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Effects of a Peer-To-Peer Mentoring Program: Supporting First-Year College Students' Academic and Social Integration on Campus

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Effects of a Peer-To-Peer Mentoring Program: Supporting First-Year College
Students' Academic and Social Integration on Campus

Abstract

This paper presents findings from a peer-to-peer mentoring program supporting ethnically diverse first-generation students at a mid-sized university in the Southwest. Research on mentoring during the undergraduate years has placed emphasis on the quality of lived-collegiate experiences from both a peer-mentor and mentee perspective (Crisp, Baker, Griffen, Lunsford, & Pifer, 2017). Using a mixed methods approach, two survey instruments and qualitative analysis, interviews with peer-mentors and mentees suggested student development occurred through various means: (i) academics, (ii) university involvement, and (iii) the reinforcement of friendship. These findings reinforce theory first drawn from Tinto's (1993) student integration perspectives (e.g., academic and social integration). Peer-mentors fulfilled their roles, while mentees who were actively involved in the program reported to have benefitted the most. The effectiveness of the mentoring program highlighted contributions to enhancing, at least one of the following, for all mentees: first-year experience, degree of college involvement, and overall retention rate.

Keywords: Mentoring, Peer-Mentors, Mentees

Effects of a Peer-To-Peer Mentoring Program: Supporting First-Year College Students' Involvement, Experience, and Retention

The influence of peer mentoring on undergraduate student development is an area of research that has increasingly become critical for institutions of higher education that are interested in understanding the impact of student-centered approaches to student engagement. The role that mentoring can have on students, in part, is based on characteristics and opportunities that foster relationship building, especially in the design of programming that pairs peer-mentors with mentees. Mentoring functions as a means to support the formation of meaningful developmental relationships (Irby, 2014), potentially promoting student well-being and a range of competencies (e.g., personal, social, academic, and civic). Specifically, when participation is highlighted among peer-mentors and mentees, there is potential for developing ongoing significant relationships that reinforce positive student growth and development (Ward, Thomas, & Disch, 2012). This can especially be the case when examining aspects of mentoring programs effects on first-year diverse student experiences, as students have been reported to attribute their successes and positive outcomes to the mentoring they received through peer-mentors (Zevallos & Washburn, 2014).

Rendón (2009) suggested that meeting the needs and expectations of ethnically diverse first-generation college students requires best practices that include helping students develop a sense of belonging at their respective institutions and creating opportunities to investment in the student's own capacities, strengths, and potential. As such, an important benefit of high quality mentoring programing on student engagement and success is that students gain access to transformational experiences, in particular opportunities to practice peer modeling, personal reflection, and one-on-one social skills (Bunting & Williams, 2017). Our paper reinforces these

combined themes by examining the impacts of student participation in a peer-to-peer mentoring program situated within a 4-year public midsized Southwestern university.

Diverse First-Generation College Students and Mentoring

Although today more students are enrolled in universities in the United States than any previous time period, by comparison, white college students still far outpace their ethnically diverse, historically underrepresented, college student counterparts in both overall enrollment and completion rates (Snyder, DeBrey, & Dillow, 2016). In addition, accounting for all recent U.S. students enrolled in institutions of higher education—over 30% are understood as first-generation college students (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2016), who are broadly defined as those whose parents have not earned a 4-year degree. Also, in this demographic, in addition to being the first in their families to enroll in college, 50% of all Latinx and 40% of all African-American student populations accounted for the majority represented within this total segment (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2016).

There are commonalities and challenges that exist among many first-generation college students, and Latinx as well as African-American students are no different. Areas that have been highlighted are managing their university positioning including, academic preparation, maximizing involvement on campus, and having a clear understanding of role expectations of themselves and their faculty instructors (Davis, 2010). It is worth noting that, ethnically diverse college students may be faced with resolving a combination of undue circumstances that may include financial difficulties in terms of accounting for the total cost of attending college, possible far less pre-collegiate academic preparation, and potential cultural incongruences due in part to higher education institutions being primarily interested in applying culture-general and

not culture-specific modes of student engagement and academic learning (Salas, Aragon, Alandejani, & Timpson, 2014).

