

THE EXPERIENCES OF STUDENT FEMALE MENTEES AND STAFF AND FACULTY  
MENTORS IN A FLEDGLING COMMUNITY COLLEGE MENTOR PROGRAM:  
A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

by

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## ABSTRACT

This is an intrinsic qualitative case study dissertation that examined the experiences of mentees and mentors in a new mentoring program for female students at a two-year public commuter college in the Southeast. The methodologies of interviews, observations, and document analysis are used to chronicle what mentees and mentors experienced as participants in this mentoring program. Mattering and marginality theory is the theoretical framework used to understand and relate the experiences of students and mentors in this new mentoring program. The additional theories of self-efficacy, career decision-making, and motivation were used to explain student challenges and outcomes from the mentoring experience. The philosophical worldview of realistic-constructivism guided the design and implementation of the study.

With retention of major concern to all institutions, but especially public, two-year colleges, coupled with the recent shift to performance funding, finding low-cost interventions to help students persist is crucial to both student success and the health of higher education institutions. This dissertation sought to reveal and understand the experiences of female mentees and mentors in this new mentoring program, as well as to expand the literature on mentoring programs and mattering and marginality theory. Results revealed the need these students had for information, guidance, connection, and encouragement. Interviews with the participants highlighted the great importance of students feeling like they matter to someone at the institution and the power of encouragement on persistence. They also showed the damage that can be done when mentors are not sincere in taking on the mentoring role. Of interest was how much mentoring meant to the mentees and how mattering theory applied to the experiences of the

mentors, as well as the mentees. Motivational, self-efficacy, and career decision-making theories were also applicable in reviewing what the mentees needed, received, and how they benefited. The findings of this study have assisted in the evaluation and planning of the mentor program under study and may be of assistance to other institutions wishing to start or improve upon similar programs. It expands further what we know about mattering and the effects of mentoring on student success and retention. It questions how to best structure mentoring programs for particular institutions and student populations. It is clear that much research is still needed, both qualitative and quantitative, to better understand what takes place in mentoring experiences.

*Key words: career-decision making self-efficacy, case study, community college, self-efficacy, mattering, mentor, mentoring, mentee, motivation, retention*

## DEDICATION

This dissertation proposal is dedicated to the following: Dr. Karri Holley, who very graciously and patiently took me through my dissertation proposal defense, providing the encouragement of a mentor, until and even after the event of her sabbatical; to Dr. Nathaniel Bray, who was beyond kind and generous in agreeing to take over as my co-chair and proved to be what a mentor should, an encourager, a challenger, and an advocate; to my dissertation committee, who provided invaluable insights and suggestions; and most of all to my husband, Terry, without whose faith, love, and support I would never have been able to undertake or complete this momentous personal accomplishment.

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## CHAPTER I:

### INTRODUCTION

*I have had a very stressful last couple of years with personal and family turmoil, and it's been reflecting more and more in my academic success. I believe a mentor would be helpful in making me more comfortable with knowledge and usage of the resources available on campus.*

*I'm in desperate need of a mentor. I have the right goals and plan, I just lack self-discipline and I'm a procrastinator when it comes to certain things. I slowly, but surely, see everything in my life blowing up to pieces if I don't catch it and stop it soon. I'm a very organized, smart, determined person, but lately I have been slacking so bad in all areas in my life, so I'm writing this email in hopes of finding a mentor to help straighten my life out before it's too late and to help me get back on the right path! Thanks so much.*

*As far as the mentoring program, I would really like help developing a better sense of how I can balance school, work, and pursuing other endeavors and devote time equally among them since they have the same amount of importance.*

*I would like to have a mentor please. I think this is a wonderful idea.*

*Yes I do need a mentor. Somebody help me please.*

Above are some of the statements from students at Georgia Highlands College in response to an email asking female students if they would like a mentor. Many students simply emailed back with their name, ID, major, career focus, and campus, as requested, but other students included pleas for help from the sincere and humble acknowledgment that they could use help in getting through school and balancing all their obligations to the heart-wrenching cries for someone to show them the way. These pleas impressed upon the AAWCC (American Association of Women in Community Colleges) mentoring group that the need to find mentors, even after the list of volunteer mentors was exhausted. When the student mentor requests were shared with the group, some mentors said, "I'll mentor her if you don't find anyone else; we

can't let her go without a mentor!" Thus, some mentors were assigned two or even three or more mentees, some mentors were recruited from outside the female employee organization, and some mentees and mentors are at different campus locations. One part-time staff member consented to mentor after some encouragement. Another member paid her annual AAWCC membership dues so she could be added to the mentor roll. What started as a suggestion to replicate with female students the college's strong male *Brother2Brother* mentor group quickly became a concern of how to meet the female requests for mentors generated from a single summer term e-mail.

Though mentees are assigned mentors, some mentees and mentors are not on the same campus, which is not an ideal situation since Georgia Highlands College's campuses are in five different counties. The larger problem, however, is how to train mentors, how to provide consistent assistance, how to handle programming for workshops and social activities without a budget or paid staff, how to recruit and match mentees and mentors, and how to continue and grow a program that seemed like a great idea but could either morph beyond control and implode or simply fizzle out; either option would be a disappointment for all involved.

The goal of the program is to enhance the academic and career success of Georgia Highlands College's female students by increasing their self-efficacy through encouragement, academic resources, and career exploration (see Appendix A). The program that began through the college's chapter of the American Association of Women in Community Colleges (AAWCC) has a mentor resource guide, a contract for mentors and mentees to sign, and a committee to establish work groups. The leadership was formed by loose consensus until volunteer groups were formed in the second year. Two surveys were sent to the mentees early in the program, one about needs and another about satisfaction.

In the next sections of Chapter I, I discuss the problem that I sought to address, the

background of the institution where this research took place, the purpose of this study, my research questions, and the significance of the study. Assumptions, limitations, and delimitations are provided before moving on to a review of the literature. Operational definitions are provided in Appendix B.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Student retention is a significant problem at Georgia Highlands College. Research shows that everything from part-time professors, college climate, college type, college cost, majors chosen, student demographics, student background, student motivation, and student self-efficacy affect whether students complete in a timely manner or ever complete college (Bragg & Durham, 2012; Gayles & Ampaw, 2011; Hall, Smith, & Chia, 2008; Ishitani, 2006; Oseguera & Byung, 2009; Scott & Cooney, 1998; Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005; Titus, 2006; Warde, 2008). A thoughtful look at the typical demographics of public two-year college students and the lack of student services and resources at these low-funded institutions should make one wonder how these students are to successfully choose their program of study, plot a career direction, and navigate the often intimidating world of college (Hurley, Harnisch, & Nassirian, 2014). Public two-year college students often have one or all of the following identifiers working against their chances of college success: 1) they are unprepared for college; 2) they are first-generation students; 3) they have family and work responsibilities; and/or 4) they are unclear of programs of study and career possibilities (Rosenbaum, Redline, & Stephan, 2007).

Research on persistence and graduation predictors has shown that, indeed, students who are first-generation, spend many hours employed, attend college part-time, or are less academically prepared, have a higher attrition rate than students without these challenges (Porchea, Allen, Robbins, & Phelps, 2010). Public two-year colleges see a large percentage of

students who have all of those characteristics. For many students, the two-year or community college is their only option for attending college (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014). Time is a particularly limiting factor for female students who often make a larger commitment to family caretaking than their male counterparts (Mohney & Anderson, 1988). These female students, whether traditional or non-traditional age, often say they are overwhelmed with all they must do and express the need for support, both in terms of encouragement and in practical resources and career planning.

### **The Challenges of Two-Year Colleges**

Two-year public colleges are the most affordable means of obtaining a career degree and certification or an associate degree that leads to a four-year college transfer, yet attrition rates are high at these colleges that have lower admission standards than four-year colleges and universities and are composed of a large percentage of students who are both unprepared for college-level work and have major obligations outside of class work (Townsend & Twombly, 2007). Attrition is a staggering 50% for students entering two-year institutions, the majority leaving in their first year due to an unfortunate combination of issues surrounding self-efficacy, engagement, college preparation, and socio-economic factors (Mertes & Hoover, 2014). Two-year students are fortunate when they are prepared enough to complete college-level work and financially stable enough to be able to attend classes, let alone have time to become engaged with faculty and peers. Worse news is that attrition rates at two-year colleges are rising (Kinloch, 2012).

The low self-efficacy in academic work and career decision-making that many of these students possess has been negatively correlated with college persistence (Paulsen & Betz, 2004). Indeed, because community colleges uniquely face the challenges of a large percentage of

unprepared students and working students, many states have advocated for more engaging pedagogy, revamping learning support courses, increasing scholarships, and even free tuition (Free Up the Two-Year Colleges, 2014). Student attrition is a major problem for higher education, but especially for public institutions and community colleges. Nationally and in the southeast, only 4% of students complete an associate degree within two years (Complete College America, 2014). The negative effects of college attrition are boldly highlighted for institutions today due to the recent pressures on college accountability for use of public funds and performance funding that places more emphases on retention, transfer, and graduation rates than the old practice of simply looking at enrollment numbers (Summers, 2003; D'Amico, Friedel, Katsinas, & Thornton, 2014).

### **The Costs**

The loss of time and money for students who do not persist in college is great for the individual, the institution, and society that foots the tuition costs for a large number of students. From 2003-2008, first-year attrition cost states \$6.18 billion through subsidies through appropriations, \$1.4 billion through state grants to students, and \$1.5 billion through federal grants to students. In Georgia, \$254,000,000 of state money was spent on first-year dropouts and \$40,800,000 of federal money was spent on first-year dropouts (Schneider & American Institutes for Research, 2010). Unfinished degrees are very costly for states, students, and institutions when considering low return on investments, loss of institutional revenue, loss of lifetime income, and loss of potential tax revenue (Johnson & American Institutes for Research, 2012).

When one realizes that the majority of two-year college students attend through federal and state aid programs, the statistics for two-year colleges are distressing (see Appendix C). Less than half of two-year college students earn some type of degree or diploma within six years,

and less than half of two-year college students return to school after their first year; attrition that cost billions in lost federal grant dollars (Community-College Study Asks, What Helps Students Graduate?, 2012; Schneider & Yin, 2011; Summers, 2003). The cost to taxpayers of dropouts is \$660 million in federal student grants for two-year colleges. The bill to states due to dropouts is \$3.2 billion from two-year colleges (Complete College America, 2014). Low completion rates mean lack of return on investment when considering federal and state financial aid and higher education funding as well as individual financial and opportunity cost lost when degrees are not completed. Low completion rates also mean that upward mobility is less likely to occur and that many needed skilled and professional positions in society may go unfilled.

Community colleges have a strong challenge and responsibility. With 45% of undergraduates enrolled in community colleges and the large number of these students non-traditional, it is crucial that they are provided needed assistance in persisting through to graduation (Bundy, 2013). Some of the problems and solutions to college completion certainly involve money. Research has shown that students who attend only part-time or who work many hours at paid work are less likely to persist (Fike & Fike, 2008; O’Keeffe, 2013). More money could increase graduation rates if students were given enough financial aid to pay tuition and living expenses so they could attend fulltime. However, without a drastic change from the status quo of stagnant growth and state decreases in higher education funding, such financial aid will not be possible. The proportion of state spending going to higher education is lower than in the past and the total amount provided to most public colleges is far smaller than in the past (Lederman, 2013). Clearly, determining low-cost ways of helping students persist to meet their needs is the only way to achieve success in the current economy of higher education.

