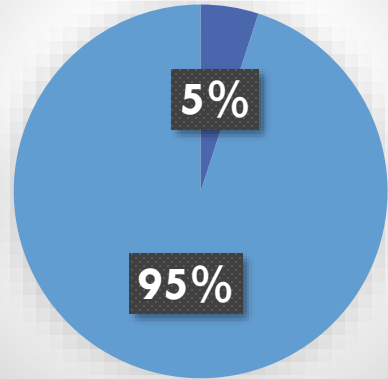


> 68% graduate careers = Our students are going on to become future health professionals...

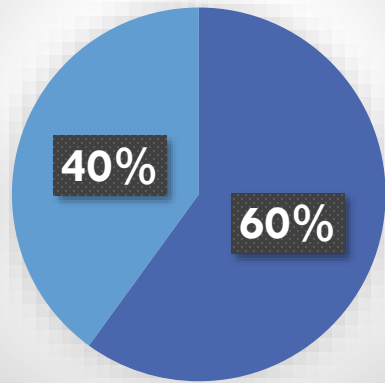
*at time of survey 2021-2022

and programs

Univ. A

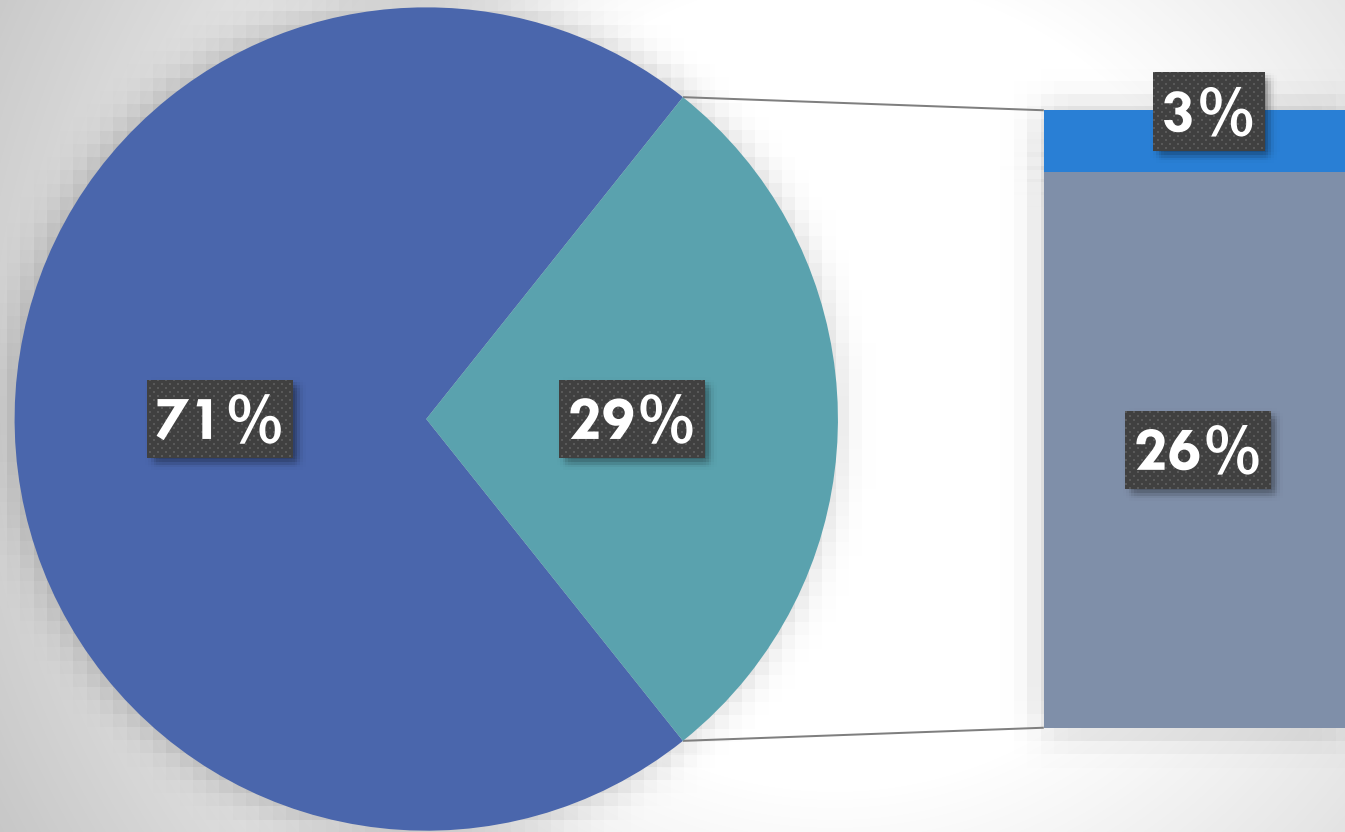


Univ. B



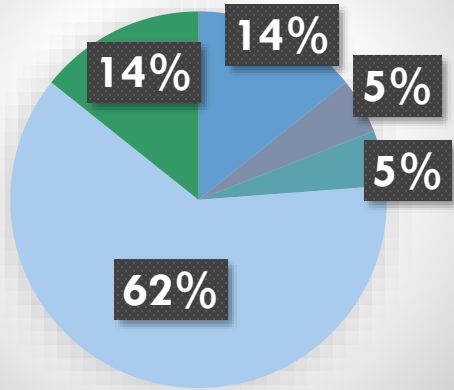
■ Yes ■ No

FIRST GENERATION