These trends suggest that significant proportions of diverse first-generation college students can be identified on college campuses and are simultaneously likely greatly influenced by the structuring of the given institution (e.g., missions; public, private, and historical), its climate (e.g., presence of intellectual, cultural, and welcoming spaces; including diverse student and faculty presence), access to resources (e.g., financial, student support services, and peer leadership opportunities), and consistency in the quality of encouragement that students receive to participate and be fully immersed on campus.

Mentoring Programming

The literature on collegiate mentorship programming in the U.S. has contributed to defining mentoring and its benefits in higher education for students, while also noting frameworks for conceptualizing the roles of both peer-mentors and mentees (Jacobi, 1991; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Gershenfeld, 2014). Internationally, by comparison, mentoring programming in higher education similarly is marked by attempting to distinguish between roles of mentoring and coaching students within institutions of higher education, their benefits and applications, based on varying forms of mentoring and underlining theoretical links (Roger & Tremblay, 2003; Andrews & Clark, 2011; Leidenfrost, Strassnig, Schütz, Carbon, & Schabmann, 2014). In reviewing both U.S. and international perspectives, there is consensus around benefits of mentoring programming within the collegiate setting. As well as, the prospect of scaling such programming to specifically target programming designed to serve various student demographics, including considerations for roles that institutions and faculty have in implementing programming (Lunsford, Crisp, Dolan, & Wuetherick, 2017).

The relationships among theoretical frameworks applied to mentorship programs depend on intended student outcomes which depend on how peer-mentors are envisioned to be utilized based on the needs of the specific student population (Gershenfeld, 2014). Therefore, clarity about the set of expectations of mentorship programming—including any mentoring done by faculty, staff, or student peers should keep in view the consistent promotion of the strengths of students which in turn reinforces the student's overall development. Mentors who are experienced upperclassmen helping to develop less experienced student counterparts (Cox, Yang, & Dicke-Bohmann, 2014) can be a critical means for meeting the needs of first year and transfer students. Taken together, research on mentoring during the undergraduate years is timely, as students who are encouraged to either participate as the peer-mentor or mentee gain opportunities to construct meaning from their individualized mentoring experiences, thus the meaning-making process can be translated into enhancing of the student's quality of lived-collegiate experience (Crisp et al., 2017).

Theory

As a theoretical foundation, we highlight Tinto's academic integration model (1993). According to Tinto's model (1993), student integration into an institution can occur along two facets, the academic and the social. Academic integration occurs when students become connected to the intellectual life of the college, while social integration occurs when students create relationships and connections outside of the classroom (Tinto, 1993). A main premise is that if colleges provide enough structured opportunities for students to engage with the institution, students will become integrated into the college and persist at a higher rate. Students in the peer-to-peer mentoring program were mentored by upper-classmen who were both academically and socially invested in the university. This is in addition to mentees receiving

advice and assistance from their peer-mentors, along with a range of academic and social opportunities to become better integrated to the college environment. In particular, the student learning that took place consisted of mentees becoming better acquainted and encouraged to use the following on-campus services: the tutoring center, career services, and the academic advising offices. Of importance, is reinforcing this overarching theoretical basis, through participation in this peer-to-peer mentoring program students were also regularly encouraged to participate in a variety of opportunities to interact with faculty members and network with professionals in their respective fields of study.

Current Study

We examined the effectiveness of a peer-to-peer mentoring program within a midsized Southwestern public university, of which continuously enrolls large percentages of historically underrepresented ethnic-racial minority students (roughly 40%). This study is presented out of recent years of having developed, monitored, and redesigned this mentoring program. Students who participated in the peer-to-peer mentoring program received a series of quality educational enhancing experiences necessary for successful transitioning to the college setting. The purpose of this program was to support freshmen in their transitions to student life in college. The program emphasized the importance of academic excellence and personal growth. Freshmen students were paired up with current student leaders who exhibited a balance between academics and overall campus involvement. In relation to educational attainment, mechanisms to enhance the quality of education received among ethnically diverse first-generation college students have the potential to meaningfully effect successful college adaptation. As such, our study advances this perspective. Specifically, we posit that the benefits of an institutionalized peer-to-peer mentoring program are tremendous, not only complementary to institutions of higher education

student populations, but send a clear message from the institution that administrators, faculty, and staff see value in mentorship at the student level and vice-versa, promoting student success and retention. We provide insights into means of positively reinforcing ethnically diverse first-generation college students so that they can develop academically and socially, ultimately integrating well into the college setting.

