Introduction: Racial and ethnic minorities, specifically African Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanics, are significantly underrepresented among NIH-funded principal investigators (Shavers et al., 2005). The NIH funds research supplements specifically designed to promote diversity among research scientists studying health disparities and minority health research. This paper focuses on factors that we believe create an environment where minority doctoral students not only gain valuable research experience, but also have the opportunity to thrive both personally and academically.

Method: While the focus of the parent study was to compare the disablement process among Mexican American and White, Non-Hispanic women, the student’s research under the diversity supplement expanded the parent study to include the disability experience of African American men. Being afforded the opportunity to learn how to conduct health disparities research over the last year provides unique and invaluable experiences in data management, recruitment, data analysis, and scholarly publications and presentations. Further, the diversity supplement provided opportunities to develop skills that will foster the development of an independent investigator and future academic mentor.

Results: The benefits of an NIH-sponsored diversity supplement are vast, but we have identified what we consider to be integral pieces of a “successful” mentoring relationship and supplement experience. We will share key factors that we have found to be instrumental to the mentoring relationship in hopes of providing direction for faculty and students working together during a diversity supplement.

Discussion: The mentorship piece of a diversity supplement clearly goes above and beyond the normal educational process planned for students in a graduate program. As a result, there are unique strategies that must be used in order to ensure that the goals of the supplement are fulfilled. Initially, differences and similarities in background, culture, and experiences between the faculty and student need to be acknowledged and appreciated. Faculty and students alike must embrace flexibility and openness regarding each other’s research ideas and experiences. The diversity experience should be tailored in a way that respects and nurtures student’s passions, while simultaneously aligning with the expectations of the faculty mentor.