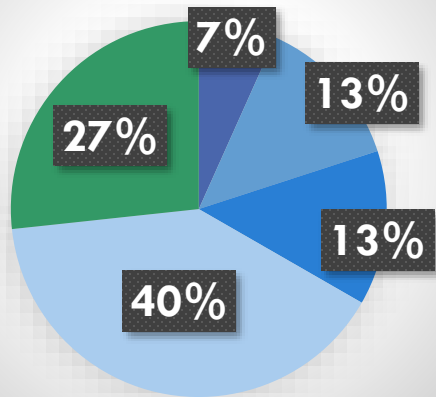


■ Not 1st Generation ■ 1st Gen ■ Univ. A ■ Univ. B

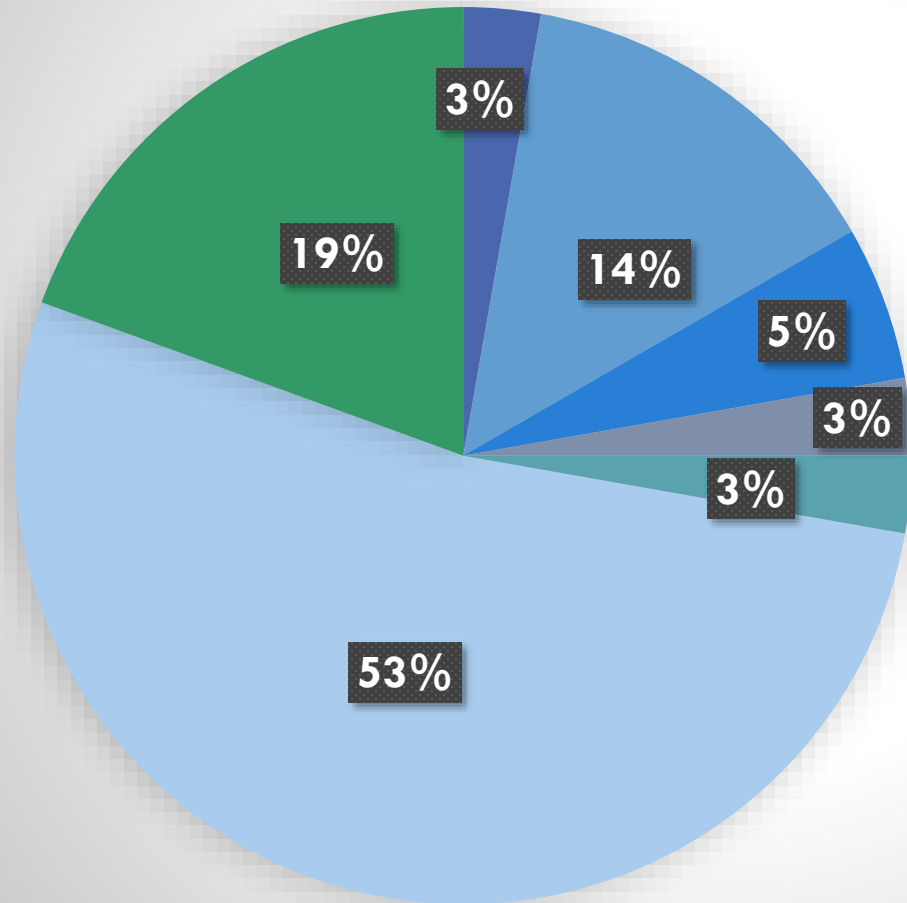
Univ. A



Univ. B



RACE



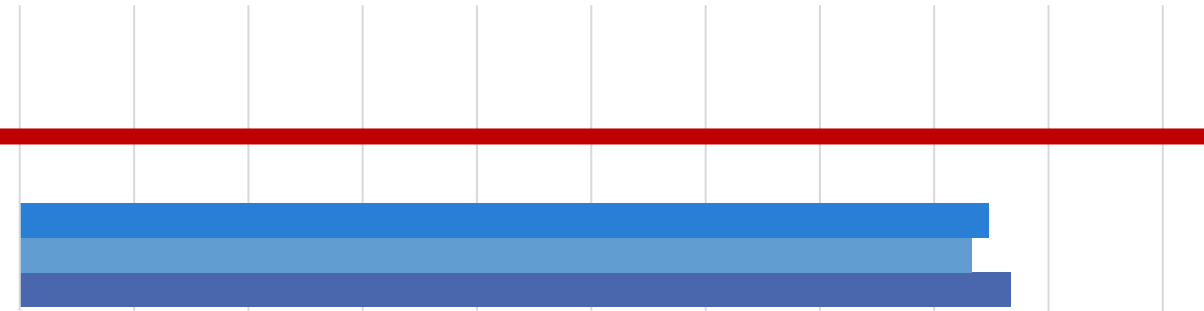
- American Indian / Alaskan native
- Asian American
- Black / African American
- Mestizo
- Middle Eastern
- Non-Hispanic White
- White (Hispanic)

HOW DID THE PROGRAM CONTRIBUTE TO YOUR CAREER ACHIEVEMENTS?

It did not help me



Provided knowledge and skills or promoted interest in veteran care



Helped in preparation for post-baccalaureate careers in psychology, medicine, neuroscience, or other fields of science



Provided knowledge and skills to understand the role of empirical science in informing clinical practice or public policy