## **The Nation's College Completion Goal**

College retention is a national concern, as evidenced by President Obama's push for the U.S. to have the world's largest share of college graduates by 2020 and the national non-profit Complete College America, the Complete College Georgia state campaigns, and the millions spent to increase college completion rates by both government and deep-pocket groups, such as the Kresge Foundation, the Lumina Foundation for Education, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, who are interested in the future of education in this country (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014; Complete College Georgia, 2011; Nelson, 2010; Morris, 2012).

With dwindling state funding for college, public entities and citizens are also calling for accountability and results (Harbour & Day, 2009; Volkwein, 2010). Though performance funding is the new buzz phrase in higher education and Georgia Highlands College is evaluated on the number of students that graduate and transfer, Georgia Highlands College's graduation rate is in the single digits and its transfer rate is in the low teens (Fact Sheet, 2014). Over half of the students are placed in learning support classes and 62% of the students are female (GHCFact Book, 2013-2014). Georgia Highlands's students are typical of two-year college students – often first-generation or older students going to college for the first time who are ill prepared to navigate the college environment, make realistic choices, understand policies and degree requirements, and possess needed social skills to thrive (Rosenbaum, Redline, & Stephan, 2007). The lack of confidence in being able to make a decision keeps many of these students from career exploration that would assist them in making the best decision (Kiener, 2006). With no career center, Georgia Highlands's students do not have a resource for confidence-building career exploration. In order to improve graduation rates without an influx of funding to assist, Georgia Highlands College must institute low-cost programming that will yield results.

## **Lack of Focus/Direction**

One of the main factors cited by researchers for this high student attrition is the lack of clear educational goals (Summers, 2003). This inability to choose a major often causes students to take more credits than they need to graduate, take on more debt than they can afford, and take more time than needed to graduate (Nakajima, Dembo, & Mossler, 2012). Studies have shown that with both traditional-age and non-traditional students, lack of career focus is detrimental to academic persistence (Graunke & Woosley, 2005; Sandler, 2000). Conversely, career self-efficacy has been found to be a predictor of college student adjustment and academic performance (Brady-Amoon & Fuertes, 2011). Lack of understanding of academic programs, career options, as well as personal limitations, and a lack of self-efficacy in being able to derive the best career path for their individual circumstance has been recognized as an attrition factor of Georgia Highlands College's students. It is the responsibility of two-year colleges (once called 'community colleges' in Georgia), entrusted to promote democracy with open access and a comprehensive mission, to provide students the educational experience that fosters student success (Harbour & Day, 2009). Lack of career choice or appropriate choice is a barrier to this success for many students at this institution. With only four full-time advisors for a student body of 5,700 spread out across five counties and no career services staff, Georgia Highland's students have little assistance in determining the best major and career path for their ultimate success.

## **Background of Georgia Highlands College**

Founded as a junior college in 1970, Georgia Highlands College (GHC) is a limited-mission, two-year, state college with six campus sites in five counties. One campus site is its nursing and dental hygiene school in the county of its original campus. In Georgia, it is known as a community college which currently has two new four-year degrees: its online RN to BSN

and dental hygiene degree programs. It is also a commuter college (About Us, 2014). Georgia Highlands College's mission statement is as follows:

The mission of Georgia Highlands College, a state college of the University System of Georgia, is to provide access to excellent educational opportunities for the intellectual, cultural and physical development of a diverse population through pre-baccalaureate associate degree transfer programs, career associate degree programs, and targeted baccalaureate degree programs that meet the economic development needs of the region. (Mission and Institutional Goals, 2014)

Georgia Highlands College is no longer fully considered an open-access institution because it recently instituted minimum COMPASS test scores for admission. Students with more than two learning support requirements or with scores in math, reading, or English that are below the minimum for admission are denied. These students are recommended to the technical colleges. Thirty-seven pre-baccalaureate associate degree transfer programs and career associate degree programs are offered, in addition to two bachelor's degrees (About Us, 2014). Enrollment averages over 5,500 students with 63% female students (Fact Sheet, 2014). Slightly more students attend part-time than full-time. Sixty-nine percent of students classify themselves as White (non-Hispanic), 17% of students classify themselves as Black (non-Hispanic), 8% of students classify themselves as Hispanic, and 5% of students are in the category of American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, and multiracial. An intercollegiate athletics program began in 2012 with basketball; baseball and softball were added in 2013, and more athletic growth is likely. The first year student retention rate is 61% with an average student enrollment of 5,500 including over 64% of these as female students. The average student age is 24. Less than 9% of students graduate within three years, and around 15% of students transfer to another institution in the state system. The majority of students require remediation in at least one learning support course (Fact Book Academic Year 2012-2013, 2014).

As advising director at GHC and an adjunct instructor, I saw students daily who were unprepared for college, were confused about how to navigate college, and unsure of what academic and career path to take. From the traditional-age student coming directly from high school, to the middle-age student wanting to further their career possibilities, the majority of students have little college or career guidance and are not confident of their ability to make the best decisions for their career futures. There are also a large percentage of students majoring in programs that they will not be successful in, wasting precious time and money. This is well-known from the number of students who sign up for nursing and dental hygiene career programs but cannot get past the required anatomy class or earn a high enough GPA for entrance into these programs. Advisors and faculty know this anecdotally from working with students, but there is also data to show the mismatch of declared programs to students. For example, the nursing program accepts only 60 students per year, yet nursing is the second largest program of study with 1,000 of 5,700 students declared as pre-nursing. Each year GHC has over 800 students who do not qualify for their nursing program (A. Maddox, personal communication, June 17, 2015).

The extent of this issue with students majoring in the career nursing associate program who have poor grades in science and math and will never be admitted due to their low GPAs spurred me to create a brochure to show these students the vast array of careers in the medical field other than nursing. Many of the programs listed in this brochure are not ones offered at this institution, the intent not being to advertise our programs but to help students make better, and often more realistic, career choices.

Because so many students are under-prepared for college, unsure of what to major or focus on for a career, challenged financially with family obligations, and lack in confidence to overcome their challenges, persistence rates are low for both the college and the students. The

latest data on retention rates is only 60% for full-time students and 50% for part-time students (Fact Book Academic Year 2013-2014, 2014). Compounding these barriers to student success, Georgia Highlands College students are all commuter students who have little time for campus activities outside of class, hampering their ability to form the needed attachment to the institution that can increase student commitment to persistence (Tinto, 2012).

Mentoring programs can help students adjust to college, alleviate feelings of alienation, provide needed support, enhance satisfaction with the institution, and increase student commitment to the institution and to degree completion (Hu & Ma, 2010). Georgia Highlands College has no such program other than its Brother2Brother program for minority males that is limited to only two mentors and a corresponding Woman to Woman support group that is only running at one campus. The Brother2Brother and Woman to Woman groups are small and only reach a small percentage of students at this multi-campus college with 5,700 students. When the need for a female mentoring program was brought to the members of the College's American Association of Women in Community Colleges chapter, they decided to start their own mentoring program to help the female students.

### **Purpose of the Study**

I studied a new mentor program to understand the experiences of the mentees and mentors involved with the program. I approached my study from the world view of a realistic-constructivist, believing that nature exists independent of society but also that society has influence upon nature, and that we all co-create each other's reality because every interaction creates a context for the meaning we give to our environment (Arias-Maldonado, 2011; Lektorskii, 2010). From this perspective, I accept that each interaction between mentor and mentee creates change in their relationship and in their individual and shared experiences. I

sought to add to the literature on mentoring, and specifically college mentoring and mentoring of female students by a female service organization, by documenting the experiences of participants in this mentor program. I also point out that I position myself in this study as a ‘major participant’ in that I was involved with the early planning and running of the mentor program (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). I sought to extend the literature on what mentees experience by documenting the experiences of mentees and mentors in a new two-year college mentor program. I sought to discover and share helpful information on what assists students and helps them persist, what makes students feel they matter to others, and what types of mentor-mentee characteristics make a successful mentor-mentee relationship.

### **Statement of the Research Questions**

Keeping in mind the retention issue for Georgia Highlands College and student barriers to persistence as well as the great amount of time it takes to create, build, and maintain a successful mentoring program, I sought in this case study to answer the following five research questions. The first question is the central research question and the following four are associated sub-questions.

1. What do GHC female student mentees experience in a specific female-led two-year college mentor program;
2. What do GHC female mentors experience as they mentor students in a specific female-led two-year college mentor program;
3. What commonalities do GHC female student mentees share in their experiences during their participation in a specific female led college mentor program;
4. What commonalities do GHC female mentors share in their experiences during their participation in a specific female led college mentor program; and

5. How do GHC female student mentees experiences relate to the tenets of Mattering and Marginality Theory?

Campbell and Campbell's research on a faculty-student mentor program reported decreased attrition as a result of mentoring (1997). Mekolichick and Gibbs (2012) reported that mentoring can help students, especially first-generation students that largely comprise the population of two-year colleges, gain the needed confidence to approach faculty, become involved in the campus community, and to challenge themselves academically. The aim of the AAWCC mentoring program is to help motivate students to persist by providing encouragement and resources. Increasing student self-efficacy and academic success is the program goal that mentors and the program leadership strive for by letting students know they have an advocate and regularly sending important information on opportunities and college watch dates. Thus, learning what students experience as mentees in this program is helpful for the mentor program leadership in deciding if the program should be continued, expanded, or altered. Learning what mentors experience is helpful for recruiting and training mentors and to add to the research on mentoring.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study lies in the importance of knowing what mentees and mentors experience in this female mentoring program to guide further mentor program planning. This study has the potential to improve the female mentoring program at Georgia Highlands College and give support for its expansion. Study results should be helpful for other organizations initiating or working to improve a mentoring program. Whether at community colleges or other types of institutions, with females or with mixed gender mentor programs, with a staff and faculty mentor group or with mentors from other realms, this study should be of

interest to any mentoring program, especially at the college level. However, the potential for this study to inform viability and best practices of design and implementation of this particular mentoring program, without consideration of transferability to other mentoring programs, is of import enough to warrant review of the results of this study.

Administrators should find the study of interest for the program's potential to increase retention rates. Employee organizations at other institutions may wish to replicate the mentoring program or a similar study of their mentoring program on their campus. With the high cost of student attrition, funding agencies should be interested in such programs for their potential as low-cost student success programming. Government, private, and non-profit entities, which are currently expending resources in the quest for greater college success and number of degrees awarded, may be interested in results from this program as they make suggestions for retention enhancement at other institutions. Where results are not favorable, lessons can be learned that can help other institutions and organizations avoid the same pitfalls in designing their mentoring programs.

This study adds to the body of literature on mentoring and mentor programs. Though many colleges have mentor programs, whether originating with alumni, faculty, staff, or student groups and mentoring has shown to produce positive results, documentation is sparse on student experiences, what mentors experience, and best practices for obtaining long-term gains (Dawson, 2014; Holley & Caldwell, 2012; Institute for Higher Education Policy, Spring 2011; Ramani, Gruppen, & Kachur, 2006). Mentoring research is relatively new and still developing (see Appendix D). Additionally, highlighting what two-year female college students and their mentors experience can be useful for other two-year colleges (Crisp, 2010). Because mentoring relationships should increase student self-efficacy and self-efficacy has been shown a better

predictor of academic success than prior achievement or expectations, this study should be of interest to the academic community (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 1996; Pintrich & Garcia, 1991; Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992). This research was designed to assist with developing a successful mentor program at Georgia Highlands College and provide findings that can be used to help develop other mentor programs.

