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RySciMatch 2015: Nurturing Students to Become Scientific Leaders and Innovators

C&B Press- In a learning environment where superior academic standing is the primary focus, experience can be your competitive advantage. Ryerson’s unique science literacy and mentorship program, commonly referred to as “RySciMatch”, was developed to provide Ryerson undergraduate students with an opportunity to pursue their interest in science-based research (See previous articles from October 2013, and June 2014). Furthermore, this initiative has included the empowerment of students to extend their learning beyond the walls of a classroom and begin paving the road to the future with soft skills development.

RySciMatch is a non-credit, certificate course offered to Ryerson undergraduate students who are interested in obtaining research experience and developing their soft skills, such as networking and leadership. The program aims to mix and match undergraduate students (mentees) with senior undergraduates, alumni, or faculty members in the Faculty of Science (FoS). Through this mentorship process, mentees obtain further insight on their field of interest, develop their networking skills, learn to identify research opportunities within the FoS, and further explore science’s diversity outside the classroom.

Ahmad Sidiqi, a former Ryerson alumni from the Department of Chemistry and Biology, helped launch this program in the Winter of 2014, along side Jessica Machado. Ahmad obtained his masters from the University of Toronto and was recently accepted to the Faculty of Medicine at University of British Columbia, but he continues to help facilitate the development of RySciMatch. “…Ahmad has helped design a program that may prove to be an integral part of every science undergraduate student’s experience here at Ryerson” said Jelena Madzarevic, the program director. “After last year’s feedback, we recalibrated the program to include entrepreneurial exposure, an initiative lead by Jessica Machado.”

After its first two years, minor modifications will be made to the RySciMatch program for subsequent sessions. “As of Winter 2016, RySciMatch will be merged with the Chang School Science Mentorship course, CKIH 200, to facilitate the extension of discussions that often begin in the RySciMatch sessions.” said Dr. Bryan Koivisto, Faculty Liaison, “This program will also serve as a pre-entry requirement for the students who wish to join the Experimental Discovery or Science Literacy hubs of the Science Innovation Zone.” “During the RySciMatch sessions, students will be able to engage with panel members to aid in the identification of soft skills necessary to succeed in their career field of choice, followed by the Chang school course, which will allow students to further develop these soft skills.” says Aesha Patel, an undergraduate biology student.

This program consists of approximately 9 modular sessions, see below, covering a broad range of topics, including communication skills, extracurricular activities, and career planning. “I found the RySciMatch program to
be very beneficial to developing my soft skills, but future development of the program should include the addition of a more interactive platform to encourage dialogue beyond the sessions” said Nathan Battersby, a Biology undergraduate.

On behalf of all the participants of RySciMatch, we would like to thank the following people involved in the following programming:

**Week 1 - Mentor and Mentee Orientation and Poster Session** – Dean Imogen Coe for her opening remarks and Faculty of Science for paying for the pizza

**Week 2 – Mentorship, Leadership and Research: Finding your place**
**Panel:** Leslie Bone (Graduate student and WISR), Akeisha Lari (Trimentoring), Tash Jefferies (Health and Lifestyle Expert & Sustainability Author), and Dr. Stefanie Hixson (Postdoctoral fellow in Dr.Art’s laboratory)

**Week 3 – Communication Skills I: Writing (What not to do!)**
**Panel:** Dr. Leslie Campbell, Dr. Lynda McCarthy, and Dr. Warren Wakarchuk

**Week 4 – Relevant Extracurricular Activities at Ryerson**
**Panel:** Dr. Emily Agard (OSOE), Aleksandra Kulesza (Supported learning groups), Kaushiga Pirabaharan (Trimentoring), Jessica Machado (Involvement from a student perspective), and Graham Pearson (Society of Awesome)

**Week 5 – Career Planning: Where to go with your degree**
**Panel:** Ahmad Sidiqi (BSc – Ryerson, MSc – U of T, Faculty of Medicine – UBC), Rebecca Dirnfeld (FoS Career Consultant), Maja Chojnacka (Chemistry, PhD Candidate UoT), Lindsay Jackson (Biology PhD Candidate Ryerson and Let’s Talk Science), and Anne Cisterna (Ryerson Co-op)

**Week 6 – Communication Skills II: Networking and Presentation Skills**
Dr. Bryan Koivisto

**Week 7 – Research Literacy: What does critical thinking mean to you?**
**Panel:** Dr. Micheal Kolios, Dr. Russ Virre, Dr. Joe McPhee, and Dr. Raffi Karshafian

**Week 8 – Innovation and Entrepreneurship at Ryerson**
**Panel:** Dr. Debbie De Lange and Dr. Greg Singer

**Week 9 – Science Innovation Zone, and how you can be a part of it!**
Dr. Bryan Koivisto, Dr. Ted Petroff, Dr. Randy Boyagoda

**Week 10 – Alumni Mentoring Event**
**Panel:** Elaine Corbett and Dennis McCormac (OGI), Dilpreet Kang, Pawel Buczkowicz, Andrew Sousa, and Marcelo Konig Sarkis

**Week 11 – Biosafety Training**
**Guest:** Valerie Phelan (Radiation/Chemical Biosafety Officer)