8-2018

Assessing a Peer Mentor Program in an Honors College of Agriculture

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Assessing a Peer Mentor Program in an Honors College of Agriculture

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Agricultural and Extension Education

by

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Sul Ross State University
Bachelor of Science in Animal Science, 2016

August 2018
University of Arkansas

Thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to assess mentees' experiences in a peer mentor program in an honors college of agriculture and to determine which factors impact mentees' ability to relate to their peer mentor based on the theory of homophily and interpersonal attraction. Colleges of agriculture are encouraged to examine which determinants impact students' decisions to enter agri-science programs, what draws students to postsecondary agricultural programs, and to try recruiting underserved individuals into higher education to fulfill open employment opportunities for diverse, skilled, and globally competent individuals (Goeker, et al., 2015; Stripling & Ricketts, 2017). Peer mentoring is often implemented as a means of encouraging students' success during their transition to college, as well as strengthening the personal and professional development of the mentor and the mentee (Colley, 2002; Hall and Jaugietis, 2010; Minor, 2007), which may be helpful for colleges of agriculture to engage and retain students. Mentees in the Dale Bumpers College of Agriculture, Food, and Life Sciences Honors Program reported that their peer mentors were helpful overall and did agree that they experienced homophily with their peer mentors. Mentees most related to their peer mentors in the areas of task attraction, social attraction, and physical attraction, while reporting slightly lower levels of background and attitude homophily, which was congruent with a previous study conducted by Rocca & McCroskey (1999). The results from this study also echoed previous qualitative and quantitative studies regarding the conceptualization of the roles of peer mentors (Benjamin, 2003; Colvin & Ashman, 2010). I recommend that peer mentoring programming offer more targeted support for racial/ethnic minority students, First-Generation students, and students who do not receive financial aid, and that groups continue to be selected by major to improve homophily.

Acknowledgements

As the Bumpers College Honors Program Graduate Assistant I served students for two years, which was an experience that shifted my entire teaching philosophy. I am grateful to Dean Lona Robertson in the Bumpers College, Dean Linda Coon and Assistant Dean Jennie Popp in the Honors College for their support.

The entire AECT department provided a strong familial culture. I extend my gratitude to Dr. George Wardlow, for awarding me an assistantship with the department, Dr. Leslie Edgar, who served as my initial advisor, and Dr. Shoulders, who served as my secondary advisor. Extended thanks also go to my committee members Dr. Jefferson Miller and Dr. Charles Rosenkrans. Additional thanks go to each student in our graduate office who provided me with feedback and comradery along the way.

Dedication

This thesis document is dedicated to my family. Their unconditional love throughout my entire life and academic career has been the backbone of my resilience. To my wife, Denise, for sacrificing, moving, and growing with me. To my mother and father who pushed me to channel my creative and scientific passions, and cultivated a sense of self-sufficiency in me from a young age. Final thanks go to my closest friends Lidia Plaza and Marykathryn Campos whose support has helped me through my toughest moments.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Background to the Study

Post-secondary degrees are becoming essential to secure financially stable, long term career positions, as recent projections suggest that 65% of all jobs will require some form of higher education by the year 2020 (Byun, Meece, & Agger, 2017; Carnevale et al., 2013). In an agricultural context, the broad AFNR (agriculture, food, and natural resources) sector has a need for diverse, skilled, culturally and globally competent employees (Stripling & Ricketts, 2017). Employment opportunities in agricultural fields are on the rise, as are the projections for open positions targeting graduates with postsecondary degrees (Goeker, et al., 2015; Stripling & Ricketts, 2017). Colleges of agriculture are also encouraged to better understand which determinants impact students' decisions to enter agri-science programs, what draws students to postsecondary agricultural programs, and to try recruiting underserved individuals into higher education (Stripling & Ricketts, 2017).

Mentoring and Peer Mentoring in Higher Education. The use of mentoring, peer mentoring, specifically, may be a useful tool for educators in post-secondary agriculture programs to engage and retain students. Mentoring is a practice that has been implemented in higher education programs as a means of encouraging student success during their transition to college, as well as strengthening personal and professional development and is generally thought to have a positive effect on the mentor and mentee (Colley, 2002; Hall and Jaugietis, 2010; Minor, 2007). Trends in education currently highlight peer mentoring as an effective mentoring method to increase student engagement and participation, and provided targeted support (Benjamin, 2004; Christie,

2014; Minor, 2007). Prior research suggests that peer mentors can provide first-year students with the emotional support and positive atmosphere to lessen mentees' stress and anxiety (Page & Hanna, 2008; Drew et al., 2000). Peer mentoring may also help mentees cope with the "social trauma of moving from the relatively secure social environment of school to a much larger and unknown university environment (Tinto, 1982). Kram (1985) found that students with peer mentors were less likely to withdraw from their education and more likely to seek mentoring positions themselves (Pinsonneault & Kraemer, 1993).

Research shows that peer mentoring impacts student satisfaction when paired with a freshmen orientation course, particularly the period during and directly after the experience (Sanchez, Bauer, & Paronto, 2006). Sanchez, et al., (2006) noted that peer mentoring did not necessarily influence a students' academic performance or commitment to graduation. Regardless, Sanchez, et al., (2006) suggested university peer mentoring facilitates opportunities for both peer mentors and mentees to become more involved, which is promoted by Astin's student involvement theory (Astin, 1984; Sanchez, et al., 2006). As student satisfaction with the orientation course increased with the addition of peer mentoring, the following questions were raised: Why were students satisfied when receiving mentoring from a peer? Are students more likely to accept information coming from a peer because they are more similar in age or status than a faculty member? The literature on the theory of homophily suggests that people do feel more comfortable communicating with individuals they perceive to be similar to themselves (McCroskey, Richmond, & Daly, 1975).

Homophily and interpersonal attraction. Homophily, or the perceived similarities between a source and a receiver and the concept of interpersonal attraction were both incorporated as a potential explanation for mentees perceptions of their mentoring experience. McCroskey,

Richmond, & Daly (1975) explained that “the more source and receiver are similar (homophilous), the more communication attempts increase and the more likely communication will be effective” (McCroskey, et al., 1975). The literature suggested that interpersonal attraction impacts homophily. If individuals are attracted to someone based on various attraction dimensions such as physical, social, or task-based, the more likely that person will favorably influence an individual’s communication habits (McCroskey & McCain, 1974).

Significance to the Field

Post-secondary agricultural honors programs have a unique opportunity to add to higher education, honors, and agricultural education bodies of research. Furthermore, research regarding meaningful, engaging, learner-centered programs in colleges of agriculture is supported by the AAAE’s current national research agenda (Edgar, Rettalick, & Jones, 2017).

Additionally, the literature indicates that honors programs are often reluctant to self-assess (Driscoll, 2011; Shushok, 2006). The lack of honors program assessments can be ameliorated by honors program directors consciously and consistently contributing to the literature. Honors program directors may be able protect their programs in a data driven university environment by conducting research on the efficacy of programs (Shushok, 2006).

Specific to this study, the Chancellor of the University of Arkansas outlined eight priorities for the campus in the coming years. The following priorities aligned with the use of peer mentoring:

- advancing student success,
- building a collaborative and innovative campus,
- enriching campus diversity and inclusion, and

- promoting innovation in teaching and learning (Steinmetz, 2016).

Peer mentoring programs potentially allow for the Chancellor's priorities to be implemented through the use of intra-curricular and extra-curricular peer mentoring activities. The College of Engineering, Walton College of Business, University Perspectives, and the Bumpers College Honors Program house the main peer mentor programs for incoming freshmen across the University of Arkansas campus.

Statement of the Problem

The majority of peer mentoring related research has focused on the link between peer mentoring and academic success, which has been shown (Roger & Tremblay, 2003). However, multiple research studies acknowledged the lack of progress regarding conceptualizing, defining, and evaluating peer mentoring models (Colley, 2002; Crisp and Cruz, 2009; Hall and Jaugietis, 2010). Christie (2014) recommended that universities evaluate their peer mentor programs rather than operate under the assumption that peer mentoring is beneficial. Coupled with the aforementioned lack of self-assessment and evaluation among honors programs, there is a need to assess programming efforts within honors programs (Driscoll, 2005; Shushok, 2006), which includes peer mentoring programs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to assess mentees' experiences in a peer mentor program in an honors college of agriculture and to determine which factors impact mentees' ability to relate or not relate to their peer mentor.

Research Objectives

The following research objectives guided the study: (1) to describe honors students' experiences in a peer mentor program; (2) to describe honors students' level of background homophily with their peer mentor; (3) to describe honors students' level of attitude homophily with their peer mentor; (4) to describe mentees' perceptions of their mentor's attractiveness; (5) describe relationships between responses and demographic variables.

Assumptions

I made the following assumptions: (1) University of Arkansas' honors students honestly answered the distributed survey; (2) University of Arkansas' honors students did not allow personal bias toward me to influence how they answered instrument items regarding their peer mentor.

Limitations

The following aspects limited my study: (1) The results of the study were not generalizable past to the entire population of honors students because the peer mentor program has only been in place since 2016, and there are students that have not participated; and (2) the mentor and mentee groups were selected differently between fall 2016 and fall 2017.

Definition of Key Terms

1. Homophily was defined as "the amount of similarity two people perceive themselves as having" (Rogers & Bhowmik, 1971).

2. The operational definition of mentoring used throughout the manuscript assumed that mentors are "seen as individuals who have expertise gained through experience and training relative to those being mentored" (Kram, 1985).
3. In this study, peer mentoring refers to mentoring experiences that took place in a peer-to-peer setting in higher education. Minor (2007) described the peer mentor role as being "fundamentally based on having a seasoned peer interact with targeted students, sharing his or her knowledge and experience, and thereby improving students' understanding and learning".
4. Teacher immediacy refers to behaviors such as "vocal expressiveness, smiling, and a relaxed body position" (Cristophel, 1990).

Chapter 2

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Building the Foundation for Peer Mentoring

The literature review will discuss the theoretical foundations for implementing peer mentor programs in higher education, the various models of peer mentor programs and associated peer mentor roles, and the most common evaluation techniques. Overall, the literature agreed that peer mentoring provides benefits to students, but there was debate over the methods of evaluating peer mentoring programs due to the lack of standardized training, mentoring techniques and program goals, across programs (Berk, et al., 2005; Karcher, et al., 2006). The literature presented conflicting information regarding the effectiveness of peer mentoring programs in higher education. There is an extensive amount of research on mentoring, which

provided a strong context and positive support for the various types of mentoring, but research on the effectiveness and evaluation was mixed and less available (Jacobi, 1991; Scandura, 1998).

Theoretical Framework

Student Involvement Theory. I chose student involvement theory posed by Astin (1984) as the foundation for the use of peer mentoring as an educational learning tool. Astin (1984) presented student involvement theory as a response to the perceived gaps found in the traditional pedagogical theories applied in higher education, such as subject-matter theory, resource theory, and individualized or eclectic theory. Subject-matter theory appeared to be common among higher education institutions. Subject-matter theory suggests that students exposed to subject matter from individuals with a high level of expertise or specialized knowledge, will flourish and develop. However, the approach is considered highly teacher centered and relies on lecture as the main method of knowledge dissemination (Astin, 1984).