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

This research study operates under philosophical assumptions taken from social constructivism and pragmatism. The first assumption is that nature is both independent of society and that nature is a social construction due to the understanding that nature exists, but also that society has influence upon it and that perceptions of the same reality can vary greatly. This marriage of social constructivism and pragmatism is realistic-constructivism, which claims that we co-create each other's reality because every interaction creates a context for the meaning we give to our environment (Arias-Maldonado, 2011; Lektorskii, 2010). The second assumption is that reality is known through many methods and that both quantitative and qualitative methods can be used for data collection and analysis; the issue desired to be studied should dictate which research process and approach is used for data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2011). The third assumption is that the researcher is part of qualitative research and central to the findings because she is the originator of the research topic, the designer of the study, the tool of data collection, the reporter of the findings, and the diviner of the conclusions. The researcher makes judgments at each stage of the research, whether it be what specific questions to ask participants, when to cease interviewing, which codes and categories to use, or what should be highlighted in the discussion of the findings. The experience, education, values, morals, and maturity or wisdom of the researcher (also the interviewer) is of great importance since this

person is designing, implementing, and interpreting the entire research process (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The researcher, being a unique individual who brings specific experiences, biases, and interests to the study, affects the study from creation to conclusion. The final personal assumption, taken from Gehrke's writing on mentoring as gift giving, is that case study is the more appropriate method of examining the mentor-mentee experience and relationship than "...inquiry techniques that insist on attempting a third-person objectivity, because the former harmonize with the personal involvement of the relationship" (2001, p. 184). Being able to obtain as much information as possible about individual experiences is the best way to learn what participants experience in this mentoring program. Qualitative case study, specifically intrinsic case study, is the appropriate research approach to view this mentoring phenomenon from the eyes of the participants in order to learn about this particular case (Cresswell, 2013; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Stake, 1995; Webb, 2013).

### **Limitations**

Limitations of this study relate to the nature of qualitative research (see Appendices E and F) and the delimitations placed on this study. There is a limit to the generalizability of this study due to the relatively small size of the sample, the single gender focus of the study, and the specific study of one program at one institution. As the researcher, I am the filter through which data is received and analyzed, so my skill and data collection rigor is a factor in the quality of the information and interpretation generated. The fact that this mentoring program is voluntary, which could mean that the female students in the program possess more self-efficacy than females in the general student body, is also a possible limitation.

In order to mitigate as much as possible the limitations of the study, I interviewed mentors, in addition to interviewing mentees, asked participants to review and confirm their

transcripts, used peer review as an external check of my research and interpretation, and examined artifacts of the mentoring program, such as the mentor guide, meeting minutes, newsletters, and emails. Using different sources and investigators to provide corroboration to my findings strengthened my research (Cresswell, 2013). It should also be realized that, though there is only one specific case examined here, generalizations are regularly made or modified by the use of case study. The fact that case study is not chosen for the purpose of generalizing does not negate its ability to assist in understanding other cases. It may be more appropriate to term any generalizations made from case studies as “petite generalizations” for better understanding and agreement of the role of case studies in generalizing (Stake, 1995, p. 7). Theoretical frameworks aid researchers in making analytic generalizations that can be applied beyond the case by “corroborating, modifying, rejecting, or otherwise advancing theoretical concepts” referenced in the case study or by generating new concepts (Yin, 2014, p. 41). Therefore, findings can be applied to the theory used, as well as the case studied.

### **Delimitations**

This study is confined to examining the experiences of female mentees and mentors in a new mentor program at a two-year college. The study is delimited to interviewing and observing 20 new mentees and 10 mentors at a multi-campus, two-year state college in the Southeast, as well as examining documents associated with the mentor program and observing group interactions where possible. Also, a delimiter to the study is the focus on what mentees and their mentors experience in the mentoring program. The study is bounded in time by interviewing participants over a five-month period.

## Conclusion

Though this researcher agrees with the sentiments of Christopher Nelson, president of St. John's College, that education should not be seen as purely "a commodity for job placement, earnings, commercial success, and prosperity," the new era of comparison and output accountability is not likely to go away any time soon (Nelson, 2007, p. 27). College funding, salaries, job reviews, and the ability to hire needed faculty and staff will hinge on retention rates and comparisons that are, as Nelson put it, commodifications of education. There is no escaping the need for institutions to do a better job of retaining students in a difficult economy and there is no escaping the fact that two-year public colleges have an especially challenging task due to their student demographics and very limited resources.

A connection to the institution and a feeling of being valued has been cited as a result of mentoring. Vincent Tinto's third principle of effective retention states: "Effective retention programs are committed to the development of supportive social and educational communities in which all students are integrated as competent members" (Tinto, 1993, p. 147). Nancy Schlossberg's theory of college students' mattering to others hinges on the importance of students feeling that others care for them, experienced by express interest shown in them and their success by others. This theory has been explored in numerous studies. Rayle and Chung (2008) found that the strongest predictor of academic stress levels was the degree to which students felt they mattered to the college. The feeling of not mattering has been identified as one impetus to students dropping out of college, so it is logical that investment in programming and attitudes that foster a 'mattering' atmosphere towards students is more vital than ever (Schlossberg, 1989; Tovar, Simon, & Lee, 2009). Clearly mentoring can help students engage more with the college community, develop the self-efficacy needed to achieve and persist, and

instill the belief they matter to the institution, factors that have shown to increase retention and college success (Crisp, 2010).

In the following chapter, I explore what the literature offers on research surrounding mentoring in terms of career decision-making, self-efficacy, motivation, and mattering and marginality theory.

## CHAPTER II:

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Literature on the value of mentoring as related to retention via assistance with self-efficacy, career decision-making self-efficacy, feelings of mattering, and motivation is young but growing. A strong body of literature on student retention factors has developed in the past decades and we have helpful theories on student self-efficacy. Sites like Mentor, The Mentoring Center, The Mentoring Group, The National Mentoring Partnership, and The Chronicle of Evidence-Based Mentoring provide a wealth of resources, support, and encouragement for organizations and individuals who mentor. This quote from Jean Rhodes' article *Five Skills for Navigating the Transition to Adulthood* on the Chronicle of Evidence-Based Mentoring site tells the story of why college students need and can benefit from mentors:

I'm sometimes alarmed that so many of my undergraduates seem adrift and unclear about their futures. I find myself wondering how they can bring themselves to pay tuition, go to class, study for tests, and go about their daily lives without a detailed, ambitious plan for their future careers. But, I've come to realize that times have changed dramatically since I was a college student in the 1980's. Indeed, coming of age has never been more confusing. Traditional economic and social markers of adulthood have all but vanished, leaving a generation of youth in limbo. And our collective notions of the transition to adulthood — young people finishing high school or college and marching lockstep into lifelong jobs, marriages, and mortgages — seem as quaint as our parents' wedding photos. (Rhodes, 2014)

What Rhodes describes above is very characteristic of what many college students feel today, an ambiguity of what they should do, which path they should take, and what options are available to them. There are more choices than ever before and more rapid change in both types of jobs and the demand and need for certain types of jobs due to changes in technology, the

environment, the physical environment, the social and economic environment, and demographics of age, health, and income (Fankhauser, Sehleier, & Stern, 2008; *The future of jobs: The onrushing wave*, 2014). Though choice is generally a good thing, it also can lead to confusion and uncertainty, a syndrome called *choice overload*, when there are so many options that one becomes paralyzed to make a decision for fear of making the wrong decision (Greifeneder, Scheibehenne, & Kleber, 2010). This decision-making fear and its repercussions are aggravated by the fact that youth in the U.S. have high expectations of adulthood and their future income, yet these expectations do not always match the current reality of many youth having poor educational preparation and work-ethic in a hyper-competitive market place (Miller & Slocombe, 2012; Mossakowski, 2011). Help with clearly viewing the world realistically and understanding their need to prepare for it by persisting through college is one of the major functions and needs advocated for mentoring (Crisp, 2010; Hu & Ma 2010; McGlynn, 2009; Miller & Slocombe, 2012).

The focus of this study was to learn the experiences of mentees and mentors in a female mentoring program. Therefore, in order to gain a clear picture of how mentoring in general and at the college level affects students in practical and psychological ways, applicable works will be discussed in the following review of the literature. There are four major parts of the review. The first part focuses on mentoring, and, specifically, its practice in the college setting. The second section provides definitions and practical applications of major components of mentoring programs from the areas of self-efficacy, career decision-making, mattering and marginality, and student motivation. Third, student retention, as related to the above areas and mentoring, is explored. And, finally, the fourth section discusses the theoretical framework used in this study. I believe both motivational theory and mattering and marginality theory are appropriate

conceptual frameworks for the study of mentoring but favor mattering and marginality as the best way to connect what happens in mentoring. The conclusion shall tie together the aspects of mentoring with factors that lead to retention.

### **Mentoring**

Mentoring and its accompanying attributes, purposes, side effects, and benefits have obscure meanings that vary according to the specific population, environment, individuals, and activities. There seem to be almost as many definitions of mentoring as there are of mentoring programs. Crisp and Cruz (2009) found over 50 definitions of mentoring in the literature and no doubt there are more today. There are several types of mentoring programs, from peer to alumni and business leaders, which have been shown as beneficial in many college settings. However, my research involves mentoring between employees (faculty and staff) and students at a community college, so I narrow down the definition of a mentor for the purpose of this study to: An individual who is more knowledgeable in a particular setting who voluntarily works to forge a relationship with a less knowledgeable and experienced person for the purpose of helping that individual achieve success by means of encouragement and advocacy. In this instance the environment is a community college, the individuals are faculty and staff as mentors and students as mentees, and the success they strive for is focused in the academic and career areas but also includes the holistic concern of personal welfare.

### **Definitions of Mentoring**

A clear or comprehensive definition of mentoring has been cited repeatedly as lacking and as a limitation to helpful research and action (Crisp, 2010). In Crisp and Cruz's (2009) extensive study of the literature, they found little consistency in definition or theoretical framework to guide college student mentoring. Before Crisp and Cruz (2009), Jacobi (1991) and

Wrightsmann (1981) expressed the same problem of common definitions, language, and framework for a mentoring model. Haggard, Dougherty, Turban, and Wilbanks (2011) conducted an intensive review of workplace mentoring literature from 1980 to 2009. They stressed that mentoring definitions have been varied and changing, which is not conducive to conducting helpful research on the practice. Titus and Ballou (2013) likewise argued that a common definition is needed in order to have accurate expectations and to assess outcomes. Such a common understanding of mentoring is difficult to come by.

Though mentoring relationships have been chronicled throughout history, as in the relationships of Socrates and Plato, numerous Biblical pairs, mythology, and literature, always thought of as a helping relationship, the role, purpose, activities, and results vary widely. Additionally, there are the two broad models or types of general mentoring, that of an informal relationship that occurs naturally, and that of a formal program in which mentors and mentees are matched and objectives are stated (Harrington, 2011). There is also the location (school, work, community, Internet), the purpose (academic, social, career), and the demographic (age, gender, stage in school or profession) to consider when reviewing mentoring definitions. There are even Biblical and spiritual models of mentoring that include, along with imparting knowledge, the function of spiritual modeling and inspiring the mentee (Chua & Lessing, 2013).

Mentoring is related to coaching in its function of providing growth and support, but distinguished from it in its characteristics of rapport and trust (Fajana & Gbajumo-Sheriff, 2011). Mentoring is seen by many as teaching (Bain, 2004). Haggard et al. (2011) has provided these three core attributes as a foundational definition of mentoring: reciprocity, developmental benefits, and regular and consistent interaction over time. Some see mentoring as advising (Titus & Ballou, 2013), some see it as *othermothering* (Guiffrida, 2005), some see it as coaching

(Connor & Pokora, 2012), and others have used terms such as guide, sponsor, or role model to define what mentoring is and what a mentor does (Hansman, 2002). From the perspective of Christian mentoring, Tangenberg (2013) has defined it as an intentional relationship supporting the mentee's personal, social, spiritual, and academic development through active listening, sharing of personal experiences, and purposeful pursuit of shared goals (p. 205).