Methods

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the mentoring effectiveness of this peer-to-peer mentoring program, our study presents results of a mixed method analysis. First, qualitative analysis explored peer-mentors' and mentees' perceptions of the mentoring process as it relates to improving ethnically diverse first-generation college students mentoring experiences in college. Husserl's phenomenology approach (1989) was selected to describe participants' lived experienced within the mentoring program. Using purposive sampling, interviews from mentees and peer-mentors were later conducted and analyzed in order to gain further in-depth information. The interviews were approximately 20 to 30 minutes in length, exploring the phenomenology of program effectiveness by looking at the themes of mentoring experiences and expectations. Participants were encouraged to give a full description of their experience, including their thoughts, feelings, images, and memories. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed by developing meaningful units from the data and analyzing emerging themes.

Second, the quantitative analysis consisted of two survey instruments designed for each of the stakeholders in the program: the mentees and peer-mentors. Utilizing Dodson, Montgomery, and Brown's minority mentoring model (2009), the aim is for researchers to develop measurable outcomes and item specifications which assess the mentoring program effectiveness through use of themes arisen from the students' mentoring experiences and

expectations. Questions on the survey were as follow: how satisfied were you with the matching of your peer-mentor, how often did you meet with your peer-mentor, in what areas was your peer-mentor the most helpful in, what areas would you have liked for your peer-mentor to have been of more assistance, and how was your overall experience with your peer-mentor etc. Additional questions were included pertaining to the mentoring program and other questions were geared towards their relationship with their peer-mentor and others about their experience.

Context

Participants of the mentoring program consisted of a diverse pool of mentees and peer-mentors, all who attended a mid-size university in the Southwest region of the United States. There was a diverse representation among stakeholders in regards to race, ethnicity, gender, classification, majors, geographic upbringing, parental education, socioeconomic status, and career aspirations. Peer-mentors were selected from a diverse and competitive pool of applicants in order to ensure wide representation from which mentees could select a peer-mentor from. Peer-mentors were mainly selected based on quality of their applications, interviews, and their ability to demonstrate mastery in balancing their academic and social lives. This was proven by their average GPA of a 3.0 and above and leadership involvement in various organizations.

Also, all the peer-mentors were heavily involved in at least three campus organizations where they held at least one leadership position. They all had at least one on-campus job or internship and they were all recognizable leaders on campus who were highly supported as evidenced by their letters of recommendation. The primary reason for selecting these students as peer-mentors was because they were well-rounded college students who demonstrate the capacity of mentoring a group of first-year students. As established in the literature, there are many benefits that come from students' active involvement and participation in organizations

outside of the classroom (Tinto, 1993). As for the mentees, everyone who joined the mentoring program did so voluntarily base on an invitation that all first-year students received upon completion of orientation. However, only the first 50 students who applied and agreed to all of the mentoring program's expectations were accepted into the program.

Instrumentation

The intention of the survey and interviews was to measure whether the peer-to-peer mentoring program did enhance first-year student participants' academic and social integration on campus. Survey items for the participants were designed by the researchers and revised the second year based on the findings from the first year to ensure readability and precision (Ritter & Sue, 2007). A few open-ended items were included to allow for more in-depth perspectives. Each survey had individual choice items with a closed-ended Likert-type scale that highlighted the extent to which the peer-mentors and the program, itself, were able to assist the mentees' college involvement, experience, and first semester retention. Each survey included multiple (N = 30) four-point Likert-type scale items for this study or binary choices of yes or no. Possible responses included (4) very satisfied, (3) satisfied, (2) somewhat satisfied, and (1) unsatisfied.