Resource theory encourages the idea that both student and learning development can take place if students are exposed to a variety of easily accessible resources. The most utilized mechanism is the marketing of low student-to-faculty ratios. However, quality faculty members may be in limited supply, which leaves educational institutions vying for the same talented individuals, creating gaps for institutions unable to attract or retain high caliber faculty (Astin, 1984).

Individualized theory focuses on individual students' needs, which is accompanied by inherent limitations. Funding, faculty willingness, and difficulty standardizing teaching methods and learning outcomes, make the theory troublesome to successfully implement. Astin's (1984) student involvement theory attempts to bridge the gaps between the three pedagogical theories to enhance student learning and development.

Astin (1984) proposed that students should be encouraged to take active roles and ownership over the learning process as opposed to remaining in a passive learning role, as in subject-matter theory. Student learning theory encourages teaching faculty to focus on student motivation, time allotment, and development rather than solely focusing on content, teaching techniques, and classroom resources. The theory also addresses the limited amount of mental and physical time and energy students have when each educator is aggressively competing for their time and attention. Students' time is considered a valuable resource and to be treated as a factor that can affect retention, as well as other environmental factors such as work, time spent on campus, social networks, and so forth (Astin, 1984). Student involvement theory blends the strong points of the three main pedagogical theories discussed and draws the focus to students' motivation and personal development as opposed to traditional teacher-centered models.

Student involvement theory tied in well with the development of intra-curricular peer mentoring programs, because Astin's (1984) theory stresses the use of tools to increase motivation, in place of traditionally passive modes of instruction. Student involvement theory shifts the educator into the position of facilitator, with the goal of influencing students to actively participate (Astin, 1984). Astin (1984) suggested that students be allowed to take ownership over their learning and be actively engaged.

In the case of the Bumpers College Honors Program, the peer mentors were purposefully integrated into the classroom, and therefore, had the opportunity to impact student engagement and interact with the classroom content, as well. Peer mentors served as facilitators to engage students in classroom and extracurricular activities that exposed freshmen students to on campus resources and content related discussions.

Homophily and interpersonal attraction. Homophily theory explains that people are drawn to and more likely to communicate effectively with individuals they perceive as similar (McCroskey, et al., 1974). I suggest that the theory of homophily accounts for some of the success peer mentor programs have, particularly because the programs allow students to engage on a peer-to-peer level with students that share similar experiences to their own. The level of background, attitude, and attractiveness homophily students experience with a peer mentor may be related to their satisfaction or dissatisfaction in a peer mentoring program, as peer mentors hold a similar role to an instructor, albeit in a more informal manner. If receivers, or mentees, are more likely to open up to sources, or peer mentors, that they perceive as similar, (McCroskey et al., 1974) then homophily could be a variable of interest in the evaluation of peer mentor programs in higher education.

Conceptual Framework

Conceptualizing peer mentoring. For the sake of clarity, I provided an operational definition of a peer mentor program within the scope of the intended study, as the concept of peer mentoring has been a challenging concept to define throughout the literature (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). In the context of this study, a peer mentor program referred to a group of selected upper level undergraduate students who have been trained and paired with targeted students, ideally with a low student to mentor ratio. Using student involvement theory as a foundation, this approach was supported by the idea that tools centered on student engagement and motivation may positively affect the learning environment and, therefore, the learning outcomes.

Crisp and Cruz (2009) critically analyzed the mentoring literature and found that recurring themes were present, such as the lack of a standardized definition of mentoring across

the literature and disciplines. Other themes in the literature included the “the prevalence of both informal and formal mentoring relationships, the extent, and ways in which mentoring contributes to academic success, and the mentoring functions that are most important to the academic success of students” (Crisp and Cruz, 2009, p. 525). Within the time period examined, multiple broad definitions were cited regarding mentoring.

Mentoring has been defined as a relationship between a more experienced person and a protégé (Brown, et. al., 1999; Murray, 2001) and “a process by which persons of a superior rank, special achievements, and prestige, instruct, counsel, or guide and facilitate the intellectual and/or career development of persons identified as protégés” (Blackwell, 1989, p. 9). Generally, it is thought that mentoring is a process that will benefit the mentor and mentee’s personal growth in a reciprocal fashion.

Another theme unearthed within the literature was a lack of consensus as to what type of assistance is included as part of the mentorship process. Various types of mentoring activities included peer mentoring videos, weekly college adjustment tips, participation in regular discussion groups, as well as professional and career development. Crisp and Cruz (2009) noted that mentoring was thought to impact retention and graduation rates, as well as the comfort level with an “educational environment” and overall findings indicated a positive relationship on student persistence among undergraduates (Crisp & Cruz, 2009, p. 532).

Although the generic definition of a peer mentor program refers to the pairing of skilled upperclassmen undergraduates and incoming freshmen undergraduates, the individual roles of peer mentors may vary across programs or college campuses. In reference to the development of a peer mentor program in a theory piece, Minor (2007) suggested that …

> The peer mentor role is fundamentally based on having a seasoned peer interact with targeted students, sharing his or her knowledge and experience, and thereby improving students' understanding and learning. Intentional enhancements to this role can increase its effectiveness. The more the target students can identify with the mentor, the more receptive they will be to the mentor's efforts to support and challenge them (p. 2).

Students with high levels of academic achievement are optimal candidates to serve as mentors in peer mentor programs, as they will be directly involved with undergraduate students' learning processes (Minor, 2007). Minor (2007) suggested that students are a vital resource to both teaching faculty and other on campus departments such as student affairs. Peer mentors can be recruited to act as an influence on student subculture by providing assistance as needed, such as simple tutoring, advice giving, or out of class support. When developing the peer mentor program, the main selection factor in selecting peer mentors is academic strength, as part of the goal of the mentoring process is to support academic success within the peer learning community.

Minor (2007) also suggested that mentors share specific characteristics as a means of identifying with their mentees. Pairings can be implemented by identifying similar traits, such as including transfer students, non-traditional students, and traditionally underrepresented students as peer mentors to reach specific populations and allow the mentor to become relatable. An example of a typical peer mentor position is a Resident Advisor (RA), who serve as mentors campus-wide; however, implementing peer mentor positions within departments other than student affairs can provide a tailored mentor experience that correlates with the specific goals of the discipline (Minor, 2007).

Depending on external variables such as funding, enough mentors should be utilized to keep the ratio of students to mentor at a reasonable level, thus providing an increased opportunity

to focus on the program outcomes. The peer mentor relationship is also perceived to be bidirectional, allowing for benefit of both parties. Involvement with a peer mentor program may provide a foundation for leadership development that is not necessarily experienced by the average college student. Peer mentors should be chosen based on their ability to serve certain populations, even if they do not appear to be traditional candidates (Minor, 2007).

Mentor program models. The development of an effective mentoring program, peer based or otherwise, was considered contingent upon a strong model prior to implementation. Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, and Taylor (2006) synthesized the various approaches to mentoring and drew from the most critical elements to contribute a practical tool for mentor program leaders to put forth a framework for mentoring programs. I suggest that the framework (Karcher, et al., 2006) is supported by the theory of student involvement posed by Astin (1984), discussed in my theoretical framework.

Karcher, et al. (2006) further reinforced the notion that the "wholesale acceptance of mentoring as an effective intervention may be an obstacle to systematic efforts to examine mentoring critically…given the prevailing assumption that mentoring is valuable" (Karcher, et al., 2006, p. 710). The model included a conceptualization of the main elements included in most mentoring programs, specifically, the context, structure, and goals. The main elements referred to the designated meeting places, format of the mentor and mentee relationship, and the intended activities. Meeting places could be divided between site-based and field-based and may take place one-on-one or in a group setting. Program goals could be different depending on the setting and nature of the mentoring relationship.

According to Karcher, et al. (2006), program goals should be aligned with instrumental or developmental activities. Instrumental mentoring primarily stressed the outcome of skills and

student achievement. Developmental mentoring focused on relationship building between the mentor and the mentee. Both mentoring categories are illustrated in Figure 1 (Karcher, et al., 2006).

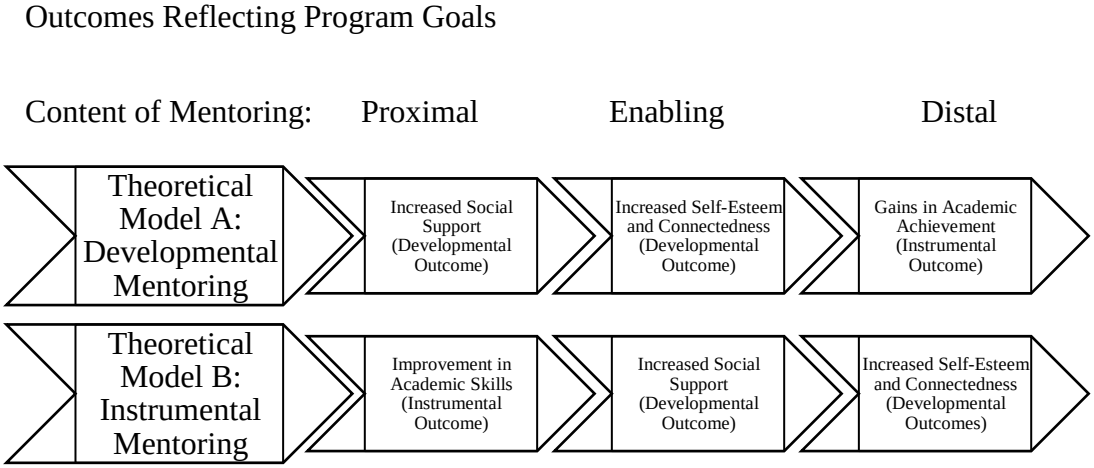

Figure 1. Developmental and Instrumental Mentoring Models. Adapted f from Karcher, et al., (2006).

Karcher, et al. (2006), recommended that program developers be clear about the theoretical approach of their program, as the program goals and corresponding activities should coincide with the chosen approach. A second model was developed to illustrate how programs can be evaluated based on their intended activities, inputs, constraints, and the eventual outcomes.