Nathalie Gehrke (1988) provided an eloquent definition of mentor and mentoring by using the theories of market economy and gift exchange to relate mentoring as a gift similar to that of art, having incalculable worth. By sharing wisdom, the mentor gives a gift of him/herself that can be measured only in its effect on the mentee and what the mentee does with the gift. In addition, the mentee uses the gift to build and refine what they have to offer and then passes the gift on to another, continuing the gift cycle. In this way, says Gehrke, mentoring is like continuing a family tradition and, done right, continues to be passed on, making the gift immortal.

Because of the many and varied definitions of mentoring, Phillip Dawson (2014) advocated using instead a design or model of mentoring as a basis for studying mentoring programs and relationships. He sought to remedy the fact that there has been no mentoring operational definition that describes what mentoring should entail, that is: how a program should be designed; what the criteria should be for mentor and mentee selection; what activities should take place; what policies should be created; what rewards should be supplied or expected and so forth. Citing the lack of a common definition, he argues the greater need for an operational definition and provides 16 elements to use in designing, researching, and discussing mentoring (see Appendix G). His summary of mentor design elements is a helpful guide for anyone starting a mentor program.

The faculty and staff as mentors to student mentees model that concerns this study has been described in the literature as a one-on-one relationship, with one person being more experienced than the other, having a focus on helping the mentee achieve growth academically, professionally, and personally, providing psychological support, and with the provision of a role model (Blackwell, 1989; Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2004; Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992; Brown, Davis, & McClendon, 1999). This is close to the original definition of a mentor based on the character Mentor in Homer's poem *The Odyssey*. In this story, Mentor was trusted counsel to Odysseus and was charged with teaching Odysseus' son, Telemachus, to become a competent successor (Gutiérrez, 2012; McLaughlin, 2010; Miller, 2002). From this original definition where the wise goddess Athena actually impersonates Mentor to help Telemachus learn, there is an implied level of responsibility of the mentor for the personal development and actions of their mentee (Joyce, 1990). For his study to determine how mentoring influenced the career development of university faculty and what these mentors looked like, Tareff (2013) defined mentoring as "...a more experienced professional serving as a supportive and guiding role model for another professional who is less experienced in the field" (p. 703). Whitney (2004) took a stand against the modern concept of mentor as an encourager, comforter, and confidence-builder and advocates for the recognition that mentors have power and that the role of mentor should be to help the mentee to learn by doing and to develop critical thinking skills.

Perhaps most helpful to understand mentoring is to examine how mentors and mentees define mentoring. In a study of mentoring beliefs, expectations, experiences, and outcomes within an education doctoral program, mentorship was defined as a reciprocal relationship, with the mentor as more knowledgeable and experienced. Faculty tended to see their roles as facilitators, teachers, and instrumental collaborators, while mentees tended to see mentors as

guides, and peer mentors tended to see mentors as encouragers and emphasized the importance of the personal relationship (Noonan, Ballinger, & Black, 2007). The official model of academic mentoring most accurate for the purpose of this research is “defined as the involvement of post-secondary faculty, advisors, or supervisors in learning relationships oriented toward career and personal development with students, graduates, or junior faculty at the same or different higher education institution” (Fletcher & Mullen, 2012). The holistic goals of mentoring that Nora and Crisp (2007) gleaned from their extensive review of mentoring literature and that they used for their study fit perfectly the intent of the mentoring program in this study: psychological or emotional support, goal setting and career paths planning, academic subject knowledge support, and role modeling.

### **Mentoring Background**

Wayman Cheatham (2010) has given a good overview of mentoring throughout history in his lecture to the Navy Medicine Institute. He explained the origin of the name ‘mentor’ from the Greek story of Athena, goddess of wisdom, impersonating Mentor, the teacher of Odysseus’ son Telemachus. The moral of the story is Athena (or Mentor) teaching that one should learn and protect what is good. This advice is picked back up in the physician’s maxim of ‘first, do no harm.’ He then described the mentoring relationships between Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, who later mentored Alexander the Great, pointing out that wise mentors pass protégés on when they are ready to progress. Cheatham used examples of mentors from the Bible, and the Middle Ages to make the point that mentors are those the mentee feels care about them. Medieval apprenticeship situations where master craftsman taught the apprentice their skills and shared their wisdom one-on-one are similar to many mentor relationships of today (Bergelson, 2014). Edward Gabriele (2010) picked back up the discussion on mentoring and leadership in this two-

part lecture on the tradition of mentoring by emphasizing the modern need for mentors to develop leaders who operate by a steady set of values and serve as companions to these leaders. In this context, mentors are vital for helping mentees to habitually reflect upon their behavior, striving for ethics, justice, professionalism, and continual learning.

### **Mentoring Today**

In the modern age, mentors are seen as crucial for developing leadership within organizations and communities and for helping individuals of all ages advance personally and professionally. Many researchers are looking at mentoring in schools, community organizations, the work place, and professional organizations and chronicling the benefits. “Through both formal programs and informal opportunities, professional organizations can help members of the profession connect with more experienced professionals who can offer practical advice, career guidance, and opportunities to network with other professionals” (Johnston, 2013, p. 37-38). Mentoring today also has the added benefit of helping older workers adjust to new technologies when reverse mentoring is used or the mentoring relationship is strong enough for skill sharing to go both ways and create a reciprocal relationship (Mangan, 2013). From librarians to nurses to teachers and the corporate world, mentoring in the professions has been found to increase confidence, competence, satisfaction, and career advancement (Bergelson, 2014; Greiner & Smith, 2009; Johnston, 2013; Nickitas, 2014). These relationships, whether in academia or business, often go on for years and end up benefiting both parties (Crone, 2011).

In a unique study of why employees volunteer to mentor and whether they continue mentoring, Montag, Smith, Nemanick, and Sanborn-Overby (2014) contributed to the mentoring literature by exploring mentoring as an ‘organizational citizenship behavior.’ They used social exchange theory to show that employees tend to mentor to repay a perceived debt to their

organization and that they are less inclined to mentor after a successful mentoring experience. In a sense, their debt is paid so they do not feel the need to take on another such commitment.

Though there is often some work-place gain in mentoring, this ‘giving back’ reasoning, as well as the personal desire to make a difference in improving their communities, their school, their organization, or the world in general is why most people volunteer to serve as mentors (Bullen, Farruggia, Gomez, Hebaishi, & Mahmood, 2010; Frels, Onwuegbuzie, Bustamante, Garza, Nelson, Nichter, & Leggett, 2013; Wright, 2012; Yip, 2014).

**E-mentoring.** E-Mentoring is the latest mentoring practice that is under study. This technological method of mentoring is taking off due to the need for mentors coupled with the dearth of mentor leaders in certain fields, especially female mentors in business and STEM areas. The convenience and low cost of this delivery is a strong plus. Rockwell, Leck, and Elliott (2013) conducted a qualitative study to determine whether e-mentoring could alleviate the negative aspects of cross-gender mentoring. They found that even in the virtual environment of e-mentoring male and female mentors differed in their approaches as related to trust, career-development and psychosocial support. However, the researchers did not resign to the common notion that women mentoring women is always most effective. Rather, they concluded that the quality of the relationship and the clear structure of the program are more important factors than gender. By providing support and encouragement, e-mentoring has been found helpful in increasing motivation and perseverance in students (Mammadov & Topçu, 2014). E-mentoring is seen as helpful in sharing knowledge, networking, and self-reflecting and is forecasted to continue to evolve as a medium for growth in the personal development of both mentees and mentors (Williams, Sunderman, & Kim, 2012).

In her quest to evaluate and improve an e-mentoring program, Christiana Houch discovered that generational work practices and understanding of technology use can hinder mentor relationships. In addition to setting guidelines and goals, she recommends discussing how technology will be used, utilizing a variety of methods and a balance of synchronous and asynchronous, and using two-way mentoring where each person acknowledges the strengths of the other and shares their talents. From their study of e-mentoring, Lach, Hertz, Pomerory, Resnick, and Buckwater (2013) developed a *Reciprocal Model of Distance Mentoring* that provides both the rationale for e-mentoring and the key features for e-mentoring success.

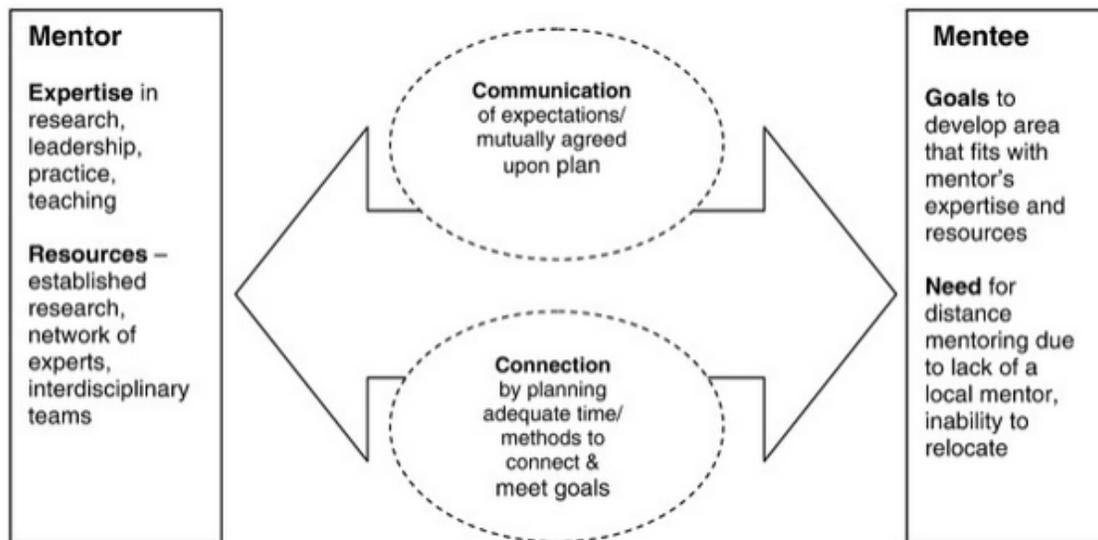


Figure 1. Reciprocal model of distance mentoring (Lach et al., 2013, p. 46)

In their work on e-mentoring, Ensher and Murphy (2007) found that personality and expectation matching of mentee and mentor, frequency of communication, and perceived similarities of the pair affected the quality of the relationship and benefits received. They noted that e-mentoring is currently used by many companies, educational, and private groups to connect mentors.

## **Mentoring Research**

Though mentoring is not a new phenomenon, but, rather, chronicled throughout history, theory and research related to mentoring, especially formal mentor programs in higher education, is relatively new (Schunk & Mullen, 2013). Researchers are becoming more interested in mentoring and best practices for mentoring, as it produces results when it is implemented with intention (McClain, Bridges, & Bridges, 2014). Mentoring at work, in community and social work settings, and in various academic settings is increasingly a subject of serious research.

As far as best practices in mentoring, there are mixed recommendations. Generally, research has suggested that when mentors can be chosen versus assigned, the mentor relationship fares better. Yamada, Slanetz, and Boiselle (2014), for example, reported that having chemistry is important and that mentoring relationships created by mentees choosing their own mentors tends to be more successful than when they are assigned. Of note is that research findings from academia, the workplace, and the social-work field all conclude that key elements of successful mentoring are mentee engagement with the mentoring process and commitment to the purposes behind mentoring, practical assistance to the mentees, and strong mentee-mentor relationships (Boddy, Agillias, & Gray, 2012). Such is the growth of mentoring programs and research in academia that many researchers give advice to students on how to best benefit from mentor relationships and collaborations, with clear communication usually cited as the most important factor of success (Brown & Pastore, 2011).