In addition, approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board for the research protocols used in this study. All participants signed an informed consent form prior to the interview session. Purposive sampling was used to interview both mentees and peer-mentors about the effectiveness of the peer-mentoring program in order to capture a more holistic perspective of the overall program. Participants were selected based on a variety of characteristics to help avoid interviewing students with similar experiences and perspectives. All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. Interviewees were also informed that their answers were based solely on their honest opinion and experience. The interviews were

transcribed and analyzed by developing meaningful units from the data and analyzing emerging themes. A total of six (N=6) students were interviewed using purposeful sampling to ensure a diverse representation. There were three mentees and three peer-mentors, with an equal representation of male to female ratio. Of the six interviewees, three were Hispanic/Latino, two were African-American, and one was Asian-American.

The interviews consisted of over ten questions, with additional probing questions. Key questions that were asked were as follow: How did your peer-mentor help you adjust to college; in what areas do you feel that your mentor helped you in the most; and how did the mentoring program and/or your mentor help you academically? The interview questions were developed in order to obtain more in-depth information about the effectiveness of the mentoring program and the type of and quality relationship peer-mentors held with their mentees.

A separate data-set was created which contained all of the comments made from both the peer-mentors and mentees. During each interview, the researcher responded to the interviewees by asking them follow-up questions about the topics that they initiated. Interviews lasted anywhere from 25 to 35 minutes and they were all audio-recorded and immediately transcribed for data analysis. For confidentiality purposes, none of the students' names were recorded and all interview data was stored in a locked cabinet. In the following section, the findings from the data collection and analysis will be presented and further discussed followed by the study's limitations and the conclusion.

Results

The findings from both the survey and interviews revealed that the mentoring program enhanced participants' college experience, campus involvement and retention. The survey findings will be shared and discussed first, followed by the interview data.

Survey Findings
College Experience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (86%) of students expressed that the mentoring program helped to improve their overall college experience
Mentor-Matching <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (80%) expressed that they were satisfied with the matching of their peer-mentor
Campus Involvement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (93%) of mentees mention that their peer-mentors encouraged or helped them to become involved on campus
College Retention <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (63%) of mentees reported that the mentoring program influenced their decision to remain on campus for the following semester

Based on the survey findings, the majority (86%) of the mentees expressed that the mentoring program did help to improve their overall college experience. This was significant for the program, especially since over three-fourths of the participants identified as being a part of an underserved group (i.e., first-generation, lower socioeconomic status, students of color) which commonly have unsatisfactory college experiences compared to students whose parents are college graduates, come from a middle-class background, or identify with the dominant racial group (Tate, 2017). Another major component that greatly contributed to mentees' positive college experience was their high (80%) satisfaction rate with the matching of their peer-mentor. This was a result of mentees having the option to self-select their own peer-mentor compared to previous years where they were assigned a peer-mentor based on their undergraduate major. This method of self-selection allowed mentees to be held more accountable for both establishing and maintaining a good relationship with their peer-mentor.

Based on the survey findings, mentees who choose not to self-select their peer-mentors felt less of a commitment to maintain a relationship with their peer-mentor and were less satisfied with their matching. Self-selection of peer-mentors was also important since advanced

research on undergraduate mentorship in higher education is rooted in gaining further understanding on the types of relationships that are formed when pairing peer-mentors and mentees, especially for ethnically diverse first-generation college student populations (Crisp et al., 2017).

Moreover, approximately 93% of mentees who completed the survey mention that their peer-mentors encouraged or helped them to become more involved on campus. The top three areas mentees reported that their peer-mentors were of the most assistance were the following: informing them about campus resources (i.e., tutoring center, career center, wellness center, etc.), helping them adjust to college by giving them advice on the do's and don'ts, and inviting them to attend campus events. A top priority of this mentoring program was to ensure that mentees had a positive first-year experience based on their campus involvement. According to research, a positive first-year experience helps to increase first-year students' college retention (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006) whereas; their campus involvement exposes them to the various resources and opportunities available on campus.

Lastly, more than half (63%) of the mentees reported that the mentoring program influenced their decision to remain on campus for the following semester. Students who did not return to the university left for reasons that were out of the program's control such as, students transferring to another institution, family or personal reasons, or financial issues. Also, students who were not as involved or committed to the program were less likely to be involved on campus and more likely to be placed on academic probation. However, students who were actively involved on campus, despite their level of commitment to the mentoring program, shared similar retention rates as those students who were committed to the program. Participants' end of year retention rate and GPA was obtained in order to see whether the mentoring program

positively impacted mentees' academic success. Overall, the survey findings demonstrated that the mentoring program was helpful in helping students adjust to college, specifically, those students who were active in the program. The findings from both the peer-mentors and mentees' interviews are shared in the following sections.