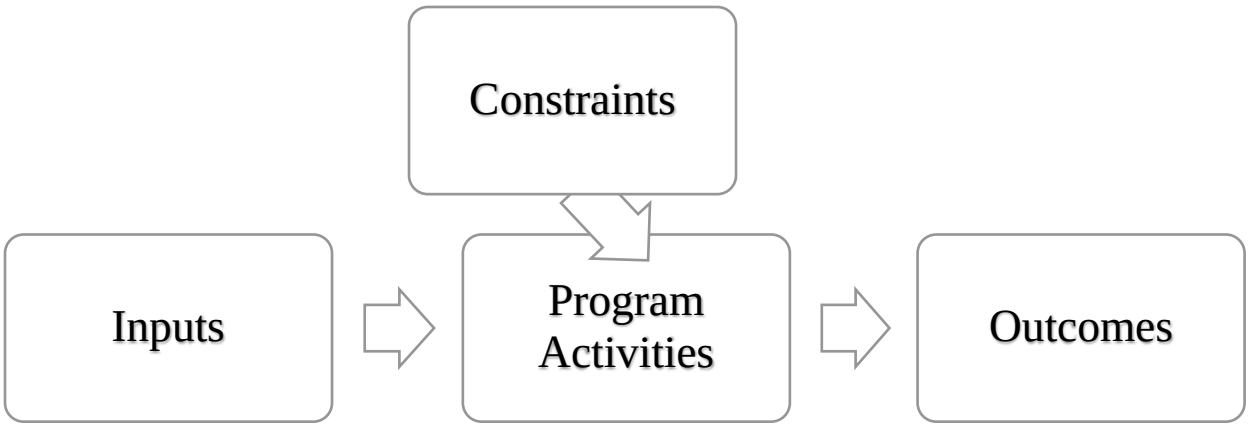

Figure 2. The Directional Relationship between Variables Impacting Mentoring. Adapted from Karcher, et al., (2006).

Both models created by Karcher, et al. (2006), would aid mentor program developers in determining appropriate inputs, outcomes, and determining potential constraints before implementation. Both student involvement theory and the models associated with mentor programs have quantitative and qualitative aspects, which is best supported by a mixed methods study; however, I chose to focus on the quantitative.

Hall and Jaugietis (2010) compiled an extensive table of the structures and variations of peer mentoring programs present throughout higher education, which is shown below.

Table 1

Structure and Organization of Peer Mentoring-Programs

Program Attributes	Program Components	Variations
Program Structure	Management	● University wide or school based ● Steering committee oversight or not ● Program manager or student run
	Duration	● One meeting to one year
	Mentor/Mentee interactions	● Drop-in only ● Face-to-face only ● Individual consultations ● Email communications ● Online only

Table 1 (Cont.)

Program Attributes	Program Components	Variations
Program Participants	Mentee characteristics	● All beginning students regardless of course ● Students in schools or courses ● Mature age students ● Students from ethnic groups ● Male or female students ● International students ● Students from remote geographical areas
	Recruitment of mentors	● Anyone who volunteers ● Those who meet selection criteria ● Interview process used or not
Program Organization	Mentor training	● What training do mentors undergo for their role? ● What ongoing support do mentors receive? ● Are mentors paid or not? ● What other acknowledgement of mentor contributions is made?
	Meeting arrangements	● Are mentors and mentees matched in any way, such as by course content or gender? ● Location of meetings with mentees ● Frequency of meetings
Program content	Academic	● Do mentors provide tutoring? ● Do mentors give advice on study skills, etc.?
	Social / Other	● What social events are held? ● Do mentors give advice on: o Accessing university services? o Dealing with campus administration? ● Locating campus facilities?

Note: Adapted from "Developing Peer Mentoring Through Evaluation," by R. Hall & Z. Jaugietis, 2010, *Innovative Higher Education.*

As Table 1 demonstrates, the differences between the program structure, participants, and content varied greatly and would likely impact the program outcomes, depending on the model created based on the listed criteria. The table highlights the importance of creating a model based on standardized criteria. This table coincides well with the development models suggested by

Karcher, et al. (2006), as the table outlines a variety of inputs, and contexts that could be used as criteria to fill out a development plan (Hall & Jaugietis, 2010; Karcher, et al., 2006). The current peer mentoring programs across the University of Arkansas campus also apply different models, with varied inputs, expected outcomes, contexts and constraints. However, it would be beneficial for each program to strategize their desired outcomes to determine the most fitting inputs and contexts for each program and assess the effectiveness of each input quantitatively.

Peer mentor roles. According to Minor (2007), peer mentors may act as informal advisors, teaching assistants in the classroom, leaders and informal role models. Further exploring the roles of peer mentors, Benjamin (2003), examined the process of role construction in peer mentor programs through qualitative focus groups. Minor (2007) also discussed the roles of peer mentors on university campuses. Peer mentor programs as part of a larger learning community, such as a university, employ students to act in the role of paraprofessional (Benjamin, 2003). Some students are monetarily compensated to fill a perceived need for mentors without clear directives from the university regarding their role, and as such, may construct their roles individually. Benjamin sought to outline how peer mentors construct and enact their roles and who they rely on for guidance throughout the process.

The overall focus of Benjamin's study was to explore how peer mentor programs are developed and how they might impact a learning community. Benjamin (2003) posited, "learning communities address barriers, such as large classes, and provide structures, like cooperative learning strategies, so that students can overcome those barriers" (p. 15). As the students involved with the study were employed as peer mentors, and enacted duties that surpassed service based work, their roles were determined to be paraprofessional, operating under the

assumption that peer learning could be encouraged through the interactions of the paraprofessional mentors and their mentees.

Another delineation that Benjamin (2003) noted was the difference of peer roles within various contexts. As student employment may take the form of peer tutors, residential assistants, peer educators, and mentors, the roles may differ based on the context (Benjamin, 2003). Informal expectations for learning community peer mentors included being a non-first year undergraduate student with strong academic standing, and the availability to fulfill the position. Additional duties included enacting out-of-class-activities, individual meetings, study groups, and in-class assistance or discussions (Benjamin, 2003). Verbal descriptions of the peer mentor roles among participants closely aligned with their formal, written job descriptions. Peer mentors noted that being "regularly available" (Benjamin, 2003, p. 79) comprised a large portion of their role, as well as being a resource for information about campus life. Academic expectations were embedded in their roles, such as teaching portions of classes, and so forth (Benjamin, 2003).

Colvin and Ashman (2010) explored the perceived benefits, risks, and roles of peer mentors. The study sought to record potential power dynamics in the peer-mentor relationships and described the experiences of each entity involved within the mentoring experience, mainly the instructors, peer mentors and students. The emergent themes referenced five different roles associated with the peer mentors: *connecting links, peer leaders, learning coaches, student advocate* and *trusted friend*. Each of these roles had different associated duties or experiences connected with the title. Mentees referred to valuing their mentors' ability to better connect them to resources on campus.

Regarding the *peer leader* role, a few mentees commented on the leadership qualities held by their mentors that served as an example for others. The role of a *learning coach* was

supported by comments that some of the academic skills imparted by their mentors encouraged persistence in their courses outside of the introductory course. *Mentor as student advocate* emerged as a theme describing the role mentors sometimes played. Mentees expressed feeling more comfortable addressing a peer mentor with questions or issues as opposed to a faculty member or instructor. Some participants assigned the role of *trusted friend* to their mentors, utilizing them as a sounding board for difficult personal situations not related to the course.

Throughout the study, a persistent factor was the number of diverse variables that occurred within each of the peer mentor groups, further indicating the difficulty in standardizing the experience for ease of evaluation. In addition to the informal roles assigned to the mentors, perceived benefits and risks to mentors and mentees were explored by the researchers.

Perceived program benefits. Peer mentors participating in the study conducted by Colvin and Ashman (2010) cited the following beneficial outcomes of participating as a mentor: the ability to support their mentees, as well as being supported by fellow mentors. Additional benefits included the ability to apply principles gained through mentoring to other areas of their lives. Mentees remarked on the benefit of being able to rely on a peer for help with standard issues that new college students face, such as residency, financial aid, or navigating the campus.

Perceived program risks. Colvin and Ashman (2010) reported the perceived risks of mentoring, which may also influence the efficacy of overall program outcomes. The perceived risks of participating from the peer mentor perspective were outlined as follows: some mentors had trouble in reconciling the fact that they may form close attachments that only last for a semester, being vulnerable in the position as mentor and facing potential rejection, experiencing mentees that are over-dependent on their relationship, navigating mentees that reject the notion of having a mentor, and determining how far their role as mentor extends. Mentees expressed concerns as

well: feeling bothered by their mentor, worrying about their mentor's dependability, the possibility of becoming dependent on a mentor's help, and having trouble sharing or opening up (Colvin & Ashman, 2010).

Colvin and Ashman (2010) also explored variables of power and resistance within peer mentor programs. This was particularly interesting, as this was the only study that explored the inherent power structures in a peer mentor program. Issues of power and resistance were categorized by instructors, mentees, and mentors. Resistance stemming from instructors revolved around the time and effort it took to allow mentoring to take place in class. Student mentees expressed resistance to the mentor process as they felt they did not need help. Student mentors experienced resistance from students who rejected help, failed to open up, evaded communicating, and so forth. However, the benefits of peer mentoring were considered to outweigh the risks and forms of resistance identified by the researchers (Colvin & Ashman, 2010).

Program Evaluation. Minor (2007) suggested that peer mentors need to be assessed and evaluated. Peer mentor programs "require staff and faculty time and effort to provide ongoing training, appropriate guidance, supervision and consistent evaluation" (Minor, 2007, p. 10). Although, it should be noted that departmental challenges such as funding and supervision may provide an opportunity for collaboration and a learning experience for faculty, staff, and peer mentors alike (Minor, 2007). The literature established support for peer mentoring as both a retention strategy and student success strategy, but few studies offered replicable methods of evaluation.

As a response to the increase in mentoring programs throughout higher education, Christie (2014) challenged the assumption that "mentoring brings only positive benefits to its

participants" (Christie, 2014, p. 955). Christie (2014) posited that the constant support of mentoring as a viable, positive, practice requires a "critical investigation of mentoring," which they considered underdeveloped within the literature (p. 956).

The underdevelopment of evaluation techniques is perhaps compounded by the difficulty associated with evaluating peer mentor programs through quantitative methods. Mentoring is challenging to measure quantitatively due to the lack of standardization across programs. This issue was addressed by Berk, Berg, Mortimer, Moss, and Yeo (2005), who collectively developed a quantitative instrument meant to measure the effectiveness of a faculty mentor program and describe the mentoring relationship. Berk, et al. (2005) stressed that …

> There is a critical need for research on mentoring that must address the definitional and conceptual issues … neither the empirical or theoretical published research has kept pace with the development of mentoring programs. The scarcity of rating scales that directly measure characteristics of the mentoring relationship … requires immediate attention (p. 69).

Quantitative evaluations. The study conducted by Berk et al. (2005) focused primarily on the mentoring relationship between faculty and students and addressed the lack of consistency among mentoring outcomes and measurement tools. The first section of the instrument, the Mentorship Profile Questionnaire, was developed to "describe the exact nature of the mentoring relationship and to specify the outcome measures produced from the relationship" (Berk, et al., 2005, p. 67) and the Mentorship Effectiveness Scale was constructed to serve as a "formal rating scale to provide an efficient, comprehensive, and standardized tool for rating the mentorship experience, and especially, the effectiveness of a mentor" (Berk, et al., 2005, p. 68).

Crisp and Cruz (2009) expanded on the issues surrounding quantitative evaluations of mentoring programs. While many of the studies reviewed in their critical analysis were found to be sound, two of the main issues surrounding quantitative designs, whether experimental or non-

experimental, were the lack of operational definitions and the failure to test the validity and reliability of the survey items (Crisp & Cruz, 2009).

