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Cultivating Inclusive Communities in Physics: What CU-Prime has Learned So Far

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CU-Prime is a student-run organization whose goal is to increase inclusion in the Physics Department at the University of Colorado Boulder, especially for women, people of color, first-generation students, and other underrepresented minorities. Founded in 2013, CU-Prime has grown into a vibrant organization offering three distinct programs to undergraduates: a talk series, a one-credit class, and a mentorship program. Our talks consist of interactive presentations illustrating the process of scientific inquiry and current research, while our class provides early opportunities to engage in that process. Our mentorship program aims to provide long-term support for students in an friendly environment. Fueled by the dedication of undergraduate and graduate student organizers, as well as by the support of a few key administrators, CU-Prime has become an established entity in the department and on campus. CU-Prime is also one of the founding organizations of the Access Network, a new organization for collaboration between similar programs across the nation. While CU-Prime is still new and constantly improving, several lessons are emerging that could benefit similar programs and efforts. We have discovered an abundance of goodwill in the general physics student population, and have been successful in translating volunteers motivation into significant investments of time. However, turning that investment into programs that benefit underrepresented populations has required research, iteration, and guidance. The average physics student lacks expertise for effective outreach and mentoring, which presents a unique opportunity to improve ourselves and the future leaders of our discipline. For example, regular workshops for program leaders have enabled us to more effectively coach talk speakers and mentors in how to effectively serve diverse populations. We are discovering that reaching out to students at all levels of study, including those who are overrepresented, is essential in the process of cultural change and making a lasting impact on the culture of physics.