

Female and Gender-Diverse Mentorship Program

Fisheries and Marine Institute

by Shelby Fudge, Georgina White



Figure 1: Lunch & Learn participants. These sessions empower women and gender diverse students to thrive in marine and ocean careers.

Despite ongoing efforts to improve diversity and inclusion, female and gender-diverse individuals continue to be underrepresented across the marine and ocean industries, particularly in leadership roles, vessel operations, and technology-intensive fields. These sectors have historically been male-dominated, presenting persistent barriers that can impact recruitment, retention, and career advancement for female and gender-diverse individuals.

Mentorship is widely recognized as a powerful tool for improving student confidence, retention, and professional preparedness. For individuals entering male-dominated industries, mentorship provides access to guidance, encouragement, and real-world insight that may otherwise be difficult to obtain.

In September 2025, the Office of Career Integrated Learning and the School of Ocean Technology teamed up to create an incentive that brought together current [Fisheries and Marine Institute](#) students who identify as

female or gender diverse and connected them with alumni who are working in the ocean sector. The Marine Institute's Females and Gender-Diverse Mentorship Program was developed to empower young women who are just starting off in their chosen careers. Connecting current students with alumni has allowed the development of meaningful relationships that extend beyond the classroom. These connections foster career guidance, networking opportunities, exposure to real work environments, and skill development that aid their entry into the workforce.

Mentors met with their assigned mentee at least once a month, with discussions focused on topics such as career pathways, workplace expectations, certification requirements, confidence building, work-life balance, and more. In some cases, mentees had the opportunity to participate in vessel visits with their mentor, providing valuable firsthand exposure to the industry and a deeper understanding of professional expectations in the field.

To date, the program has established itself as a highly effective initiative, engaging approximately 22 mentees and 20 mentors across six programs. In addition to the mentorship connections, the program has hosted two Lunch & Learn events (Figure 1) designed to foster networking, facilitate knowledge sharing, and strengthen relationships between participants. These sessions were generously sponsored by [Oceans Advance](#), highlighting the valuable support of industry partners in enhancing student experiences. One of the events took place on the Marine Institute campus, while the other was hosted at the [Co-Innovation Centre](#), providing participants with diverse settings to connect and collaborate.

Mentorship not only fosters meaningful one-to-one connections but also creates opportunities for individuals from diverse programs and backgrounds to come together, share perspectives, and learn from one another. The Lunch & Learn sessions extended these connections beyond individual mentor-mentee pairs, providing a welcoming space for open conversation, relationship building, and broader, more fluid engagement across the program.

The mentorship program would not be possible without the support and commitment of our female alumni, whose knowledge and industry expertise enrich the mentorship experience. By sharing their journeys, challenges, and successes, they provide students with a clearer vision of what a career in the marine industry can look like and inspire them to pursue their goals with determination and confidence.

Looking ahead, the program aims to expand to reach more students and alumni. More Lunch & Learns will be hosted, and other networking events will be held to strengthen connections between participants. Guest speakers will also be invited to share their expertise, providing insights on a range of topics related to career development and professional growth. These sessions will cover areas such as effective communication, leadership, teamwork,

problem-solving, and other essential soft skills, giving mentees practical tools and guidance to navigate the workplace successfully. The program also seeks to deepen partnerships with industry sponsors, creating new avenues for support and collaboration.

Continued support is essential to sustaining and expanding these impactful experiences. Donations to the mentorship program directly support initiatives such as Lunch & Learns and community-building events, ensuring that participants can continue to connect, learn, and grow together.

If you would like to learn more about getting involved, whether through sponsorship, signing up as a mentor, or participating as a guest speaker, please reach out to shelby.fudge@mi.mun.ca and georgina.white@mi.mun.ca.

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