Qualitative evaluations. The literature regarding peer mentoring programs relied heavily on qualitative evaluation methods. Focus groups and semi-structured interviews were most often used to further explore the mentoring experience (Benjamin, 2003; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Hall & Jaugietis, 2010). Hall and Jaugietis (2010) utilized semi-structured interviews in addition to an online questionnaire, laying a foundation for measuring impact of mentoring programs through a mixed-methods approach. Interview questions were meant to further explore the nature of the mentor-mentee relationship, and discuss the themes surrounding engagement, helpfulness, and potential areas for improvement (Hall & Jaugietis, 2010). Crisp and Cruz (2009) indicated in their critical analysis that many of the reviewed qualitative studies attempted to better understand the perceived benefits of mentoring, and while rich in context, many were "methodologically flawed in that they provided a limited description of the methods used to collect, and/or analyze the data" (Crisp & Cruz, 2009, p. 532).

Homophily and interpersonal attraction. Homophily referred to the perceived similarities between the source of the information and the receiver (Rocca & McCroskey, 1999). The principle of homophily suggested that "the more two communicators see themselves as similar, the more likely they are to communicate with one another, understand one another, and to engage in future interaction with one another" (Rogers & Bhowmik, 1971). Applying this concept to the classroom, students' perceptions of the teacher or instructor role may be shaped by their own background characteristics (McCroskey, Hamilton, & Weiner, 1974).

The more background characteristics teachers share with students, the more students may perceive the teacher to be similar and willingly open up (Wheeles, 1974). McCroskey,

McCroskey, & Richmond (2006) further separated homophily into three sub areas: background, attitude, and attractiveness (McCroskey, McCroskey, & Richmond, 2006).

McCroskey, McCroskey, and Richmond (2006) analyzed a substantial amount of research studies that employed homophily and interpersonal attraction measures as a means of improving the measurements. While the research using the first-generation homophily and interpersonal attraction measures were found to be reliable and valid, McCroskey, et al., (2006) suggested that future researchers use the improved and revised measurements for greater reliability.

McCroskey, et al., (2006) recommended that when generating items for the homophily dimensions, 10 items were needed for attitude homophily to achieve consistent reliability over .90 and 16 for background homophily. For interpersonal attraction scales, McCroskey, et al., (2006) determined that at least 10 items need to be present for each attraction scale to achieve consistent reliability.

Rocca and McCroskey (1999) explored the potential relationships between immediacy and verbal aggression with homophily and interpersonal attraction in instructional settings. The principle of immediacy states that "people are drawn toward persons and things they like, evaluate highly, and prefer; and they avoid or move away from things they dislike, evaluate negatively, or do not prefer," according to Mehrabian (as cited in Rocca & McCroskey, 1999). While my study did not focus on the concept of immediacy, the link between immediacy and homophily is worth briefly explaining, as it relates to interpersonal and/or organizational communication in the classroom. Homophily theory explains the levels to which individuals relate or do not relate to one another through the lens of various interpersonal scales, whereas immediacy behaviors refer to specific traits that may affect how individuals view one another.

Verbal or non-verbal immediacy behaviors are thought to impact student learning. Cristophel (1990) described “vocal expressiveness, smiling, and a relaxed body position” to be notable behaviors that could contribute to student learning (p. 325).

Previous studies found that “immediacy is associated with more positive student affect, as well as increased cognitive learning, and more positive student evaluations” of the teacher or facilitator (Rocca & McCroskey, 1999, p. 308). Rocca and McCroskey (1999) noted that an educator’s immediacy would not necessarily translate into perceived similarities between the educator and student, as not all students are immediate; however, teacher immediacy behaviors communicating liking for students could instigate a reciprocal response. Taking the scenario a step further, a student may have more of a positive affect toward the teacher, which could translate to a perception of homophily (Rocca & McCroskey, 1999). Rocca and McCroskey (1999) found that each of the homophily and interpersonal attraction scales *were* positively related to teacher immediacy, which had not been clearly linked prior to the study.

Summary

Overall, the literature agreed that there was a lack of standardization regarding defining and conceptualizing peer mentoring (Colley , 2002; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Hall & Jaugietis, 2010).

Crisp and Cruz (2009) suggested that benefits of peer mentoring include increased retention, increased graduation rates and support in educational settings (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). Additionally, the literature agreed that other benefits exist for students, such as emotional support, comfort, a positive atmosphere, increased campus engagement, potential increase in course satisfaction, and so forth (Drew, Pike , Pooley, Young , & Breen, 2000; Page & Hanna, 2008; Pinsonneault & Kraemer, 1993; Sanchez, Bauer, & Paronto, 2006; Tinto, 1982).

Colvin and Ashman (2010) explored the perceived risks and benefits of the peer mentoring experience, and noted that some mentees may be resistant to the mentoring process, have trouble opening up emotionally, and potentially become over-dependent on their peer mentor.

Minor (2007) recommended that peer mentors should share some characteristics with their mentee to help the mentee be more receptive to the mentoring experience. Minor's suggestion that mentees may respond positively to the experience based on perceived similarities is also supported by the theory of homophily (Rogers & Bhomik, 1971). Minor (2007) also recommended that programs consistently train, supervise, and evaluate their peer mentor teams.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Restatement of the Problem

The literature showed that the increasing rate of peer mentor programs in higher education has not been matched with adequate progress in the conceptualizing, defining, and evaluating peer mentoring models (Colley, 2002; Crisp and Cruz, 2009; Hall and Jaugietis, 2010). Minor (2007) acknowledged that Universities implementing peer mentor programs should incorporate consistent evaluation.

Restatement of the Purpose

The purpose of the study was to assess mentees' experiences in a peer mentor program in an honors college of agriculture and to determine which factors impact mentees' ability to relate or not relate to their peer mentor.

Restatement of the Research Objectives

The following research objectives guided the study: (1) to describe honors students' experiences in a peer mentor program; (2) to describe honors students' level of background homophily with their peer mentor; (3) to describe honors students' level of attitude homophily with their peer mentor; (4) to describe mentees' perceptions of their mentor's attractiveness; (5) describe relationships between responses and demographic variables.

Design of the Study

The timing of the study took place after both sessions of the honors orientation course had already taken place. Salkind (2010) outlined that ex-post facto research begins investigation after-the-fact and may replace situations in which an experimental design could not be applied. Written survey methodology was used to gather responses. Isaac and Michael (1997) provided an overview of survey research, explaining that surveys are used to …

> Answer questions that have been raised, to solve problems that have been posed or observed, to assess needs and set goals, to determine whether specific objectives have been met, to establish baselines against which future comparisons can be made to, to analyze trends across time, and generally, to describe what exists, in what amount, and in what context (p. 136).

Subject Selection

The population of participants included all undergraduate honors students who participated in the Bumpers College Honors Student Mentor Program during the fall 2016 and fall 2017 semesters. The Bumpers College Honors Student Mentor Program was in its second year at the time of the study. Census sampling was used to target responses from all students who participated in the Bumpers College Honors Student Mentor Program. Ninety students were identified who had participated in the program in the last two years.

IRB approval was obtained through the University of Arkansas prior to data collection, and was deemed exempt by the approval committee. The IRB approval number was 1802105493. IRB documentation is attached as Appendix B.

Instrumentation

I used a survey instrument as the main data collection tool. Pinnsonneault and Kraemer (1993) defined a survey as a "means for gathering information about the characteristics, actions, or opinions of a large group of people" (Pinnsonneault & Kraemer, 1993, p.77). I adapted a previously created instrument developed by Berk et al. (2005) to reflect the desired outcomes of the Bumpers College Honors Peer Mentor Program. The original instrument focused specifically on the faculty mentor relationship, but served as a practical guide for developing questioning for a peer mentor program. I revised any wording referencing faculty mentor to instead refer to "peer mentors." I also included the complete revised attitude homophily, background homophily, and attractiveness scales created by McCroskey, et al., (2006).

Instrumentation included closed-ended questions with ordered, Likert-type scale responses for both ease of response and analysis (Glasgow, 2005). The final survey consisted of

18 overall questions; however, six of the questions were displayed as matrices to visually condense the survey. All survey information was entered into the University of Arkansas' Qualtrics system for electronic distribution. The survey instrument is attached as Appendix A.

Validity and reliability. Validity refers to how well a survey item "measures what it sets out to measure" (Litwin, 1995, p. 33). Face validity assesses the overall appropriateness of instrument items upon a cursory review (Litwin, 1995), and content validity is a more in-depth review of items to "ensure that [the instrument] includes everything it should and doesn't include anything it shouldn't" (Litwin, 1995, p. 35). Two professors from the University of Arkansas Agricultural Education, Communications, and Technology Department reviewed the questions and provided feedback. One of those professors was the prior Honors Program Director.

The homophily and attractiveness scales had been tested for reliability prior to this study. When revising and updating the homophily and interpersonal attractiveness measures, McCroskey, et al., (2006) determined that surveys using the attraction scales needed at least 10 items for each dimension (task, social, and physical attractiveness. The estimated reliability scores for the attractiveness scales ranged from .91 to .96 with a student sample of 374 and a teacher sample of 177. A minimum of 10 items were needed for background homophily to attain consistent reliability, and 16 for attitude attractiveness. The estimated homophily reliability scores ranged from .81 to .95 (McCroskey, et al., 2006). Furthermore, the researchers indicated that shorter versions of the instruments resulted in lower reliability.

Cognitive interviews were used to explore how understandable questions were, which was recommended by Glasgow (2005). I collaborated with the supervisor of the engineering peer mentor program to identify potential respondents for the cognitive interviews and the pilot tests described below. I interviewed two engineering mentees to gather their thoughts regarding the

survey questions and survey format. After sharing the results of the cognitive interviews with my thesis chair, appropriate changes were made to my instrumentation.

The intent was to test respondents twice to see if the responses were stable according to correlation coefficients (Litwin, 1995). Test-retest reliability would be considered acceptable if the correlation coefficient, or *r* value, was higher or equal to .70 (Litwin, 1995). Pilot test participants were recruited in collaboration with the supervisor of the Engineering peer mentor program. I chose to send the pilot survey to Engineering freshmen mentees enrolled to avoid lowering my already small sample of students in the Bumpers College Honors Program. While the complete survey with honors program questions and the homophily scales *were* sent to Engineering students, I only received two responses. Engineering participants were sent two reminders through Qualtrics to increase the response rate. However, there were not enough respondents to send a post-test. Therefore, I was *unable* to calculate internal reliability for the honors program questions.

I conducted post-hoc reliability using Version 24 of SPSS for the homophily and interpersonal attraction scales. The background homophily scale had an overall reliability score of .935, attitude homophily had a score of .932, task attractiveness had a score of .947, social attractiveness had a score of .928 and physical attractiveness had a score of .901. Each of the scales had Cronbach alpha scores which are considered statistically reliable.