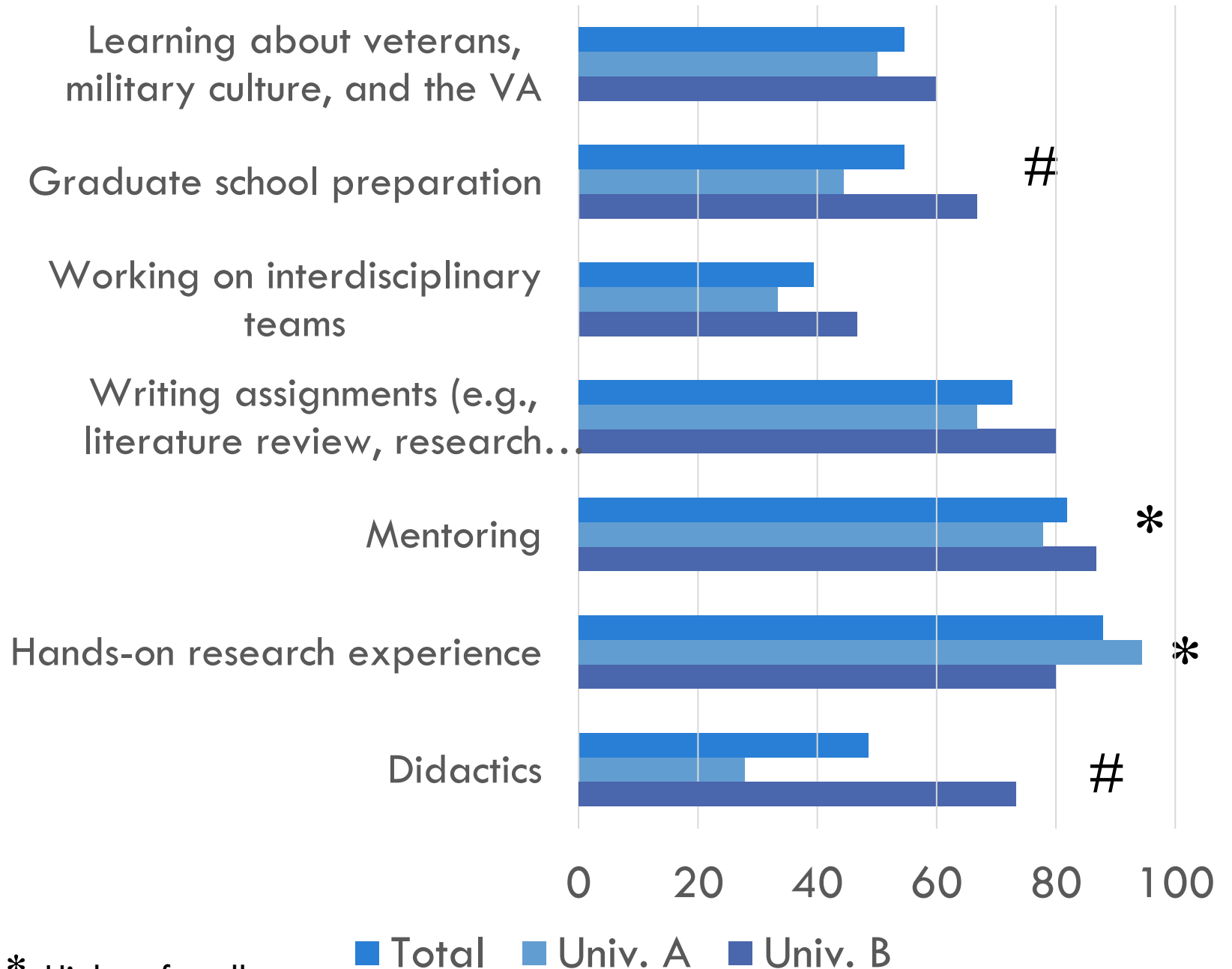
Provided knowledge and skills to understand, participate in, and contribute to the field of mental health research