Interview Finding 1: Emphasis on Academics (Academic Socialization)

The findings of our study indicate that the effectiveness of this peer-to-peer mentoring program did help to increase the academic and social integration of first-year students on campus. The three most common roles that peer-mentors took on for their mentees were serving as a study buddy, tutor, and academic/accountability coach. All three mentees who were interviewed expressed how their peer-mentor helped them adjust to college by being a point of reference in finding out about various academic resources on campus. For instance, peer-mentors strongly encouraged their mentees to utilize the tutoring center. It was common for peer-mentors to schedule times to study with their mentees. Some peer-mentors even invited their mentees to join them at the library to study together.

Through such study groups, peer-mentors were able to teach their mentees how to properly study and prioritize their time. Peer-mentors took their study tactics a step further by serving as tutors for those mentees who were struggling in subject areas in which the peer-mentor was strongly competent. One peer-mentor mentioned how he constantly proofread his mentees' writing assignments whenever they studied together, "*I would look over their paper and edited it with them.*" Another peer-mentor mention that anytime she could not help one of her mentees on a specific subject area, she would "*...direct them to someone I personally knew who could help them in their studies.*" As a result of the peer-mentor's strong emphasis on academics, many of the mentees became more comfortable in seeking outside tutoring.

All three mentees who were interviewed also shared how their peer-mentors served as accountability partners for them especially, when they were getting off track. For many peer-mentors, it was important to help their mentees avoid some of the same mistakes they had made. As students themselves, peer-mentors knew many of the troubles, worries, and temptations their mentees faced. Therefore, they knew how important it was to intervene with certain mentees' about not procrastinating, skipping classes, or not taking college seriously. One peer-mentor expressed his reason, "...*I knew that if they started off bad (academically) it was going to be a hard road to climb but if you start off at the top and falter a little bit, you'll be ok, for the most part.*" Conversations about having their priorities mixed up were other common topics most peer-mentors had with at least one of their mentees. According to one of the mentees that were interviewed, "*having those conversations with my peer-mentor about taking college seriously was definitely something I needed to hear in order to stay focused and get my act together.*" Such conversations became common and acceptable since most of the peer-mentors had established close relationships with their mentees.

Another component of academic excellence emphasized by peer-mentors was the need for their mentees to establish relationships with professors. The close proximity of age the peer-mentors had with their mentees made them more susceptible to their peer-mentors' advice particularly, after trust was established. According to two of the mentees interviewed, they looked up to their peer-mentors mainly because they could relate to them on a more personal level than they would with a faculty or staff mentor. Some mentees immediately saw the direct benefit of forming a close relationship with their professors. One mentee shared how, "...*establishing a relationship with some of my professors helps take away my fear of asking them for help,*" while another peer-mentor spoke about the employment opportunity she was

given by one of her professors. Both students followed the advice their peer-mentors gave them about establishing relationships with faculty and staff, and were able to reap the benefits as first-year students.

Interview Finding 2: Emphasis on Involvement (University Access and Participation)

In addition to serving as academic tutors/coaches, the interviews revealed how peer-mentors reinforced the importance of their mentees to get involved on campus. Peer-mentors did this by encouraging their mentees to join a campus-organization, volunteer, or attend campus events. Through their involvement and participation on campus, the three most common themes mentees shared were: their increase sense of feeling a part of the university, making connections with other students, and stress relief. One mentee mentioned how she joined the same student organization as her peer-mentor which allowed her to connect with other students and feel a part of the campus. She goes on to emphasize how it also, “*allowed for further interaction*” between her peer-mentor and herself which helped to build a closer relationship between the two. This same peer-mentor introduced her friends to her mentees, allowing her mentees to become better acquainted with other college students. Another mentee shared how becoming involved in non-academic activities allowed him to, “*become better acquainted and comfortable with navigating the campus*” since he was able to meet other students and lose the fear of stepping out of his “*comfort zone.*”