In a very encouraging and research broadening study on the long-term career effects of mentoring youth, McDonald and Lambert (2014) used data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health to determine if 1) mentored respondents experienced more job stability than respondents not mentored; 2) if mentored respondents were in jobs with higher pay

and benefits than respondents not mentored; and 3) if mentored respondents were in jobs with greater intrinsic rewards such as autonomy and creativity. They found that mentoring contributed positively to intrinsic job orientation and realizations of autonomy and authority but not much difference in extrinsic rewards of pay. They advocate for more research in this understudied area of mentoring benefits.

Campbell and Campbell (2000) surveyed students and faculty involved in a mentoring program at a large West Coast university to test their hypotheses that 1) students and faculty-mentors will differ in mentoring benefits they report; 2) students will not likely know of benefits to faculty and staff who mentor; and 3) mentoring relationship perceptions will be constant regardless of gender or ethnicity. They found that students saw mentoring to be more helpful for academic success than did the mentors, faculty thinking friendship was a benefit to students and students thinking academic aid the benefit. Hypothesis two was supported in that few students could think of mentor benefits to participation, and the third hypothesis of gender and ethnic groups not affecting perceptions of benefits was supported. They found that students primarily want academic help and that faculty want to help students, but are frustrated when students fail to participate in the process. These researchers advocated for further research to understand the motivation of faculty and student participation in mentor programs and suggest early discussions to clarify expectations and goals.

**Research on mentoring in the workplace.** Mentoring in the workplace has been found to increase retention, increase employee loyalty, result in promotion of underrepresented candidates, advance talented individuals, and project a strong and positive employer brand (Fajana & Gbajumo-Sheriff, 2011). Rollins, Rutherford, and Nickell (2014) interviewed salespeople in a top U.S. insurance carrier and found that informal mentoring improved sales

performance, reduced turnover, and increased job satisfaction. In various medical professions, mentoring has been found to increase career decision-making, career satisfaction, career advancement, personal development, and has been used as a means to recruit minorities to certain career fields and medical professionals into teaching (Yamada, Slanetz, & Boiselle, 2014). Specifically, in medical research, Drotar (2013) found that mentors can help mentees understand the challenges of their careers and recommended that mentoring focus on career development decision-making and professional development. Women tend to enjoy greater compensation, opportunity for career growth, work satisfaction, work/life balance, and career commitment when mentored, especially when mentored by other women (Rockwell et al., 2013).

Harrington and Marshall (2014) conducted research of mentoring in Canadian libraries and found that mentoring helps recruit new librarians and that new MLS graduates expect to have mentors to help them adjust and learn what is expected in their new jobs. They also found that, while administrators can be reluctant to support mentoring programs, they admit that mentoring does help with succession planning and in implementing change. In a study by Atif Tareef (2013) at the University of Jordan on the efficacy of mentoring faculty on their career development, ninety-two respondents from faculty in the college of education indicated that their careers had been significantly influenced by mentors. For women and minority faculty in fields where their numbers are low, mentoring can be especially helpful in guiding them through the political landscape (McMurtrie, 2014). Houck (2011) pointed to the need for workplace mentoring due to both the unique needs of the millennial generation and the isolation that can result from virtual teams working from home or remote locations. She advocated for greater study of virtual workers and their technology experiences and how mentoring can help.

Mentoring can be especially helpful for minorities and women who still encounter the ‘glass ceiling’ that makes it difficult for them to rise to the top professionally. Wilson (2014) has used much of Keith Wyche’s advice from his book *Good is Not Enough: And Other Unwritten Rules for Minority Professionals* to explain how mentors can and should help mentees with crucial workplace and leadership awareness and practices, such as: understanding perceptions, being visible, knowing when change is needed, recognizing career killers, being more prepared than others, being lifelong learners, learning needed skills, being diligent, building trust, communicating effectively, being socially responsible, setting goals, knowing which battles to fight, and seeking out mentors. These are areas that mentors can tutor their mentees, often helping them to avoid pitfalls they may have encountered.

**Mentee benefits.** Benefits of mentoring to mentees have been researched and reported in the field of education and in the workplace for the past few decades. Mentoring benefits reported by education faculty being mentored in Jordan included: setting realistic performance goals; learning to advise and evaluate students; classroom management; encouragement of research; and career advancement (Tareff, 2013). In another study of mentoring for new math and science teachers, Oliver (2009) found mentoring decreased attrition and increase teacher skills. Eble and Gaillet’s (2008) compilation of mentoring stories from the field of composition and rhetoric reveal mentoring relationships to be “mutually beneficial and reciprocal” (p. 307).

McDonald and Lambert (2014) found that mentoring youth can lead to them enjoying careers with more intrinsic rewards, careers that often allow for greater advancement opportunities. Delores Whiteing Williams (2013) has described mentoring students at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center as a major plus for work preparation and career enhancement. She cited their program as helping students with student confidence,

maturity, communication, treatment skills, critical-thinking skills, teamwork, professionalism, and networking. Zevallos and Washburn (2014) studied their SEEK peer mentoring program at the City College of New York, CUNY and found that mentoring helped first-year students adjust to college and helped peer mentors develop leadership skills. In this model, high achieving students mentor high-potential, but low-income, new students from a summer program, through a fall college readiness course, to spring workshops. Evaluation of the program found all who participated benefited.

**Mentor benefits.** An interesting meta-analysis, a quantitative study by Ghosh and Reio (2013), found that mentoring provides many benefits to the mentor, such as increased job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job performance, and overall career success. Bozionelos (2004) studied university administrators in England and found that mentoring significantly increased both objective and subjective career success. He cited the limitations of a self-reporting survey and the possibility that those asked to mentor could be those already most successful in their careers, suggesting a longitudinal study to clear up issues of causality.

A quantitative study involving 3,500 real estate agents found that mentoring increased managerial skill, increased sphere of influence, and helped gain friends or pay back support given to their career at an earlier time (Pullins & Fine, 2002). In another study where library students and librarians at Konkuk University in Korea were paired, the mentoring program helped both mentors and mentees learn about themselves and each other while preparing the mentees for professional library work (Noh, 2014). The mentors in this case said that mentoring helped them better define their own goals and priorities.

In an innovative qualitative study conducted by Canter, Kessler, Odar, Roberts, and Aylward (2012), identified mentors in the field were found to believe that serving as mentors

benefited their own professional development and career advancement as well as providing personal satisfaction in helping mentees and furthering growth in the field. In addition, these mentors found that mentoring kept them up-to-date in current research and activities in the field, which helped with research tasks and presentations and enhanced work relationships.

In a qualitative study of physician and medical students in a near-peer program, Silberberg, Ahern, and van de Mortel (2013) found that near-peer teachers derived benefits from mentoring such as enhanced knowledge and skills from their work with students and increased work satisfaction. Howard and Smith-Goodwin (2010) studied a new mentor program at Wilmington College for freshmen in their athletic training education programs. This unique mentor program design of using a ‘family’ of student mentors that includes each class of students in a cohort of eight to 12 students was found to be very helpful to freshmen in their adjustment to college and also of benefit to the student mentors and the academic programs as a whole.

**Mentoring challenges.** Mentoring challenges range from difficulty in getting one’s mentee to communicate or take advice, mentees becoming too dependent, uncomfortable situations of having mentees in class or under work supervision, to simply having the time to mentor (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Holley & Caldwell, 2012; Horowitz & Christopher, 2013; Wilson, 2015). In a very helpful piece on mentoring doctors, Taherian and Shekarchian (2008) pointed to some of the most critical areas to avoid in terms of mentoring quality and conduct mistakes involving factors that can apply to any mentoring relationship such as conflict of roles when a mentor may also be in a supervisory or any role where they have control over the mentee’s evaluation or grade; unnecessary sharing of mentee’s personal information with others; becoming patronizing, jumping to conclusions or trying to solve problems for mentees; frustration over lack of progress or expected mentee involvement or

improvement; or simple conflicts from personality or opinion differences.

E-mentors, those using only technology as a means to communicate, may have difficulty in actual use of the technology medium or of using it effectively and without misunderstandings, as well as experiencing the same role ambiguity as face-to-face mentors (Williams, Sunderman, & Kim, 2012). In a study surveying nursing students with e-mentors, the need to have set times to meet and more frequent communication was cited as an issue by mentees (Lach et al., 2013). Other concerns and possible disadvantages of e-mentoring are the fact that relationships may develop more slowly than in face-to-face relationships, Internet connectivity problems can interrupt communication, writing skills can interfere with intended messages, and security of private information could be vulnerable (Ensher & Murphy, 2007).

**Mentoring in higher education.** The literature on mentoring in higher education, whether faculty and staff are used as mentors or peer mentoring is the method, states repeatedly that programs are growing but that little quality evaluative research has been conducted. Fortunately, helpful research on mentor programs in colleges and universities is increasing around the globe. Collings, Swanson, and Watkins (2014) reported that peer mentoring has been utilized in an attempt to stem the rising college attrition rates in the United Kingdom. Their longitudinal study showed that the self-esteem of mentored students was bolstered by having a peer mentor and that retention rates increased as a result of these programs. Amazing results from a quantitative evaluation of a faculty mentoring program at West Chester University showed that 100% of faculty approved of the program and felt it should be the norm at all institutions (Bean, Lucas, & Hyers, 2014).

Mentoring is often used as a retention activity for minority students and is turned to in the current environment of initiatives to bring more minorities and women into the STEM fields. At

the tribal college of the Northern Cheyenne Nation, a qualitative study found mentored research to improve student performance and confidence and increase minority student retention in STEM programs (Ward, Jones, Coles, Rich, Knapp, & Madsen, 2014). Though different in design, another mentor program designed to help minority students is the Professional Mentor Program Plus at the University of Detroit Mercy. This program targets adult academically at-risk students, largely lower-economic minority students. The program was found to help recruit and retain a diverse student body, increased student satisfaction, and was attributed to a bump in GPA (Mentoring as Success and Retention Tool, 2008). At Washington State University, an alumni mentor program was begun to increase retention of women in engineering. This program has grown and received high marks from students and resulted in a higher retention rate for mentored students than non-mentored female engineering students (Poor & Brown, 2013). Likewise, a longitudinal study on the effect of self-efficacy on retention of engineering students at four major universities found that self-efficacy increases retention, that student self-efficacy is affected by co-op experiences, and that mentors can be of assistance, especially for women (Raelin, Bailey, Hamann, Pendleton, Reisberg, & Whitman, 2014). At James Cook University in Australia, mentoring circles are used to support and retain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing students (Felton-Busch, Maza, Ghee, Mills, Mills, Hitchins, & Chamberlain-Salaun, 2013).

Mentoring has been shown to result in higher GPAs, lower dropout rates, and greater self-efficacy (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Crisp, 2010). Research shows that students with a higher level of self-efficacy, especially in navigating college and deciding on a program of study and career, are more likely to persist (Bandura, 1977, 1997; Betz & Wolfe, 2004). Self-efficacy has also been positively correlated to academic performance (Brady-Amoon & Fuertes, 2011).

In their research on stress, self-efficacy, and academic success of freshmen students, Zajacova, Lynch, and Espenshade (2005) found self-efficacy to be the strongest predictor of academic success. Hughes and Fahy (2009) found peer mentoring to help new psychology students become indoctrinated into their major and the department and that the experience was seen as enjoyable and helpful to the peer mentors, as well as the new students. A study of a mentoring program for library students found that the program increased the students' career goal setting and planning, increased GPA, increased realistic career expectations, and helped them focus on obtaining a position after graduation (Noh, 2014).