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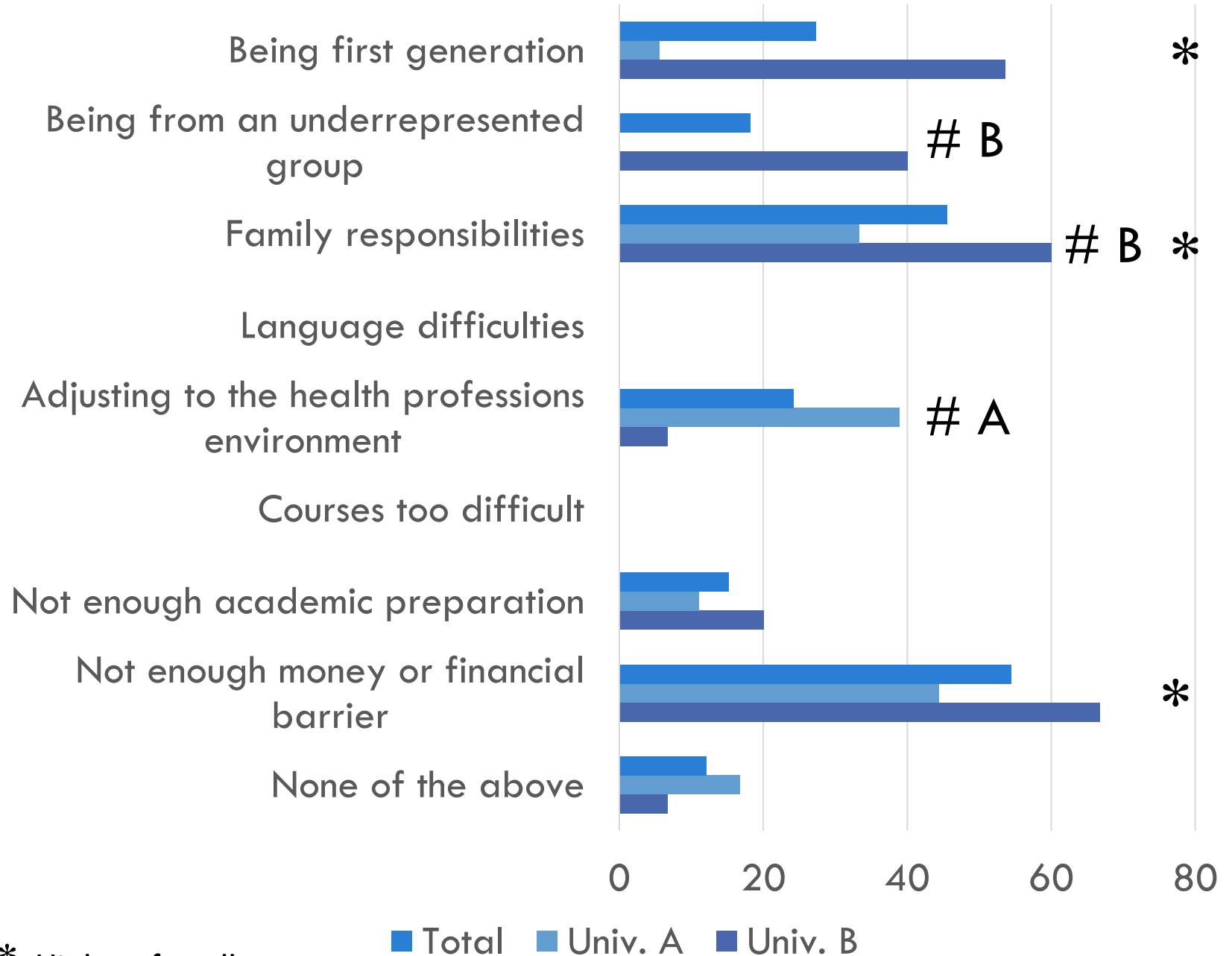
■ Total ■ Univ. A ■ Univ. B

Which component of VA-CERP did you find most useful?



#: Difference between Univ. A & B; *: Highest for all

What have been the three biggest challenges you have faced in your professional development and career?



#: Difference between Univ. A & B; *: Highest for all

■ Total ■ Univ. A ■ Univ. B

Challenges by university type

- University A (i.e., the private university): adjusting to the health professions
- University B (i.e., the public university): first-generation status as obstacle

Across both financial barriers as a primary impediment in their professional development and careers, however

- students from University B are more likely to be non-traditional students who have additional financial responsibilities such as housing and transportation and may be especially vulnerable to monetary difficulties.

Underrepresented identities

- Family responsibilities followed by not enough money
- < 50% believed that their underrepresented identity represented top challenge
- Anecdotally challenges of having to balance school responsibilities with being a primary source of emotional and financial support to their families (e.g., caring for younger siblings or elderly family members).

What are some reflections on these stats from our trainees?



What does this all
mean?

Qualitative and quantitative evidence for program efficacy in objective and subjective measures

Support for elements consistent with broader literature (e.g., mentorship & didactic model)

Highlights relevance of unique elements for VA training (e.g., mental health research, veteran care/military culture)

Under-graduate training in VA works!

Tiered Mentorship

- Individualized mentorships offers support and guidance of marginalized students offering guideline for future professional practice
- Tangible examples that **graduate education is an attainable goal**
- Increasing cultural competency among postdoctoral fellows, current psychologists, and healthcare providers (DOUBLE INVESTMENT IN FIELD!!)