Moreover, peer-mentors made sure to stress the importance of not becoming overly involved. Instead, they stressed the importance of becoming involved in the right organizations that will help to enhance mentees’ leadership, academic, and career goals. Social clubs and intramural sports were included since they too helped to support students’ sense of belonging on campus, as well as, help college students release stress and network with other students. For

example, one peer-mentor spoke about the advice he gave one of his mentees, “...*I asked him to prioritize which organization will benefit him most and though he dropped some he continued to do rugby which I encouraged him to do because you do need a social aspect, and it’s actually exercise as well.*” Like this peer-mentor, the other mentors agreed that becoming involved in intramural sports or other clubs helped their mentees relieve stress in a healthy manner. As long as the extracurricular activity did not interfere with their academics, peer-mentors encouraged it.

Peer-mentors also encouraged their mentees to get involved so they could have exposure to other students, faculty, and staff who could serve as resources to them and help them jump start their future careers. As one peer-mentor mentioned, “*If you are surrounded by a successful circle of friends then they will also rub off on you. You all will benefit from one another through methods of studying, or better study habits, or better habits in general.*” Whether mentees selected the right crowd of friends or not, their peer-mentors were sure to exemplify the necessary traits and habits required of successful college students such as, placing top-priority on studying and strategically chosen student activities to get involved in.

Interview Finding 3: Emphasis on Friendship (Sense of Belonging and Validation)

Furthermore, all three of the mentees who were interviewed expressed a huge amount of gratitude towards the mentoring program specifically, in regards to having an immediate “*older friend*” or “*a big brother/sister*” in the person of their peer-mentor. Many of the mentees felt that their transition from high school to college was positive because of their peer-mentor. One mentee expressed how having a peer-mentor, “...*gave me a friend right off the bat in college so I wouldn’t be by myself and there was someone to answer all my questions, whether it was about class, or my dining dollars. Anything I had questions about, I knew she would be there to answer my questions or if I needed anything she would text me.*”

Another student referred to her peer-mentor as someone she could ask, “*Like all the unanswered questions everyone else kept avoiding.*” With so many students having trouble adjusting to the open environment of college it was helpful for many mentees to have someone they could talk to who was close in age and who could relate to the same issues or concerns they were currently experiencing. Two of the mentees shared how they were dealing with personal issues but felt comfortable enough to vent and seek advice from their peer-mentors. However, peer-mentors made certain that they set the proper boundaries to ensure respect was always a top priority. Despite the closeness in age, many mentees had the utmost respect for their peer-mentor.

Moreover, the level of dedication that peer-mentors gave their mentees surpassed their obligations and the expectations set by both the program and their mentees. It was not uncommon for some peer-mentors to take their mentees to lunch or the grocery store. As mentioned in the interviews and surveys, friendship was very important to most, if not all first-year students in this program. One mentee mentioned how, “*knowing I had friends here just made me want to come back*” because her friends became a strong support system for her. Overall, peer-mentors helped their mentees beyond academics and campus involvement. Many peer-mentors made their mentees “*feel more at home*” or motivated their mentees to stay focused, despite the stress of classes. Peer-mentors did a great job of keeping their mentee’s informed and answered all their questions, regardless of the topic. If peer-mentors were unable to answer their mentees questions they would find the correct answer through other channels. Unfortunately, a few mentees were not open or comfortable asking their peer-mentor certain questions, while others felt that they were well informed about college and didn’t need to ask.

Study Limitations

While the findings of this study were favorable towards improving the structure of the mentoring program and enhancing peer-mentors' training, it is important to interpret them based on its context. After all, this study was conducted at a mid-sized Southwestern university within the United States, which may reflect a variety of cultural, demographic, and geographic biases, among many other limitations. Thus, one methodological limitation consists of the lack of generalizability of findings since this study was only conducted at a single institution. Like many other institutional mentoring programs, this program was designed for a particular student population (i.e., first-year students). This also limits the generalizability and replicability of mentoring programs from which researchers and practitioners can make comparisons or draw conclusions for their own programs or institutions.