Mentoring programs have been targeted toward helping women go into and succeed in male-dominated majors and careers. There are a number of traditional and e-mentoring programs for female engineering students. At Washington State University their alumni mentoring program increases retention by increasing student self-efficacy, connections, and motivation (Poor & Brown, 2013). In a qualitative study to evaluate the role of mentoring in career choice and success of female sport management faculty Chester and Mondello (2012) found that mentoring helped prepare students to begin and maintain their careers and with specific advantages in degree completion, scholarly activities, and enjoyment of their profession. From a study on a medical faculty mentor program, Steele, Fisman, and Davidson (2013) found that females were interested in help with work-life balance and mentors who understood them and had time for them.

Christian mentoring is a special category of college mentoring for females due to their often conflicted dictates of academic and professional success and faith-based responsibility to and for family. Tangenberg (2013) asserted that a closer look at the needs of female students in faith-based institutions is necessary in order to best meet their needs. She has advocated for a

developmental approach to mentoring that comprises feminist and faith components in order to provide a holistic experience that helps females deal with competing priorities and reconcile sometimes conflicting messages as to what they should and can achieve.

“Needless to say, having a faculty mentor who happens to be a pioneering creativity scholar is a huge door opener! What a monumental experience for a new graduate student!” (Ockuly & Richards, 2013, p. 257). Many students say they feel this appreciation for having close access to a scholar in their field. In their studies on African American male student-athletes, Kelly and Dixon (2014) have recommended a multiple mentor model to meet the multiple needs of these students. Their research found mentoring to be beneficial but advocated for a group design such as composite, strategic, or constellation mentoring. They admitted to a lack of hearty reach of these mentoring models and the need to answer the many questions they raise such as how many mentors is optimal, how should the mentors be joined, and should the program be formal or informal, but they hope to create a successful mentoring network model that can be replicated at other institutions.

While some tout the benefits of undergraduate mentoring, others worry about the lack of evidence for success of such programs, the difficulty of putting in place mechanisms to standardize or regulate the practice, and the failure to follow through in delivery of services (Anderson & Shore, 2008; Baterna-Daluz, 2014). However, the vast majority of studies cite the benefits of mentoring in whatever fashion it is performed (Beller, 2013; Suciu, 2014; Valbrun, 2014; Yoder, 2013). Lightweis (2014), for instance, found that student mentoring programs increase college success for white, working-class first-generation college students.

**Ethical issues.** Anderson and Shore (2008) pointed out that unique ethical issues can arise when faculty mentor undergraduates without compensation. Because mentoring is a time-consuming endeavor, the risk is to favor students who may be able to help the faculty member through their research or simply be more interesting and likely to rise academically and professionally, which can make the faculty member look good. Faculty mentors may end up favoring some students over others or interfere with their mentee's autonomy by asking them to do research in their area or push them towards working in their academic area, rather than encouraging their mentees to follow their own path. As a way to lessen the burden of mentoring and reduce the temptation for unethical mentoring behavior, the authors recommend constellation mentoring where several mentors are available to the student.

### **Self-Efficacy Theory**

A large part of the mentoring effect, many studies and anecdotal reports have claimed, is the beneficial increase in self-efficacy of students. Support provided in mentoring, whether emotional or specific practical tools and guidance, have been cited as responsible for greater self-efficacy in general and in specific areas of academics and life. Self-efficacy deals not with ability but, rather, the personal belief in oneself to develop ability. Albert Bandura, who could be called the father of self-efficacy for his extensive work on self-efficacy, deemed self-efficacy as a form of self-confidence that comes from feeling one is in control and can achieve a certain result. He also asserted that those with high self-efficacy are generally more successful than those with low self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Because self-efficacy must be studied in context to specific areas of ability, academic self-efficacy must be examined as related to academic work, career decision-making self-efficacy must be examined as related to career decision-making, and so forth (Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005).

## **Background of Self-Efficacy**

Self-efficacy, according to Albert Bandura, has to do with confidence in one's capabilities and belief in one's ability to affect desired outcomes. Importantly for educators, the level of a student's self-efficacy affects their level of effort and persistence, which, in effect, can bring greater success and increase confidence and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). Terms and concepts intertwined with self-efficacy are self-concept, self-esteem, self-regulation, mastery, and locus of control (Kasilingam & Sudha, 2010; Piran, 2014). Self-regulation refers to the student's active participation in their learning and correlates positively with academic success (Zimmerman, 1989). Related to self-efficacy, is achievement goal theory, which addresses the reasons for students' goals and motivations and ties lack of self-efficacy to avoidance of tasks and learning (Pintrich, 2000).

One could boldly say that discussion of self-efficacy and its related concepts is Biblical in that it has a base in the philosophical discussions of free-will, destiny, and preordination. Philosophers, scientists, theologians, and psychologists have all debated the issue of individual control and self-direction. "Social cognitive theory asserts that the individual's interpretation of their performance alters their sense of self-efficacy and, in turn, their future performance" (Tinto, 2012, p. 27). Thus, the individual's interpretation or perception of how well they perform and their potential to perform in the future becomes, knowingly or not, their personal philosophy of their ability to learn and achieve being tied to fate or free-will.

Motivation to persist in college has been found to relate strongly to the student's level of self-efficacy, or belief in their ability to succeed in college. A study of freshmen at a southeastern college found that students with higher self-efficacy, students who cited support in preparing for college, and those who took responsibility for their academic success as more

likely to graduate on time (Hall, Smith, & Chia, 2008). Similar results were found in a study of non-traditional female students (Scott, Burns, & Cooney, 1998). Self-efficacy and the presence of goals have also been correlated with GPA, shown to be a strong factor in persistence (Nakajima, Dembo, & Mossler, 2012). One of the three major categories that influence student success is that involving attitudes (motivation to work) and self-perceptions (self-efficacy). General self-efficacy has been found to be a strong predictor of academic performance, more so than other motivational measures (Kim, Newton, Downey, & Benton, 2010).

### **Self-efficacy Research**

Changxiu and Xiaojun (2014) used the RESE Scale of Chinese college students, the Coping Style Questionnaire, and the General Self-Efficacy Scale with 225 Chinese university students to determine the relationships between self-efficacy and program solving, self-blame, and inferiority. They found that self-efficacy aided with problem-solving and managing inferiority and that self-blame decreased self-efficacy. In an interesting study of the relationship between depression and smoking and smoking resistance self-efficacy in traditional age college students, Mee (2014) found that higher self-efficacy reduced the likelihood of smoking. Mee also found a negative relationship between self-efficacy and depression. The implications for higher education from this important work point to a more positive outlook for students with high self-efficacy, which is another factor for the likelihood of ability to persist through difficulty to completion of a goal, such as college.

Research has shown that adult learners with higher levels of self-efficacy are more satisfied with their educational experiences, are more persistent, and are more successful (Jameson & Fusco, 2014). Ciani, Sheldon, Hilpert, and Easter (2011) used the Achievement Goal Questionnaire with 184 teacher education majors to discover relationships between

internalized motivation, course mastery, performance-avoidance, and autonomy supportiveness of teachers. They found that students with greater internal motivation and teacher autonomy support were less likely to exhibit performance-avoidance and more likely to develop learning goals and master the subject, as displayed in their achievement path model below.

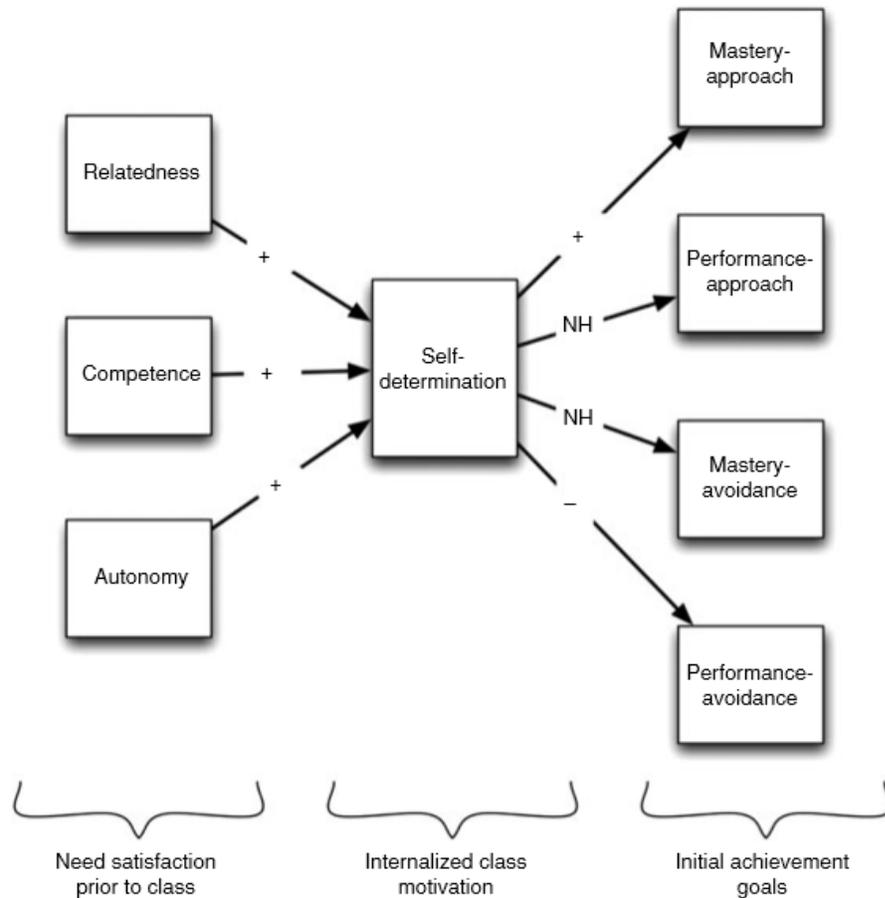


Figure 2. Achievement paths model (Ciani et al., 2011, p. 229)

Because one's feeling about oneself affect our actions, including the environments in which we place ourselves and the tasks we undertake or avoid, self-efficacy has a large impact on college success (Bandura, 1993). With the increased concern regarding college attrition, what motivates students to persist is becoming a popular research topic. In many studies, self-efficacy is found to correlate with student motivation and persistence (Liao, Edlin, & Ferdenzi, 2014).

Out of concern for the lower retention rate of women in the STEM fields, Raelin et al. (2014) performed a longitudinal study of men and women engineering undergraduates from four major universities. They examined the effects of demographic characteristics, cooperative education, contextual support, and self-efficacy on undergraduate student retention. Academic self-efficacy and work self-efficacy were found to be instrumental in the retention of both genders. Their conceptual framework for the study (see Figure 3) held true, especially for the strong circular roles of self-efficacy and co-op participation, and supports the implementation of co-op programs and living-learning communities.

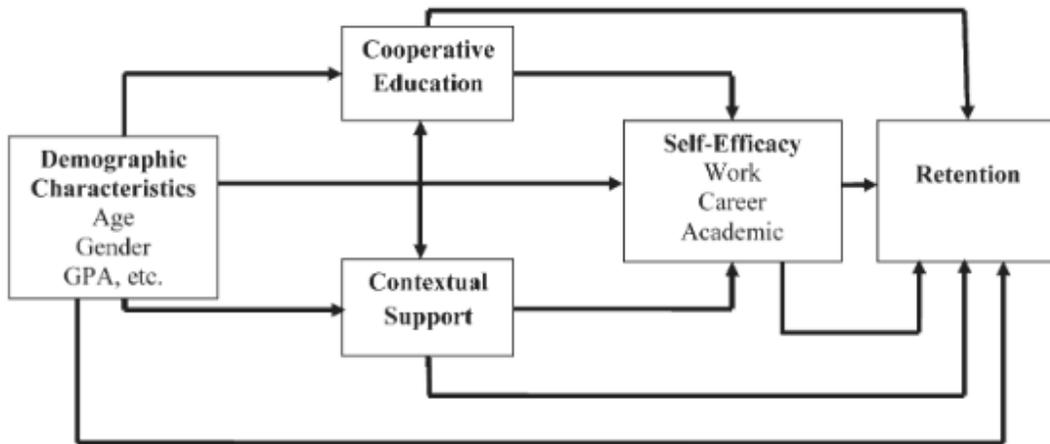


Figure 3. Conceptual framework for study on gendered effects on undergraduate retention (Raelin et al., 2014, p. 605)

Based on their research on self-efficacy with a technology and science short-form survey instrument, Lamb, Vallett, and Annetta (2014) argued for early interventions to increase student self-efficacy in the STEM fields to counter the low percentage of students entering science, technology, engineering, and mathematics majors. In college student studies on self-efficacy and alcohol, high episodic drinking by female college students has been found to result from low self-efficacy, a lack of confidence in their ability to refuse drinks and engage in protective activities associated with drinking alcohol (Lienemann & Lamb, 2013).