Data Collection

The Bumpers College Honors Program students were sent the electronic survey through Qualtrics to their University of Arkansas email. Data were collected over a period of three weeks

with one reminder sent per week. I exported the survey responses to an Excel spreadsheet, cleaned the data and prepared them to be analyzed.

Data Analysis

Data were statistically analyzed using Version 24 of SPSS. Frequencies, means, and standard deviations were run. Frequencies were run for the initial questions regarding the honors program and all demographic questions. Mean scores and standard deviations were run for all remaining questions with a Likert-style response scale. Mean scores for demographic variables and the homophily and interpersonal attraction scales, as well as for the demographic variables and mentees' experiences in the peer mentor program were displayed for comparison.

Chapter 4

Results

The previous chapter described the study design and methodology applied in my study. Chapter four presents the results. The result tables are organized into five main sections, to display data from each portion of the instrument. The first section presents and describes the demographic characteristics of participants. The second section contains results related to mentees' experiences in the Bumpers College Honors peer mentor program. The third section displays the results for the two homophily scales. The fourth section displays the results for the interpersonal attraction scales. The fifth section displays mentees' responses and demographic variables for comparison. Each of the demographic variables are given their own comparison table.

Response Rates

The participants of the study were students that had participated in the mentor program in the last two years. Out of 90 participants contacted, one email failed, leaving 89 viable respondents. Although 24 of the 89 participants started the survey, 18 participants completed the survey for a 20.2% response rate. All of the data was analyzed, with the number of respondents indicated for each table. The data was not generalizable beyond the respondents.

Demographics

Participants were asked a series of demographic questions, such as their major, sex, race/ethnicity, term of participation, and whether they hold first-generation status. Participants' characteristics were compiled into Table 2.

Table 2.

Table of Demographic Characteristics

	f	%
Major		
Agricultural Business	2	8.3
Agricultural Education, Communications, and Technology	3	12.5
Animal Science	5	20.8
Environmental, Soil, & Water Science	4	16.7
Food Science	1	4.2
Horticulture, Landscape, & Turf Sciences	1	4.2
Human Development & Family Sciences	1	4.2
Human Nutrition & Hospitality Innovation	2	8.3
Poultry Science	2	8.3
I am not enrolled in a major within Dale Bumpers	3	12.5
Term of Participation		
Fall 2016	10	41.7
Fall 2017	8	33.3
No Answer	6	25.0

Table 2 (Cont.)

	f	%
Sex		
Male	3	25.0
Female	15	62.5
No Answer	6	25.0
Race/Ethnicity		
Asian/Pacific Islander	1	4.2
White	17	70.8
No Answer	6	25.0
First-Generation Status		
Yes	4	16.7
No	14	58.3
No Answer	6	25.0
Recipient of Financial Aid		
Yes	15	62.5
No	3	12.5
No Answer	6	25.0

Students first indicated their major. Most students reported animal science, or environmental, soil, and water science (ESWS) as their major, with five animal science students and four ESWS students. The rest of the students were distributed evenly between majors, with *at least* one student from each major. Students then indicated whether they participated in the fall 2016 or fall 2017 session of the peer mentor program. There were 10 respondents from the fall 2016 session and seven responses from the fall 2017 session. Participants were asked to indicate their biological sex, by providing an open response text box to allow for self-identification. Most respondents identified as female, with 14 text entries. The remaining three responses identified their sex as “Male.”

Students were given the option to report their ethnicity, by selecting from “White,” “Hispanic/Latino,” “Asian/Pacific Islander,” “Native American/American Indian,” or “Other.” Of the participants, one mentee self-identified as Asian/Pacific Islander, and 17 identified as

White. Participants were asked to indicate if they were first-generation college student, four of which answered “Yes.” In reference to financial aid, 14 students indicated that they were received aid of some kind.

Honors Program Peer Mentor Experiences

Objective one was to describe honors students’ experiences in a peer mentor program. The first section of questions asked participants about their experiences with a five option Likert-style response scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree. The initial objectives of the peer mentor program were to inform mentees about the requirements of the honors program, campus resources, and study abroad opportunities, as well as provide an emotional support network, and a relatable group environment based on academic or outside interests. The questions in this portion of the instrument were adapted from the mentor instrument created by Berk, et al., (2005) to gain a better understanding of mentees’ experiences with their peer mentors. Data was analyzed for means and standard deviations, presented in Table 3.

Table 3.

Experiences of Students in the Bumpers College Honors Peer Mentor Program

Statement	*M*	*SD*
My peer mentor helped me better understand the overall requirements of the Bumpers College Honors Program.	4.13	.626
My peer mentor explained general thesis requirements.	3.70	.876
My peer mentor provided guidance about honors coursework.	4.17	.778
My peer mentor informed me about on-campus resources.	4.57	.662
My peer mentor provided guidance about study abroad opportunities.	3.78	1.04
I felt encouraged by my peer mentor.	4.30	1.02
My peer mentor was easy to contact.	4.65	.714
My peer mentor made a consistent effort to reach out to me.	4.04	.976
I related to my peer mentor based on major, minor, or academic interests.	3.83	1.15

Table 3 (Cont.)

Statement	*M*	*SD*
I related to my peer mentor based on outside interests or hobbies.	3.09	.996
My peer mentor mainly helped me with personal (non-academic) issues.	2.52	1.23
My peer mentor mainly helped me with academic issues.	3.61	.998

Note: n = 23. The five-point scale ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Honors Program related statements were interpreted individually as the statements were not part of an index. Students felt that their peer mentors were easy to contact, with a mean of 4.65 (*sd* = .714), informed them about on-campus resources, with a mean of 4.57 (*sd* = .662), encouraged them, with a mean of 4.30 (*sd* = 1.02), provided guidance about honors coursework, with a mean of 4.17 (*sd = .778*), and explained the general honors requirements, with a mean of 4.13 (*sd = .626*).

Students agreed regarding whether their peer mentors were relatable based on academic interest and/or major, with a mean of 3.83 (*sd* = 1.15), whether they provided information about study abroad opportunities, with a mean of 3.78 (*sd = 1.04*) and whether their peer mentor mainly helped them with academic issues, with a mean of 3.61 (*sd* = .998).

Students were neutral regarding whether their peer mentor helped them with personal issues, with a mean of 2.52 (*sd* = 1.23).

Homophily

Background homophily. Objective two of the study was to describe honors students' level of background homophily with their peer mentor. Background homophily related questions were used to determine if mentees perceived their personal background to be similar or dissimilar to their mentor, by inquiring about economic status, class, geographic locale, and so forth. The

background homophily construct included 10 statements. As indices, a grand mean was calculated for the homophily and attractiveness scales. Each section will be interpreted as a whole, followed by a description of salient items. The positively worded statements were coded as (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree. Negative statements were reverse coded during data analysis in SPSS.

Table 4.

Level of Background Homophily between Peer Mentors and Mentees

Statement	*M*	*SD*
My peer mentor is from a social class similar to mine.	3.39	.941
My peer mentor's status is different from mine. *	3.13	.815
My peer mentor is from an economic situation different from mine. *. *	2.96	.928
My peer mentor's background is similar to mine.	2.87	1.05
My peer mentor's status is like mine.	3.26	.810
My peer mentor is from a social class different from mine. *	3.14	.834
My peer mentor is from an economic situation like mine.	3.00	.739
My peer mentor's background is different from mine. *	2.87	1.10
My peer mentor and I come from a similar geographic region.	2.96	1.29
My peer mentor's life as a child was probably similar to mine.	3.04	1.02
Grand Mean	3.06	

Note: $n = 23$, * = reverse coded item. The five-point scale ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

The grand mean for background homophily was 3.06, which falls slightly above agree on the five-point scale. Mentees agreed the most that their peer mentor was a from a similar social class, with a mean of 3.39 ($sd = .941$). The next highest mean indicated that mentees agreed that their peer mentor's status was like their own, with a mean of 3.26.

The background homophily section had *four* reverse coded items. The first item pair asked mentees whether they perceived their peer mentor's status to be different or similar to their own. Mean scores were 3.13 and 3.26, which are close in range. The second item pair asked mentees whether they perceived their peer mentor's economic situation to be different or similar to their own, with mean scores of 2.96 and 3.00, also very close in range. The third item pair

asked mentees whether they perceived their peer mentor to be from a social class different or similar to their own, with mean scores of 3.14 and 3.39, which differed slightly. The final item pair asked mentees whether they perceived their peer mentor's background to be different or similar to their own with exact mean scores of 2.87.

Attitude homophily. Objective three was to describe honors students' level of attitude homophily with their peer mentor. Attitude homophily measured how similar or dissimilar mentees perceived their mentor's thought interpersonal behaviors, thought processes, and values. The attitude homophily construct included 15 statements.

Table 5.

Level of Attitude Homophily between Peer Mentors and Mentees

Statement	*M*	*SD*
My peer mentor thinks like me.	3.43	.945
My peer mentor doesn't behave like me. *	3.04	.976
My peer mentor is different from me. *	2.48	.898
My peer mentor shares my values.	3.52	.665
My peer mentor is like me.	3.13	1.01
My peer mentor treats people like I do.	3.87	.815
My peer mentor doesn't think like me. *	3.13	.920
My peer mentor is similar to me.	3.30	.974
My peer mentor doesn't share my values. *	3.43	.788
My peer mentor behaves like me.	3.26	.810
My peer mentor is unlike me. *	3.22	.850
My peer mentor doesn't treat people like I do. *	3.61	.839
My peer mentor has thoughts and ideas similar to mine.	3.70	.635
My peer mentor expresses attitudes different from mine. *	2.74	.915
My peer mentor has a lot in common with me.	3.30	.876
Grand Mean	3.27	

Note: $n = 23$, * = reverse coded item. The five-point scale ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

The grand mean for the attitude homophily construct was 3.27, which also landed in the slightly agree range on the five-point scale. Mentees felt that their mentor treats people the same,

with a mean of 3.87 (*sd* = .815), and that their peer mentor has similar thoughts and ideas, with a mean of 3.70 (*sd* = .635). For this construct, there were seven reverse coded items. The first item pair asked mentees to report as to whether they felt their peer mentor did or did not behave like them, with means of 3.26(s*d* = .810) and 3.04 (*sd* = .976). The second item pair asked mentees whether they felt that their peer mentor was different or similar to them, with means of 2.48 (*sd* = .898) and 3.30 (*sd* = .974), which were similar in value. The third item pair asked mentees to report as to whether they felt their peer mentor did or did not think like them, with means of 3.43 (*sd* = .788) and 3.13 (*sd* = .920). The fourth statement asked mentees to report as to whether they felt their mentor shared or did not share their values, with means of 3.52 (*sd* = .665) and 3.43 (*sd* = .788). The fifth item asked whether mentees whether they felt peer mentor was like them or unlike them, with mean scores of 3.13 (*sd* = 1.01) and 3.22 (*sd* = .850). The sixth item pair asked mentees whether their peer mentor treats or does not treat people the way they do, with means of 3.87 (*sd* = .815) and 3.61 (*sd* = .839). The final item asked mentees whether their peer mentor expressed dissimilar attitudes to their own, with a mean of 2.74, which was neutral. The means between the positive and negatively worded statement pairs were quite similar throughout the entire construct, also with consistent standard deviations.