Other forms of biases that affected participants' responses included the amount of time and the level of commitment mentees had to the program. For example, mentees who were more committed to the program spoke more favorably about their peer-mentor and the mentoring program overall. These students were also more academically and socially inclined. However, students who were not as involved with the mentoring program were less likely to speak favorably of the program or complete the survey. Since every mentee in the program did not complete the survey, some level of biasedness exists within the survey findings. Also, how peer-mentors and mentees were recruited and selected by the mentoring program greatly affects the program's learning outcomes. The author's identity and relationship with the interviewees may have affected the study in regards to what the interviewees felt comfortable in sharing or withholding.

Additional limitations of this study consist of the assessments of the program's effectiveness in relation to the mentoring program's objectives. The program's survey assessment was not meaningfully connected to students' relationship with their peer-mentors, making it difficult to draw conclusions specific to the impact and influence of peer-mentoring. Therefore, interviews were conducted that included more specific outcome measures that clearly connected to students' mentoring experiences. Another methodological limitation in understanding the outcomes of mentoring is the lack of control groups. This makes it difficult to compare learning outcomes between those students who received peer-mentors versus those students who did not. Nonetheless, despite the limitations of this study there are still many findings that can contribute to the existing literature on the subject.

Discussion

Analysis of the data revealed that this peer-to-peer mentoring program was effective in enhancing a diverse group of first-year college students' academic and social integration on campus through a positive first-year experience, increased college involvement, and sense of belonging. A considerable amount of attention was placed on the mentorship program's expectations. By doing so we ensured that student outcomes aligned with the program's vision (Gershenfeld, 2014) which included that peer-mentors would offer friendship, help, advice, and support to their mentees so they could have an easier time acclimating to their new surroundings. After all, participation in collegiate mentorship programming suggests peers-mentors and mentees can mutually benefit from consistent interactions and engagement (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Gershenfeld, 2014), especially when organized and clearly defined. In most cases, peer-mentors fulfilled their role however; one mentee's interview centered on the role mentees wished their

peer-mentors would have taken such as, doing a better job of informing them about campus resources and events.

Nonetheless, mentees who were actively involved in the program and met biweekly with their peer-mentor reported to have benefitted the most from the program in the areas of having a positive first-year experience, becoming actively involved on campus, and returning the next semester in good standing. However, students who lost interest in the program for either lack of commitment or no longer finding the program necessary still reported to having a positive first-year experience because they were actively involved in non-academic activities. Overall, every student participant that left the program received at least some sort of academic or social assistance. While this mentoring program aimed to increase the social and academic integration of first-year students at the university, what was found throughout the process was that peer-mentorship relationships were largely impacted by the quality of relationship peer-mentors were able to establish with their mentees. Mentees who connected with their peer-mentor on a more personal and social level, were more inclined to make use of all the information and resources their peer-mentors shared with them.

Whereas, mentees who did not establish a close relationship with their peer-mentor, whether it was conflict of schedule, lack of interest, or not a good mentee-mentor match, were less likely to be fully engaged with the mentoring program. Of those mentees who were less involved in the program, a few still managed to prosper academically and socially on their own, but the majority struggled in at least one of the two areas. Hence, the structure of the program, clarity in the expectations, and the relationships established by the peer-mentors, were also influential in the academic and social integration of the mentees. Mentees who were actively engaged in the program reported more favorable responses and were more inclined to excel

academically and socially than mentees who were less committed. The findings undoubtedly stress the importance of peer-mentors' relationship with their mentees, as well as the mentee's ability to put forth effort into establishing such relationships.

Conclusion

In summary, students who participated in this mentoring program learned a variety of high-impact educational practices that helped them to successfully transition into the collegiate setting. The majority of the mentees reported having received the necessary support and encouragement from their peer-mentors in regard to staying actively involved. For example, many of the mentees kept their academics as a top priority while developing meaningful relationships with other students and institutional gatekeepers, as modeled via the mentoring program. The findings of our study are worthy of further investigation, that include comparisons to outcomes of similar peer-mentoring programs, that assess whether their own program evaluations align with enhancing both the social and academic integration of their respective diverse student population. Furthermore, our study expands upon the present limited literature centered on those contributing factors that are mentorship specific, and others that are dynamic, influential, and directly support ethnically diverse first-generation college students. We encourage additional research that concentrates on the development of mentees over time, before, during, and after participation in a peer-to-peer mentoring like program, their continued enhanced well-being, personal and social.

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