## **Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy and Mentoring**

Several leaders in the fields of self-efficacy and career decision-making have studied the relationship between the two and found that students are more able to make career decisions when they feel equipped to make a satisfactory decision, and that these students fare better academically because they have a career focus or at least confidence that they can eventually make the best decision for them. Most mentoring programs have career decision-making and academic success and persistence as either direct or indirect goals. Because career self-efficacy has been determined a predictor of adjustment and academic performance, the study of career-decision making self-efficacy is germane to how such programs are designed, maintained, and evaluated (Brady-Amoon & Fuertes, 2011).

### **Career Decision-Making Theory**

Career decision-making theory is an outgrowth of Albert Bandura's self-efficacy theory. Low self-efficacy in specific areas has been found to decrease an individual's expectation of what they can learn or accomplish and, consequently, lowers the amount of effort they put into the task. Similarly, low career decision-making self-efficacy causes individuals to avoid making a career decision or even undertaking tasks that would aid with a career decision (Luzzo, 1996).

As far back as colonial times in the U.S., college convocations and orientations made vocational guidance a priority. One of the first known career courses in the U.S. was offered for women at Barnard College in 1921 and another is recorded at the University of Minnesota in 1932 (Borow, 1960; Maverick, 1926). Career decision-making research began in earnest in the 1960s, though Frank Parsons, a man of many professions, from teacher to lawyer, wrote a career guidance book in 1908 that is still used as the foundation of career development and cited today (Parsons, 1909). The GI Bill after World War II brought the need for counseling and vocational

guidance, creating large numbers of counseling centers to spring up at colleges and universities around the country (McCarthy, 2014). The first measure for vocational development, the Career Maturity Inventory, was used in 1961 to determine if a student was ready to make a career decision (Savickas & Porfeli, 2011). A survey in 2000 found that 70% of institutions of higher education offer a career course (Folsom, Peterson, Reardon, & Mann, 2002).

Of important note for this study, due to the ability of mentors to help students develop positive ways of thinking, is the work of Andrews, Bullock-Yowell, Daheln, and Nicholson (2014) on the connection between perfectionism and career decision-making self-efficacy. Andrews et al. found that adaptive perfectionists scored higher in career decision-making self-efficacy than either maladaptive perfectionists or non-perfectionists. The difference was due to the adaptive perfectionist's traits of enjoying the process of putting forth effort and yet not being unhappy with their imperfection. Contrasting the adaptive perfectionists, the maladaptive perfectionists tend toward negative thoughts and worry over the opinions of others and the non-perfectionist does not have as high of personal standards as the perfectionist. Perfectionism aids in career decision-making self-efficacy but only if the individual is on the adaptive side of perfectionism where there is not a dominance of negative thought and rigid expectations.

Lent and Brown (2013) developed a career self-management model in which self-efficacy is acknowledged as a predictor of career-decision making effort and success. Their extensive research and resultant model explaining career behaviors demonstrate how positive expectations help individuals to be pro-active with activities such as networking, self-advocacy, and career preparation. Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, and Pastorelli (2001) conducted a longitudinal study with 272 Italian children from ages 11 to 15 using a self-efficacy scale to measure perceived self-efficacy in academic areas, ability to learn and get needed help, leisure

and extracurricular activities, social competencies, and self-regulation. From this very thorough study, evidence arose that parental social-economic status, parental expectations, academic experiences, and student self-awareness all work together to determine the student's career preparation and expectations. Interestingly though, they found that the parental socioeconomic standing was not nearly as important a factor in student career aspirations as the students' aspirations and belief in their abilities. Though each factor affects the other, self-efficacy was determined the greatest factor in later career decision-making for these students.

In a quantitative study using multiple instruments and data sources, Hall, Smith, and Chia (2008) found that the more successful college students were those with a higher level of self-efficacy and internal locus of control. In terms of specific career self-efficacy, numerous research studies have shown that career courses and other career interventions help students feel more confident about their academic and career choices and more likely to persist (Komarraju, Swanson, & Nadler, 2014). In studying the effects of career decision-making self-efficacy on Mexican-American college students, Piña-Watson, Jimenez, and Ojeda (2014) found that students who had confidence in their ability to choose a career were happier than their peers who lacked such self-efficacy. The authors recommended interventions be used to increase student confidence, goal setting, and self-expression in order to increase their self-efficacy and likelihood of college success.

### **Motivational Theory**

One of the greatest aims of and benefits from college mentoring is to help the student mentee achieve academic success by assisting in their confirmation of major and career aspirations, goal setting, and study skills. Greater assurance of career goal is credited with greater motivation to persist through to graduation (Porter & Umbach, 2006; Willcoxson &

Wynder, 2010). Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) explained in their seminal work, *How College Affects Students*, that uncertainty of academic major correlates positively with failure to persist. Lattuca and Stark (2009) explained that “Students’ goals influence the value they place on a given endeavor or task and, consequently, drive motivation and effort” (p. 166). If students do not have clear goals, they do not have strong motivation to put forth effort into the challenging task of college completion. Adding to the lack of motivation from lack of goals, lack of efficacy in academics can lead to poor academic preparation and a self-defeating propensity for test anxiety (Kitsantas, Winsler, & Huie, 2008; Lopez, 1999).

Albert Bandura’s social cognitive theory asserts that motivation is shaped by the way the individual relates to the environment, the individual’s unique characteristics, and the individual’s behavior (Bess & Dee, 2012). Bandura’s goal-setting theory and the practice of setting challenging goals is the basis for motivation theory and the motivators of achievement, responsibility, and recognition (Daft & Marcic, 2011; Lunenburg, 2011). In 1990, Edwin Locke and Gary Latham took four hundred studies on goals and created their theory of goal-setting that asserts goals are great motivators. They show in their model diagram in Figure 4 that goal accomplishment can lead to satisfaction and greater motivation, whereas frustration and lower motivation occur when the goal is not accomplished (Lunenburg, 2011).

Locke and Latham’s General model of goal setting and task performance:



Figure 4. General model of goal setting and task performance (Lunenburg, 2011, p. 2)

Self-belief or self-efficacy has been used in several theories of motivation to explain what motivates individuals to attempt and persist through tasks. Pajares (1996) studied the relationship of self-efficacy to motivation in the academic setting and confirmed that students with higher self-efficacy are more motivated to put forth effort because they attribute their success more to their ability and level of effort expended than students with low self-efficacy. The motivational theory of life-span development explains the motivational benefit of appropriate (attainable) and focused goal-setting that is needed for ultimate success (Heckhausen, Chang, Greenberger, & Chen, 2013). This theory has been shown to hold true for educational goal-setting creating the motivation to achieve academic success.

Motivation is understood as a necessary ingredient for significant learning and achievement. Being “an internal state that arouses, directs, and maintains behavior,” motivation is important to study as it applies to student achievement and completion (Woolfolk-Hoy & Hoy, 2006, p. 127). Goal orientation, which is correlated with motivation, concerns the ‘why’ of goals, the reasons for the importance of certain goals to students and why they behave in certain ways to achieve certain goals (McCollum & Kajs, 2007).

### **Research on Motivation**

Though Schutz said in 1991 that many theories have studied self-directed behavior in relation to the individual seeking the status quo but that not as many examine the process of goal setting. There is now a great deal of research on goal-setting and its effect on success, especially in the academic arena. In a mixed-methods study conducted at the City University of Hong Kong, the effect of goal setting on student achievement was tested on 182 students. Results showed that students who set goals for themselves achieved higher grades. Additionally, there was a positive correlation between higher expected grades and higher achieved grades. While

goal setting was seen as only one factor in student success by students, it was deemed an important factor (Cheung, 2004).

In a Swedish longitudinal study of children 10 to 13 years of age, Giota (2006) found that goals for attending school and self-perceptions of competence, or self-efficacy, affected interest in school work and achievement, with the children of a more positive and goal-oriented mindset more successful. In a study of 120 fifth to seventh graders using a survey that measured action-control beliefs, academic goals, intrinsic motivation, and test anxiety and student school records, Lopez (1999) found that children who thought they could perform well in school performed better than children who did not feel confident in their ability to perform. Additionally, the students' ability to set academic goals aided in their self-efficacy and ultimate achievement.

Heckhausen et al. (2013) studied the effect of educational and career engagement in the year after high school on educational, career, and psychological satisfaction. They followed 1,183 high school seniors through year four after they left high school looking at factors such as occupational goal engagement and progress, work hours, educational status, life satisfaction, etc. Interestingly, they found that early occupational goal engagement can be detrimental to long-term educational, career, and psychological satisfaction. However, an early focus and persistence in educational achievement directly after high school was found to produce a more positive mood, greater life satisfaction, and greater career progress. Apparently, too much career emphasis early on can be a distraction from educational engagement, but that an educational focus can provide the positive future outlook that can help students persist with education through difficult periods and ultimately provide better career options.

Motivation in terms of what helps motivate college students toward academic success and completion is very complicated, as each student has their own needs, goals, and challenges.

Higher education institutions must look at what motivates students intrinsically and extrinsically and what will help them to persist toward graduation. The greatest needs and, consequently, motivators discussed in the literature on student retention surround issues of engagement, whether in the classroom or the dorm room, achievement and self-esteem. Petty (2014) argued that institutions can help students, especially first-generation students, persist by examining the theories of human need and motivation. He discussed Abraham Maslow's physiological, safety, social, self-esteem, and self-actualization needs and David McClelland's achievement motivation theory in relation to what institutions should do to motivate their students. Petty's review of the literature concluded that higher education must provide programming to help students feel they belong, help them develop strong self-esteem, and help them achieve.

In studying what helps students persist in community colleges, Martin, Galentino, and Townsend (2014) interviewed community college graduates identified as successful by college faculty and administrative staff. They asked students about their "academic preparation for college, factors relating to their cultural capital, their goals in attending college, and their academic and social behaviors as a student" (p. 228). They found that "successful graduates have (a) clear goals, (b) strong motivation, (c) the ability to manage external demands, and (d) self-empowerment" (p. 229). Students tend to agree that goal setting is a good motivational tool and research supports goal setting as an aid in persistence (Cheung, 2004; Giota, 2006). The framework model (see Figure 5) on entering student characteristics based on student departure work by Braxton, Hirschy, and Shederick (2004) was created by Martin, Galentino, and Townsend (2014) to display the categories of beneficial new student characteristics and used to advocate for programming to help current students develop these persistence factors.