Interpersonal Attraction

Objective four was to describe mentees' perceptions of their mentor's attractiveness. Attractiveness was broken down into three sub-sections: task attractiveness, social attractiveness, and physical attractiveness.

Task attractiveness. There were 14 statements to measure mentees' perceptions of their mentor's task attractiveness. As previously mentioned, peer mentors were given facilitation tasks

throughout the semester, during which mentees could observe how their mentor approached guided discussions, in-class activities, or out-of-class activities.

Table 6.

Perceptions of Mentor's Task Attractiveness

Statement	*M*	*SD*
If I wanted to get things done, I could probably depend on my peer mentor.	3.71	.902
My peer mentor would be a good problem solver.	4.10	.539
I couldn't get anything accomplished with my peer mentor. *	4.10	.625
I have confidence in my peer mentor's ability to get the job done.	4.10	.625
My peer mentor is a typical goof-off when assigned a job to do. *	4.14	.655
I would enjoy working on a task with my peer mentor.	3.71	.956
My peer mentor is lazy when it comes to working on a task. *	4.29	.784
My peer mentor would be an asset in any task situation.	4.00	.775
I would recommend my peer mentor as a work partner.	4.05	.740
I could rely on my peer mentor to get the job done.	4.19	.602
My peer mentor takes their work seriously.	4.29	.561
My peer mentor is an unreliable work partner. *	4.29	.561
I could not count on my peer mentor to get the job done. *	4.10	.768
I could not recommend my peer mentor as a work partner. *	4.19	.680
Grand Mean	4.09	

Note: $n = 21$, * = reverse coded item. The five-point scale ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

The grand mean for the above task attractiveness construct was 4.09, which was the highest score for each of the scales. Mentees felt that their peer mentors took their work seriously, with a mean of 4.29 (sd = .561), and the reverse coded item, essentially stating that they viewed their peer mentor as a *reliable* work partner, with a mean 4.29 (*sd* = .561). Other notable high means indicated that mentees did *not* consider their peer mentor to be lazy, with a mean of 4.29 (*sd* = .784) and that they felt they could rely on their peer mentor to get a job done, with a mean of 4.19 (sd = .602). All the means for the task attractiveness construct landed within the upper range of agree, to somewhere on the strongly agree scales.

Social attractiveness. The second attractiveness scale measured mentee's perceptions of their mentor in a friendship role, referred to as *social attractiveness*. There were 12 statements related to social attractiveness.

Table 7.

Perceptions of Mentor's Social Attractiveness

Statement	*M*	*SD*
I think my peer mentor could be a friend of mine.	3.95	.911
I would like to have a friendly chat with my peer mentor.	3.89	.937
It would be difficult to meet and talk with my peer mentor. *	3.79	1.13
We could never establish a personal friendship with each other. *	3.89	1.04
My peer mentor just wouldn't fit into my circle of friends. *	3.37	1.06
My peer mentor would be pleasant to be with.	4.05	.621
My peer mentor is sociable with me.	3.68	1.10
I would not like to spend time socializing with my peer mentor. *	3.79	.918
I could be come close friends with my peer mentor.	3.37	1.06
My peer mentor is easy to get along with.	4.16	.602
My peer mentor is unpleasant to be around. *	4.42	.607
My peer mentor is not very friendly. *	4.53	.841
Grand Mean	3.90	

Note: $n = 19$, * = reverse coded item. The five-point scale ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

The grand mean for the social attractiveness construct was 3.90, which was slightly below the strongly agree range. Mentees most agreed that their mentors were *not* unpleasant to be around, with a mean of 4.43 ($sd = .841$) that their mentors *were* friendly, with a mean of 4.53 ($sd = .607$) which were both reverse coded statements. Each of the means for this construct remained in the upper range between agree and strongly agree. The grand mean placed the social attractiveness scale as the second highest rated of the interpersonal attraction scales.

Physical attractiveness. The final attractiveness scale measured mentees' perceptions of their mentor's physical attractiveness. This construct presented statements about mentors' physical

traits or overall level of attractiveness. There were 11 statements related to physical attractiveness.

Table 8.

Perceptions of Mentor's Physical Attractiveness.

Statement	*M*	*SD*
I think my mentor is handsome/pretty.	3.72	.669
My peer mentor is sexy looking.	2.67	.907
I don't like the way my peer mentor looks. *	4.06	.938
My peer mentor is ugly. *	4.22	.808
I find my peer mentor attractive physically.	2.83	.924
My peer mentor is not good looking. *	4.06	.802
My peer mentor looks appealing.	3.33	.907
My peer mentor is nice looking.	3.83	.514
My peer mentor has an attractive face.	3.39	.916
My peer mentor is not physically attractive. *	3.72	1.07
My peer mentor is good looking.	3.67	.594
Grand Mean	3.59	

Note: n = 18, * = reverse coded item. The five-point scale ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

The grand mean for the physical attractiveness construct was 3.59, which was the lowest rated of the three interpersonal attraction scales. Mentees most felt that their peer mentor was *not* ugly, with a mean of 4.22 (*sd* = .808) and that they liked the way their mentor looks, with a mean of 4.06 (*sd* = .938). Mentees were neutral regarding whether or not they considered their mentor to be sexy, with a mean of 2.67 (sd = .907).

Demographic Comparisons

Objective 5 was to compare students' experiences in the honors program and the various levels of homophily with demographic variables such as term of participation, gender, ethnicity, First-Generation designation, and financial assistance. With a census, data was not analyzed to

test for significance or to generalize to a larger population. Means for each group are displayed side by side for consideration.

Term of participation. Mentees were asked to select their term of participation, either the fall 2016 session, or the fall 2017 session. The following tables compare mentees' responses to the different instrument sections based on the term they participated in the peer mentor program.

Table 9.

Comparison of Means by Term of Participation

	Fall 2016		Fall 2017	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Experiences in the Peer Mentor Program				
My peer mentor helped me better understand the overall requirements of the Bumpers College Honors Program.	3.90	.316	4.38	.744
My peer mentor explained general thesis requirements.	3.50	.850	4.25	1.03
My peer mentor provided guidance about honors coursework.	4.30	.483	4.25	1.03
My peer mentor provided guidance about study abroad opportunities.	4.20	.919	3.63	1.30
I felt encouraged by my peer mentor.	4.40	.699	4.25	1.38
My peer mentor was easy to contact.	4.90	.316	4.75	.707
My peer mentor made a consistent effort to reach out to me.	3.90	.994	4.25	1.03
I related to my peer mentor based on major, minor, or academic interests.	3.50	1.179	4.38	1.188
I related to my peer mentor based on outside interests or hobbies.	2.80	.789	3.38	1.30
My peer mentor mainly helped me with personal (non-academic) issues.	2.30	1.16	3.00	1.51
My peer mentor mainly helped me with academic issues.	3.30	1.16	4.00	.926

Table 9 (Cont.)

	Fall 2016		Fall 2017	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Attitude Homophily	3.45		3.16	
Task Attractiveness	4.01		4.21	
Social Attractiveness	3.80		3.90	
Physical Attractiveness	3.65		3.60	

Note: Fall 2016 $n = 10$, Fall 2017 $n = 8$

A few of the item means were consistent between the two terms. There were 10 students who participated in the 2016 term and 8 students who participated in the 2017 term. Mentors' guidance regarding honors coursework, on-campus resources, effort made to contact mentees and availability all remained generally similar. The three statements with the largest differences between the mentees in fall of 2016 and fall of 2017 were regarding whether their mentors helped them with academic issues and whether they related based on major or academic interests. Fall 2017 mentees reported relating more to their peer mentor based on academic interest versus fall 2016 mentees. Fall 2016 mentees and fall 2017 mentees were both neutral regarding whether their peer mentors helped them with personal issues, with means of 2.30 (sd = 1.16) and 3.00 (sd = 1.51) respectively. The attractiveness scales indicated similar means while the level of background homophily varied the most, with grand means of 2.79 and 3.19 for the fall 2016 and fall 2017 participants.

Sex. Students were given an open-response box to indicate their preference to account for diverse identities. Of the participants, 15 self-identified as female, and three self-identified as male. Various forms of capitalization were present in the open responses. As such, the *only* changes made to the responses were to standardize capitalization prior to analysis.

Table 10.

Comparison of Means by Sex

	Female		Male	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Experiences in the Peer Mentor Program				
My peer mentor helped me better understand the overall requirements of the Bumpers College Honors Program.	4.07	.594	4.33	.577
My peer mentor explained general thesis requirements.	3.60	.986	4.33	.577
My peer mentor provided guidance about honors coursework.	4.20	.775	4.67	.577
My peer mentor informed me about on-campus resources.	4.60	.632	4.67	.577
My peer mentor provided guidance about study abroad opportunities.	3.80	1.14	4.67	.577
I felt encouraged by my peer mentor.	4.27	1.10	4.67	.577
My peer mentor was easy to contact.	4.80	.561	5.00	.000
My peer mentor made a consistent effort to reach out to me.	3.93	1.03	4.67	0.577
I related to my peer mentor based on major, minor, or academic interests.	3.73	1.28	4.67	0.577
I related to my peer mentor based on outside interests or hobbies.	2.93	.961	3.67	1.528
My peer mentor mainly helped me with personal (non-academic) issues.	2.27	1.10	4.33	1.15
My peer mentor mainly helped me with academic issues.	3.67	1.04	3.33	1.52
Background Homophily	3.00		2.73	
Attitude Homophily	3.34		3.26	
Task Attractiveness	4.05		4.35	
Social Attractiveness	3.82		3.97	
Physical Attractiveness	3.69		3.30	

Note: Female $n = 15$, Male $n = 3$

Most of the participants identified as female. Means were consistently similar regarding their experiences in the peer mentor program, except for one question. Females were neutral

regarding whether their peer mentor helped them with personal issues, with a mean of 2.27 (*sd* = 1.10), while males strongly agreed that their peer mentor helped them with personal issues, with a mean of 4.33 (*sd* = 1.15). Females and males reported similar levels of background homophily, attitude homophily, and interpersonal attraction. The interpersonal attraction scale with the highest mean score was task attractiveness, with grand means of 4.05 from females and 4.35 from males, respectively.

Ethnicity. Participants could select from White, Hispanic or Latino, Black or African American, Native American or American Indian, or Asian/Pacific Islander with an open response box for other racial/ethnic identities. There was one participant that identified as Asian/Pacific Islander and the remaining 17 identified as White.

Table 11.

