

Undergraduate Peer Mentors Serving Underrepresented Students at a Predominantly White Institution

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Rationale

- Nationally, there is a call to increase graduation and retention rates in our colleges and universities (Obama, 2009).
- One mechanism educational administrators are utilizing towards this goal is peer mentoring at the undergraduate level (Girves, Zepeda, & Gwathmey, 2007).
- Although many studies have examined the experience of undergraduate mentees, little research has focused on the lived experiences of undergraduate peer mentors.
- With rising demographic changes and an increased focus on increasing racial and ethnic diversity, universities are employing peer mentor programs to help increase the graduation and retention rates for specific populations like underrepresented students.

Intent

- The intent of this study was to uncover the lived experiences of undergraduate peer mentors who serve underrepresented students at a predominantly white institution.
- For the purposes of this study, underrepresented students include African American, Latino, and first generation college students.

Frameworks

Seidman's (2006) Phenomenological Approach

- Two semi-structured interviews
- Capture the lived-experience of undergraduate peer mentors.

Kram & Isabella's (1985) Mentoring Definitions

- Psychological
- Vocational

Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1985, 2006)

- Self
- Situation
- Support
- Strategies

Research Questions

- How do student mentors in the University Peer Mentor Program at UT Austin (a PWI) describe their lived experience in their mentor role (psychosocially, vocationally, and in their relationship to the institution)?
- How do student mentors in the University Peer Mentor program describe their lived experience through their interactions with their mentees (psychosocially and vocationally)?
- How do student mentors in the University Peer Mentor program describe their lived experience in their transition from mentee to mentor role using Schlossberg's transition theory, specifically the 4 S's (situation, support, self, and strategies)?

"I didn't want nobody to go through what I went through. Mentoring is just a way to give all of your experiences to someone else to help them get to where you are or help them not struggle like you did."
~ Jeremiah

Population

Sex	Race/Ethnicity	College	Classification	Years Mentor	First Gen
Female	White	Liberal Arts	Junior	2	No
Female	Hispanic	Communication	Junior	1	Yes
Male	White	Natural Sciences	Junior	2	Yes
Female	Hispanic	Liberal Arts	Senior	3	Yes
Male	Hispanic	Business	Junior	2	Yes
Female	Hispanic	Business	Junior	2	Yes
Male	Black/African American	Fine Arts	Junior	2	Yes
Male	Asian American	Natural Sciences	Junior	2	Yes

Findings

Roles & Interactions

- Mentor role and interactions provided opportunity for psychosocial and vocational development
- Social Exchange

Transformative Experience

- Psychosocially
- Vocationally
- Student Identity

Increased Connection to University

- The role of mentoring increases or creates a strong feeling of connection to the Institution
- Mentor specifically touched on serving underrepresented students

Transition Theory

- Schlossberg's (1985, 2006) transition theory, specifically the four coping resources of the 4S' served as an effective analytical framework for examining the mentor transition
- Higher use of strategies and support

New Definition of Peer Mentoring

Undergraduate peer mentoring is a relationship between a more experienced undergraduate student from and underrepresented population (typically older) acting as a role model, friend, and resource to a less experienced undergraduate student (typically younger) who is also from an underrepresented population. The aim of the mentoring relationship is to further the mutual development and refinement of both the mentee and mentor's psychosocial and vocational skills in order to aid in their successful transition to college life.

Next Steps

- Development of a Mentoring Theory
 - Options for exploration include, but are not limited to creating an ecological model of mentoring (Bronfenbrenner, 1995) and a life cycle model of mentoring, specifically focusing on programs where first year students transition to the role of mentor during their college experience.
- Examining New Terminology that demonstrates reciprocity and mutual benefit
- Broaden the audience in regards to the concept of mentoring
 - Development
 - Alumni Relations
 - Executive Administration