Hands-on Experience

- Access to opportunities that **build skill, help clarify and explore career interests**, & align with skills that graduate programs look for in trainees
- For students in University B, many of these opportunities would not be readily available through their university

Didactic Curriculum

- Offers access to **information and resources** that enable underrepresented trainees to advance in their academic goals and careers (e.g., preparation for graduate school application, scholarships)

Presentation Experience

- Invested mentors are essential for creating **strong professional networks** to build the social capital needed for advancement, research productivity, and grant funding
- **Efficacy, skill and confidence** building (tackling impostor syndrome!)

VA-CERP Impact on Hispanic/ Latino(x) & other Underrepresented Students

What does this mean for workforce diversity?

Undergraduate attrition rates disproportionately impact women and traditionally underrepresented minorities

Gender and racial disparity persist throughout academic career advancement

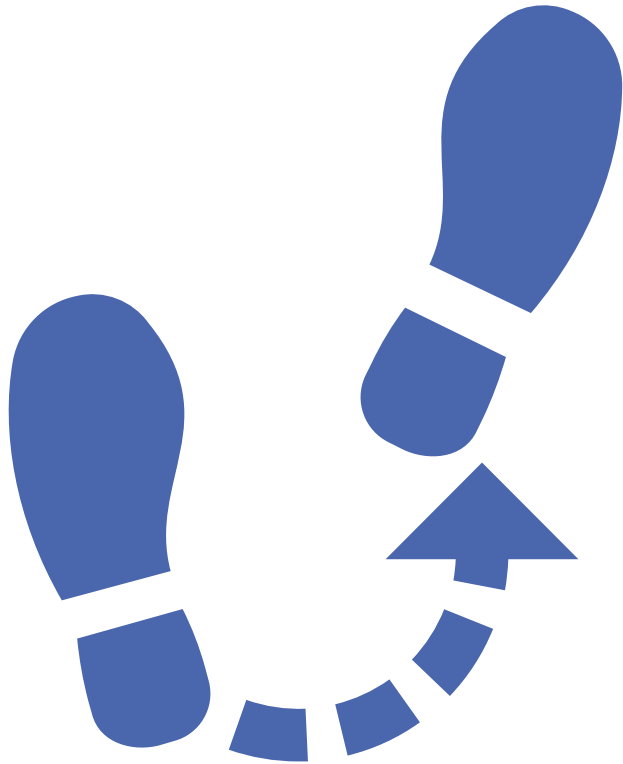
Diversity increasing in undergraduates, BUT mentorship stymied by the lack of representation among senior academic faculty and practitioners

Importance of starting early:

- Alignment with the CCTC's Social Responsibility Tool Kit (CCTC, 2021)
- Developing awareness, accessing resources, drafting materials for graduate school program admissions
- Diversifying the pipeline by collaborating with minority serving institution.

Future replication & expansion of comparable programs →
Promotion of equitable access to advanced healthcare and leadership careers →
GREATER WORKFORCE DIVERSITY

SO HOW DO WE GET THERE?



Our next step: VA-LAUNCH

VA Leveraging Access for Undergraduates to Careers in Healthcare (VA-LAUNCH)

Funded by the Office of Health Equity

Adapted existing model to strategically target individuals from underrepresented backgrounds

Partnering with minority serving institutions (MSIs)

Currently partnering with a historically black college/university (HBCU)

Working on partnership with Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI)

Dreaming Big (And sustainably!)



VA Leveraging Access to Undergraduates Nationwide

Expanding to other MSIs

BIG DREAMS:

Infrastructure embedded within
VHA that can strategically partner
with MSIs



Sustainability

Elements contributing to our success:

- commitment to training
 - a center-specific education core
 - leadership eager to invest in growth from the earliest stages of training
- VA MH providers uniquely equipped
- keenly aware of the need to foster diversity
 - Train-the-trainer model
- Interdisciplinary work within VHA

VHA as launching platform

VHA's National Infrastructure

- Interdisciplinary
- Education and training leader



Undergraduate Minority Serving Institutions



Access to Careers in Healthcare to those Underrepresented backgrounds

- **GREATER WORKFORCE DIVERSITY** ready to address health disparities

Concluding
thoughts from our
trainees



Thanks!

Questions?

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