Comparison of Means by Ethnicity

	Asian/Pacific Islander		White	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Experiences in the Peer Mentor Program				
My peer mentor helped me better understand the overall requirements of the Bumpers College Honors Program.	4.00		4.12	.600
My peer mentor explained general thesis requirements.	4.00		3.71	.985
My peer mentor provided guidance about honors coursework.	4.00		4.29	.772
My peer mentor informed me about on-campus resources.	5.00		4.59	.618
My peer mentor provided guidance about study abroad opportunities.	5.00		3.88	1.11
I felt encouraged by my peer mentor.	5.00		4.29	1.04
My peer mentor was easy to contact.	5.00		4.82	.529

Table 11 (Cont.)

	Asian/Pacific Islander		White	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Experiences in the Peer Mentor Program				
I related to my peer mentor based on major, minor, or academic interests.	4.00		3.88	1.26
I related to my peer mentor based on outside interests or hobbies.	3.00		3.06	1.08
My peer mentor mainly helped me with personal (non-academic) issues.	1.00		2.71	1.31
My peer mentor mainly helped me with academic issues.	1.00		3.76	.903
Background Homophily	3.90		2.90	
Attitude Homophily	3.33		3.33	
Task Attractiveness	3.92		4.11	
Social Attractiveness	3.91		3.84	
Physical Attractiveness	3.75		3.62	

Note: Asian/Pacific Islander $n = 1$, White $n = 17$

The item means that were the most similar between ethnicities were that their peer mentor helped explain overall program requirements, general thesis requirements, coursework guidance, was easy to contact, and relatability based on academic interests. The mentee who identified as Asian/Pacific Islander was neutral regarding whether they related to their peer mentor based on outside interests or hobbies, with a score of 3.00, and disagreed that their mentor helped them with academic or personal issues, with a score of 1.00. There was also difference between background homophily scores. The Asian/Pacific Islander mentee reported higher levels of background homophily, in the agree range, with a score of 3.90, while White students reported a neutral level of background homophily with a grand mean of 2.90. Except for background homophily, the other homophily and interpersonal attraction scales had similar means.

First-Generation students. Students indicated whether they are First-Generation students as an integral part of assessing students' needs. Of the participants, four indicated that they were First-Generation students and 14 indicated that they were not.

Table 12.

Comparison of Means by First-Generation Status

	Yes		No	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Experiences in the Peer Mentor Program				
My peer mentor helped me better understand the overall requirements of the Bumpers College Honors Program.	3.50	.577	4.29	.469
My peer mentor explained general thesis requirements.	3.25	.500	3.86	1.02
My peer mentor provided guidance about honors coursework.	3.50	1.00	4.50	.519
My peer mentor informed me about on-campus resources.	4.25	.957	4.71	.469
My peer mentor provided guidance about study abroad opportunities.	3.50	1.29	4.07	1.07
I felt encouraged by my peer mentor.	3.50	1.73	4.57	.646
My peer mentor was easy to contact.	4.25	.957	5.00	0.00
My peer mentor made a consistent effort to reach out to me.	3.75	.500	4.14	1.09
I related to my peer mentor based on major, minor, or academic interests.	3.25	1.50	4.07	1.14
I related to my peer mentor based on outside interests or hobbies.	2.75	1.25	3.14	1.02
My peer mentor mainly helped me with personal (non-academic) issues.	2.00	.816	2.79	1.42
My peer mentor mainly helped me with academic issues.	3.25	.957	3.71	1.13

Table 12 (Cont.)

	Yes		No	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Attitude Homophily	3.10		3.40	
Task Attractiveness	3.80		4.18	
Social Attractiveness	3.35		3.98	
Physical Attractiveness	3.81		3.57	

Note: First-Generation $n = 4$, non-First-Generation $n = 14$

The comparison of means by First-Generation status illustrated larger gaps between mean scores than the other comparison tables. First-Generation students reported lower mean scores regarding whether their peer mentor was encouraging, helped them understand program requirements, provided guidance about honors coursework, and whether they helped with mainly personal issues. First-Generation students consistently *agreed* with the statements mentioned, but the scores were lower than non-first-generation students, who strongly agreed with the statements. First-Generation students held a lower, neutral level of background homophily, with a grand mean of 2.60 versus non-First-Generation students with a grand mean of 3.06.

Recipients of financial aid. Students were asked to indicate whether they received financial aid. Types of aid were not specified any further, but could feasibly include any type of financial assistance (federal or state aid, scholarships or grants, and/or other sources).

Table 13.

Comparison of Means by Financial Assistance

	Yes		No	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Experiences in the Peer Mentor Program				
My peer mentor helped me better understand the overall requirements of the Bumpers College Honors Program.	4.13	.640	4.00	.000

Table 13 (Cont.)

	Yes		No	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Experiences in the Peer Mentor Program				
My peer mentor provided guidance about honors coursework.	4.33	.816	4.00	.000
My peer mentor informed me about on-campus resources.	4.60	.632	4.67	.577
My peer mentor provided guidance about study abroad opportunities.	4.00	1.13	3.67	1.15
I felt encouraged by my peer mentor.	4.27	1.10	4.67	.577
My peer mentor was easy to contact.	4.80	.561	5.00	0.00
My peer mentor made a consistent effort to reach out to me.	4.00	1.00	4.33	1.15
I related to my peer mentor based on major, minor, or academic interests.	3.93	1.33	3.67	.577
I related to my peer mentor based on outside interests or hobbies.	3.20	1.08	2.33	.577
My peer mentor mainly helped me with personal (non-academic) issues.	2.80	1.37	1.67	.577
My peer mentor mainly helped me with academic issues.	3.73	.961	3.00	1.73
Background Homophily	2.86		3.43	
Attitude Homophily	3.32		3.35	
Task Attractiveness	4.11		4.04	
Social Attractiveness	3.85		3.83	
Physical Attractiveness	3.61		3.69	

Note: Financial aid recipients $n = 15$, Non-recipients $n = 3$

Mentees that did not receive financial aid were neutral regarding whether they related to their peer mentor based on outside interests or hobbies and whether their peer mentor mainly helped with academic issues with means of 2.33 ($sd = .577$) and 3.00 ($sd = 1.73$). Additionally, mentees that did not receive financial aid disagreed that their peer mentor helped with personal issues, with a mean of 1.67 ($sd = .577$) as opposed to a neutral mean of 2.80 ($sd = 1.37$) from students that did receive aid.

Mean scores for the homophily and interpersonal attraction scales were similar, except for background homophily, which had the lowest score of the scales. The grand mean for background homophily fell on the neutral end of the scale for students that *did* receive financial aid, with a grand mean of 2.86. The grand means for attitude homophily and interpersonal attraction were relatively similar between groups and were mostly between agree and strongly agree on the scale.

Chapter 5

Conclusions, Discussion and Recommendations

The main goal of the study was to assess mentees' experiences in a peer mentor program in an honors college of agriculture and determine the degree that mentees relate to their peer mentors based on different scales. Overall, mentees reported positive experiences and moderate levels of homophily with their peer mentors, which was relatively consistent between the two years. There were similarities preset with my research and previous studies regarding homophily, which I will discuss further. The portion of the instrument used to assess mentees' experiences in the honors peer mentor program, although not tested for reliability, still provides the honors program with initial data that can be used to improve the program. The instrument should be further refined, validated and tested for reliability to be useful to other colleges of agriculture, and the agricultural field.

Conclusions and Discussion

The purpose of the study was to assess mentees' experiences in a peer mentor program in an honors college of agriculture and to determine which factors impact mentees' ability to relate or not relate to their peer mentor. Students enrolled in the Bumpers College Honors Program who had participated in the honors orientation course in the past two years were surveyed to determine their experiences and levels of homophily with their peer mentors.

Honors program experiences. Objective one was to describe honors students' experiences in a peer mentor program. Honors students felt that their peer mentors were helpful with providing guidance about the overall honors requirements, informed them about on-campus resources and honors coursework, were encouraging, easy to reach, and consistently made contact. Students also felt that their mentors explained the general thesis requirements, provided information about study abroad opportunities, were relatable based on academic or outside interests, and helped them mainly with academic issues. Students were neutral regarding whether their mentor helped them with personal issues.

The results from the first portion of the survey were informative about students' overall experiences in the peer mentor program. The administrative objectives of the peer mentor program were to inform students about overall honors requirements, particularly thesis and coursework expectations, as well as inform students about how to engage with opportunities on and off campus. Finally, the program was meant to provide students with a social and emotional support system for managing academic or personal issues. Responses indicated that the program objectives were generally met among the students that completed the survey, which is a positive outcome for both sessions of the program, as the amounts of respondents from each session were roughly equal.

The literature mentioned that peer mentor programs are prone to blurring the boundaries between academic and social objectives and should have clear objectives and a model outlined prior to beginning (Karcher, et al., 2006). Mentees indicated that their mentor mainly provided academic support rather than social support, which aligned with the initial goal to provide students with academic mentoring, and emotional support as needed. While social and/or personal support was available, that did not necessarily mean that the peer mentor assumed the role of confidant for personal issues. Karcher, et al., 2006) also described the differences between developmental and instrumental mentoring. It is still not clear whether the Bumpers College Honors peer mentor program follows a developmental or instrumental model. It likely follows more of a blended approach in its current form.

Karcher, et al., (2006) explained that developmental mentoring focuses on building a personal relationship with the mentee first, with increased academic skills as an eventual outcome, rather than an immediate outcome, while instrumental mentoring focuses on academic skill building first. The Bumpers College Honors peer program began with an academic focus in mind and has evolved over time to also provide social or personal support. As an aside, anecdotal observations suggest that the various peer mentors have self-constructed roles that sometimes conflict, as they have expressed various opinions about relationship building versus an academic focus. Further exploration of the construction and perceptions of roles between mentors and mentees in the honors peer mentor program would be a good next step for the honors program to take to further adapt and solidify the program model.

There were similarities in the peer mentoring literature between my data and previous findings. For example, Bumpers College Honors mentees' noted that their mentors were easy to contact and consistently reached out to them. Benjamin (2003) indicated that peer mentors

verbally described part of their role as being regularly available and providing information about on-campus resources, as well as being part of their formal job description.

Colvin and Ashman (2010) found that there were different roles associated with peer mentoring: connecting links, peer leaders, learning coaches, student advocates, and trusted friends. In this qualitative study, mentees mentioned being grateful for their mentor's ability to connect them to on-campus resources, which again, was shown in my data. Colvin and Ashman's study also illuminated that some mentees described their mentor as a trusted friend or sounding board for personal situations, but Bumpers College Honors mentees indicated that their mentors provided more *academic* support than personal support.

Homophily and attractiveness. Objective two was to describe mentees' level of background homophily with their peer mentor and objective three was to describe mentees' level of attitude homophily with their peer mentor. As the homophily scales were indices, a grand mean was calculated and interpreted, versus the individual statements. Each of the sections were presented in a five-point Likert-scale format, with options ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Attitude and background homophily came in on the lower end of all the grand means, with grand means of 3.27 and 3.06. While the scores between scales did differ, each of the grand means were above 3.01 on a five-point Likert-scale, which indicated a positive response in the agree range. Any grand mean score above 4.01 indicated strongly agree. Mentees' responses illustrated that they did positively relate to their mentors.

Students reported the lowest scores for background homophily, which was addressed during both cognitive interviews. The two interviewees from the College of Engineering mentioned that they would have to guess their mentor's background, because it never came up in conversation during their mentoring sessions. However, engineering students are mentored one-

on-one and are not mentored in a class setting. The difference in settings between the two programs could affect their commentary. It is still possible that attitudes, task attractiveness, social attractiveness, and physical attractiveness were easier for Bumpers College Honors mentees to observe and gauge based on the type of social experiences they had with their mentor, because they did meet regularly in and out of the classroom. I pose that the Bumpers College Honors Program would benefit from follow up qualitative exploration to further understand what freshmen honors students' experiences are being peer mentored and how students relate or do not relate to their mentor based on the homophily and attractiveness scales.

Objective four was to describe mentees' perceptions of their mentor's attractiveness. Honors program mentees related most to their mentors based on task attractiveness, with a grand mean of 4.09. The second highest level of relatability was based on social attractiveness with a grand mean of 3.90, the third highest was physical attractiveness with a grand mean of 3.63. The observability of these factors would potentially be greater for mentees than background homophily, as mentees were able to interact with mentors each class day as well as during out-of-class activities and observe their personal traits in a variety of settings. Students could observe mentors facilitating classroom activities, conducting in-presentations, and coordinating social meet-ups. Rocca & McCroskey (1999) found that students had high levels of task attraction with a mean of 22.45, social attraction at 18.68, and physical attraction at 12.76. The highest possible score was a 28 for the study. Means for background and attitude homophily were much lower, which had nearly the same mean score, both around 15. Honors program mentees perceived high levels of task attraction, social attraction, and physical attraction, in the same order, with background and attitude homophily presenting lower, nearly identical mean scores. The results

from my homophily and attraction sections mimic the results from Rocca and McCroskey's study (1999).

Rocca & McCroskey (1999) also calculated correlations between teacher immediacy and homophily. They found that immediacy was moderately positively related to both dimensions of homophily as well as attractiveness, however, background homophily presented lower correlations. Levels of immediacy were positively associated with perceived similarities and greater attraction. As peer mentors may take on the role of facilitator, peer mentor programs may benefit from investigating the effects of immediacy on the peer mentor-mentee relationship to see if there is a positive correlation between immediacy and homophily in peer-to-peer experiences.

Comparisons. Objective five was to compare participants' responses with various demographic characteristics. I describe the differences in participants' responses for term of participation, sex, racial/ethnic identity, first-generation status, and financial aid status.

Term of participation. One notable difference between mentees' responses from the fall 2016 term and the fall 2017 term, was that mentees enrolled in the fall 2017 session reported higher levels of background homophily. Mentees enrolled in the fall 2017 session also reported that they related more to their peer mentor based on academic interest. One potential explanation for this may be that the difference in selection had a positive impact on mentees' perceptions of their peer mentor. Groups were divided by major as much as possible for the 2017 session, whereas the 2016 groups were randomly divided.

Sex. Mean scores for male and female mentees were similar except for background homophily and help with personal issues. Males strongly agreed that their peer mentor helped them with

personal issues. Overall, males reported slightly higher mean scores for each of the statements regarding their overall experiences in the peer mentor program than females. The homophily and interpersonal attraction scales showed more variation, although both males and females both reported the highest score for task attraction while the lowest score was for background homophily.

Race/ethnicity. One mentee identified as Asian/Pacific Islander and the remaining 17 mentees identified as White. The main takeaway for this section was that the mentee identifying as Asian/Pacific Islander reported that their peer mentor did not help with personal or academic issues, but rated their peer mentor highly on the other areas of the program. The mentee also reported a higher level of background homophily than White students.

First-generation status. This section hinted at some gaps in comparison to the other demographic characteristics. Students who reported being first-generation college students had lower mean scores for their peer mentor encouraging them, helping them understand program requirements and guiding them about honors coursework. First-generation students still agreed that their peer mentor helped them, but reported consistently lower scores for those statements. Again, background homophily displayed the lowest grand mean for first-generation students.

Recipients of financial aid. Students who did not receive financial aid disagreed that their peer mentor helped them with personal issues and reported a lower, more neutral level of background homophily with their peer mentor.

Recommendations

The data pertaining to objective one is a starting point for the honors program in terms of assessing the peer mentor program. Previous literature suggested that peer-to-peer interactions

can present benefits for the mentor and the mentee (Colvin and Ashman, 2010) and mentees' overall responses indicated that their peer mentors did assist them. Follow up studies could be conducted to expand on the conceptualization and refinement of the program structure, as well as to better understand students' experiences and conceptualizations of peer mentor roles from both mentee and peer mentor perspectives.

Part of the purpose of the Bumpers College Honors peer mentor program was to introduce incoming students to an experienced peer, preferably from the same major area, who could help them integrate into the college. My findings indicated the presence of homophily between mentees and peer mentors, suggesting that mentees did relate to their peer mentors. Adding in the concept of immediacy may help further explain the nature of the peer mentor-mentee relationship based on peer mentor's behaviors in and out of the classroom. Rocca and McCroskey (1999) found that there *was* a positive relationship between immediacy and homophily in the classroom. Within the context of peer mentoring, further examining the effects of immediacy could inform the program model and training for peer mentors.

I recommend that 1) groups continue to be selected based on major or academic interest to improve homophily; 2) programming be implemented via peer mentors to better serve the needs of racial/ethnic minority students, first-generation students, and students who do not receive financial aid; 3) the instrument used to assess honors' students experiences in the honors mentor program be further refined, validated, and tested for reliability to be of use to other colleges of agriculture with honors programs or other discipline specific honors programs that provide peer mentoring, particularly in addressing the gender of the peer mentor; 4) qualitative follow up studies be conducted to better understand mentees experiences in an honors agricultural peer mentor program, their perceptions of the program model, and how peer mentors

and mentees conceptualize peer mentor roles; 5) quantitative follow up studies be conducted to incorporate the concept of immediacy in addition to the homophily scales; and 6) colleges of agriculture with honors programs consistently assess and evaluate their programming.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Instrumentation

Q1 What is your major in the Dale Bumpers College of Agriculture, Food and Life Sciences?

Q2 If you have more than one major, please indicate your additional major(s) in the text box below.

Q3 Since engaging in the AFLS mentor program, did you change your major to a major outside of the Dale Bumpers College of Agriculture, Food and Life Sciences?

Q3.1 Did your peer mentor impact your decision to leave the college? (Yes selected)

Q3.2 Did your peer mentor impact your decision to stay in the college? (No selected)

Q4 Did you change your major to another major within the College?

Q5 Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

- My peer mentor helped me better understand the overall requirements of the Bumpers College Honors Program.
- My peer mentor explained general thesis requirements.
- My peer mentor provided guidance about honors coursework.
- My peer mentor informed me about on-campus resources.
- My peer mentor provided guidance about study abroad opportunities.
- I felt encouraged by my peer mentor.
- My peer mentor was easy to contact.

- My mentor made a consistent effort to reach out to me.
- I related to my peer mentor based on major, minor, or academic interest.
- I related to my peer mentor based on outside interests or hobbies.
- My peer mentor mainly helped me with personal (non-academic) issues.
- My peer mentor mainly helped me with academic issues.

Q6 Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

- My peer mentor is from a similar social class to mine.
- My peer mentor's status is different from mine.
- My peer mentor is from an economic situation different from mine.
- My peer mentor's background is similar to mine.
- My peer mentor's status is like mine.
- My peer mentor is from a social class different from mine.
- My peer mentor is from an economic situation like mine.
- My peer mentor's background is different form mine.
- My peer mentor and I come from a similar geographic region.
- My peer mentor's life as a child was probably similar to mine.

Q7 Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

- My peer mentor thinks like me.
- My peer mentor doesn't behave like me.
- My peer mentor is different from me.
- My peer mentor shares my values.
- My peer mentor is like me.

- My peer mentor treats people like I do.
- My peer mentor doesn't think like me.
- My peer mentor is similar to me.
- My peer mentor doesn't share my values.
- My peer mentor behaves like me.
- My peer mentor is unlike me.
- My peer mentor doesn't treat people like I do.
- My peer mentor has thoughts and ideas that are similar to mine.
- My peer mentor expresses attitudes different from mine.
- My peer mentor has a lot in common with me.

Q8 Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

- If I wanted to get things done, I could probably depend on my peer mentor.
- My peer mentor would be a good problem solver.
- I couldn't get anything accomplished with my peer mentor.
- I have confidence in my peer mentor's ability to get the job done.
- My peer mentor is a typical goof-off when assigned a job to do.
- I would enjoy working on a task with my peer mentor.
- My peer mentor is lazy when it comes to working on a task.
- My peer mentor would be an asset in any task situation.
- I would recommend my peer mentor as a work partner.
- I could rely on my peer mentor to get the job done.
- My peer mentor takes their work seriously.
- My peer mentor is an unreliable work partner.

- I could not count on my peer mentor to get the job done.
- I could not recommend my peer mentor as a work partner.

Q9 Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

- I think my peer mentor could be a friend of mine.
- I would like to have a friendly chat with my peer mentor.
- It would be difficult to meet and talk with my peer mentor.
- We could never establish a personal friendship with each other.
- My peer mentor just wouldn't fit into my circle of friends.
- My peer mentor would be pleasant to be with.
- My peer mentor is sociable with me.
- I would not like to spend time socializing with my peer mentor.
- I could become close friends with my peer mentor.
- My peer mentor is easy to get along with.
- My peer mentor is unpleasant to be around.
- My peer mentor is not very friendly.

Q10 Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

- I think my peer mentor is handsome/pretty.
- My peer mentor is sexy looking.
- I don't like the way my peer mentor looks.
- My peer mentor is ugly.
- I find my peer mentor attractive physically.
- My peer mentor is not good looking.

- My peer mentor looks appealing.
- I don’t like the way my peer mentor looks.
- My peer mentor is nice looking.
- My peer mentor has an attractive face.
- My peer mentor is not physically attractive.
- My peer mentor is good looking.

Q11 Please select the year you participated in the peer mentor program.

Q12 What is your sex?

Q13 Please specify your ethnicity.

Q14 Are you a First-Generation college student?

Q15 Are you a recipient of financial aid?

Q16 What is your home zip code?

Appendix B

IRB Documentation

UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS

To:	Isabel Whitehead BELL 4188
From:	Douglas James Adams, Chair IRB Committee
Date:	04/09/2018
Action:	**Exemption Granted**
Action Date:	04/09/2018
Protocol #:	1802105493
Study Title:	Assessing a Peer Mentor Program in a Honors College of Agriculture

The above-referenced protocol has been determined to be exempt.

If you wish to make any modifications in the approved protocol that may affect the level of risk to your participants, you must seek approval prior to implementing those changes. All modifications must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have any questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact the IRB Coordinator at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.

cc: Kate Shoulders, Investigator
Jefferson Davis Miller, Investigator
Charles F Rosenkrans Jr., Investigator