Figure 5. Framework for entering student characteristics (Martin, Galentino, & Townsend, 2014, p. 227)

### **Mentoring Theory**

Mentoring theory has only in recent years evolved to cover more than mentoring in the workplace. Kathy Kram’s 1985 book, *Mentoring at work: Developmental relationships in organizational life*, has served as the foundation for research on mentoring since then, but most of this study has focused on the workplace and career mentoring (Ragins & Kram, 2007). The importance of mentoring in the profession of K-12 teaching is valued to the extent that many states have mandated mentoring for all new teachers (Blank & Sindelar, 1992). Mentoring has also become common place and encouraged widely in the healthcare field (Dancer, 2003). The business world has definitely seen the value of mentoring and embraced it as a way to teach, develop, and retain employees (Cranwell-Ward, Bossons, & Gover, 2004; Dunnett, 2012; Stone, 2007). However, it has only been in the past few years that mentoring has received significant attention as an intervention in higher education, and research in this area has focused on the mechanics, such as mentor matching and evaluation, showing that mentoring can produce beneficial results. However, little has been discussed regarding the mentoring relationship itself, insight as to what transpires and why (Schunk & Mullen, 2013).

Mentoring theories range from couching mentoring purposes, activities, and effects in everything from goal-setting, personal development, career development, self-organized learning, and social capital to networking (Blank & Sindelar, 1992; Kay & Wallace, 2009). The major mentoring theories in the literature that pertain to mentoring in academia are personal learning theory, collaborative mentoring theory, and mentor relationship theory (Schunk & Mullen, 2013). Common assumptions of the theories used are that (1) mentoring is a dynamic and developmental process; (2) mentoring relationships are not one-size-fits-all and are subject to change; (3) mentoring relationships are socialized learning partnerships for the mentee's personal and professional growth and may be formal or informal (Allen & Eby, 2007; Fletcher & Mullen, 2012; Mullen, 2008). What used to be thought of as the mentoring model, the master-apprentice relationship, has fallen out of favor due to its exclusionary properties, while progressive mentoring literature speaks more of the collaborative and reciprocal nature of mentoring, of equality and respect, and cautions of ethics and 'do no harm' practice in mentoring relationships (Brown, 2009; Eble & Gaillet, 2008; Schunk & Mullen, 2013). The most applicable mentoring theory for college mentoring programming and this study in particular was developed by Nora and Crisp (2007) from theoretical perspectives in primary and secondary education as outlined in the four interrelated constructs:

- 1) Psychological and Emotional Support – encompasses listening, providing moral and emotional support, identifying problems, and providing encouragement;
- 2) Degree and Career Support – involves assessment of student's strengths, weaknesses, and abilities, providing guidance with academic and career goals and decision-making;
- 3) Academic Subject Knowledge Support – assisting with acquisition of skills and

knowledge and challenging the student academically;

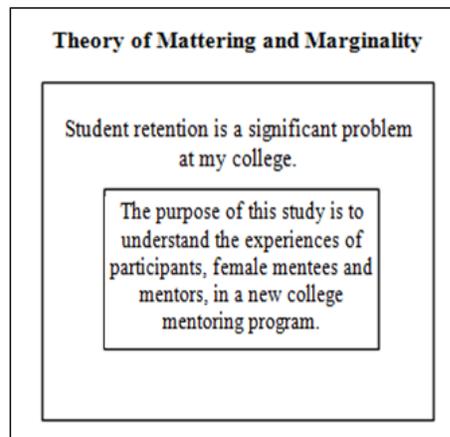
- 4) The Existence of a Role Model – emphasis on sharing, self-disclosing life experiences and feelings by the mentor to personalize and enrich the relationship.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Theoretical frameworks help guide research studies, from the researcher's assumptions, to the questions posed, to the analysis of data, creating a scaffolding for the study (Merriam, 2009; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). I chose Nancy Schlossberg's mattering and marginality theory as the theoretical framework to guide this study because I believe it can best explain what female student mentees receive from college mentors in a program like the one the studied here. As Baumeister and Leary (1995) found through their extensive work, the need to belong, to feel one matters to others, as experienced in interpersonal attachments, has a strong bearing on physical and mental health and overall wellbeing. With the main activity in this program one-on-one interaction, mattering and marginality theory does the best job of explaining what mentees may receive from the mentoring program that can influence their success.

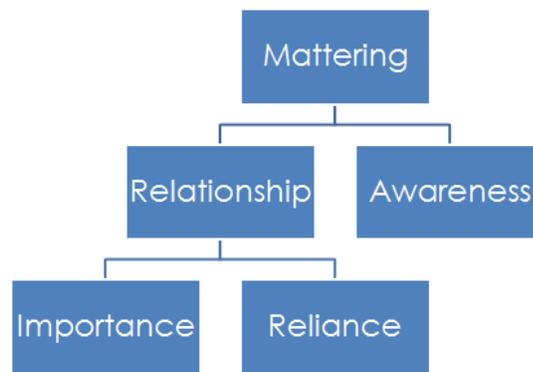
As Corbin and Strauss (2008) pointed out, one should be cautious about using theoretical frameworks in qualitative research. They should not stand between the researcher's creative mind and openness to looking at the research data without preconceptions. However, as Green (2014) has pointed out, use of theoretical or conceptual frameworks can aid in making the research coherent and the findings meaningful and *more* generalisable. Indeed, there is no escaping the effect that personal identification with a theory has on the researcher's choice of research, method of research, and interpretation of research. Anfara and Mertz (2015) stated that theoretical frameworks provide the lens to see how to design, conduct, and analyze the study. They believe frameworks, in fact, determine what is learned from the study. Anfara and Mertz

argued that theoretical frameworks are in each study, whether explicit or implicit and that making them clear helps to focus the study and show relationships, which support and inform the research. As Merriam (2009) pointed out, the theoretical framework helps the researcher to zero in on what they believe should be the focus of the research and the purpose of the study. It helps guide the study creation, implementation, and data discussion. Borrowing from Merriam's visual of frames and inserting my study purpose, problem, and theoretical framework, it is easy to see in Figure 6 how the purpose and problem for this case study fit within the theoretical framework of mattering and marginality theory (2009, p. 68).



*Figure 6.* Theoretical framework for this study

Mattering and marginality theory is especially helpful to guide this study and in forming helpful conclusions on data collected because it addresses several factors that affect student retention. In his own review of the literature, Tinto (2012) cited mattering, as named by Schlossberg, to yield the following “benefits that promote retention” but that hinder persistence if absent: social support, reduced academic stress levels, increased self-efficacy, increased self-worth, increased commitment to the institution, motivation, and increased academic performance (p. 28). It is easy to see the relationship between mattering and the typical aims of mentoring in the illustration of mattering categories in Figure 7.



*Figure 7. Categories of mattering (Elliott, Kao, & Grant, 2004)*

Nancy Schlossberg's theory of Mattering and Marginality covers these five areas: attention, the feeling that one is noticed; importance, a belief that one is cared about; ego-extension, the feeling someone else will be proud of what one does or will sympathize with failures; dependence, a feeling of being needed; appreciation, the feeling that one's efforts are appreciated by others (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). These are all areas that mentoring addresses, which is why it is the best framework for this study.

Of all the student development theories that are applicable to mentoring and the benefits that are often attributed to mentoring, mattering and marginality theory is the broadest in scope. If students feel they matter, they are more likely to develop self-efficacy, be confident in making career decisions, be motivated to succeed, and to persist through college. As addressed in numerous studies, mattering and marginality theory addresses the whole person and is a strong framework to use for this study since the aim of the mentoring program is to help students develop in ways that address Chickering's seven vectors of development: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy towards interdependence, developing mature relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity (Chickering & Reisser, 2005; Rayle, 2006; Understanding Campus Complexity:

Problems, Challenges, and Marginalization, 2013; Wilson & Wolf-Wendel, 2005; Wolf-Wendel & Ruel, 1999). Of note regarding Chickering's vector of developing 'interdependence' is the competence and confidence needed to know when and how to reach out for assistance when needed, an important skill mentors can assist student mentees in mastering. Next, we shall look at mattering and marginality theory in more depth in relation to mentoring.

### **Mattering and Marginality Theory in Higher Education**

Does it matter if college students believe they matter? Looking at some statistics on suicides by college students puts mattering into perspective:

1. One in 10 college students say they have seriously considered suicide during the last year;
2. Approximately 1,100 college students die by suicide each year;
3. Half of all college students have had suicidal thoughts; and
4. Suicide remains the second leading cause of death among college students. (The Jed Foundation, 2014)

Nancy Schlossberg moved from self-esteem and mattering to further explain the experience of college students and why institutions should be concerned about their students' feeling of worth with her 1989 theory on mattering and marginality. Her work on the importance of college students mattering to others has been quoted widely and used in much research about college student development, need for support, and predictors of success (Rayle & Chung 2007-2008). In her extensive work on life transitions, Schlossberg (2011) cited feelings of support from the people one turns to for help during a life transition, as one of the four major factors in a successful transition period, such as college. Schlossberg's work has a basis in the suicide theory of Emile Durkheim. Durkheim declared that his fourth type of suicide, egotistical suicide,

occurs when individuals feel isolated from others and stressed the need for strong communities with healthy relational bonds to reduce instances of this suicide (Tinto, 1993). Since Durkheim, many psychologists and child theorists, most notably Erick Erikson, wrote of the need for children and adolescents to receive recognition from others and feel that they mattered in order to form a healthy identity (Erikson, 1963). Schlossberg has carried this emphasis on relationships and mattering into her work on life transitions, and, especially, retirement by encouraging retirees to continue to matter by remaining active in some type of work or personal interest and to maintain strong relationships (Pushkar & Bye, 2010).

The idea of mattering has been either the foundational rationale or is at least a component for many of the modern guru's of higher education work on student retention. Alexander Astin's (1984, 1999) work on student involvement, Arthur Chickering's (1993) work on identity development, and Vincent Tinto's (1993) work on student departure all have as integral to student persistence the following: integration, belonging, purpose, and mattering. Though mattering and marginality theory has been roundly criticized for insufficient testing and validating of the inventories used to measure it, in recent years it has been researched with diverse populations, in varied settings, and with replicated use of mattering inventories (Dixon, Scheidegger, & McWhirter, 2009; Tovar, Simon & Lee, 2009). Sheila Marshall (2001) developed the Mattering to Others Questionnaire (MROQ) by seeking feedback on it from 14 social scientists, eight professionals in teaching or human services fields, 12 adolescent raters, an undergraduate sample, and a high school sample. Demir and Davidson (2013) used the Mattering to Others Questionnaire with 4,840 college students and found perceived mattering to be significantly correlated to happiness and needs satisfaction.

Rosenberg and McCullough coined the term *mattering* to refer to the feeling that one is of concern to one's parents and others, that one is wanted and that their feelings and opinions count (1979). Mattering has been said to correspond to self-esteem, a concept explained by the psychologist William James as how one feels about their worth, tested by educator Stanley Coopersmith, and used to help explain almost every human behavior, including difficulty or success experienced by college students (Coopersmith, 1981; Osborne, 2014). Other researchers believe perceived mattering is distinct from self-esteem, stating that mattering has to do with the perception that others are interested in oneself, whereas self-esteem has to do with the personal evaluation of oneself (Marshall, 2001; Rosenberg, 1985; Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). Mattering has been tied to identity (Kohut, 1977), feelings of interest and appreciation (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981; Scholssberg, 1989; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989) and belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Mattering is related to Maslow's levels three and four of his hierarchy of needs, those of belongingness and self-esteem, but goes beyond belongingness to the more powerful feeling of relatedness (France, & Finney, 2009; Lester, 2013). In very basic terms, mattering is about feeling that one counts (Prilleltensky, 2014). Often the term marginality is used in conjunction with mattering. Marginality refers to being excluded from something and has been shown to negatively affect feelings of mattering (Draus, Roddy, & Greenwald, 2010; Phillips, 2005).

Marginality often has to do with transition periods of life where one is not integrated into a group yet. Marginality elicits feelings about mattering on the negative side; the marginal individual feels they are invisible and insignificant (Schlossberg, 1989). Similar to the broader concept of marginality is the practice of individual shunning that is enacted as a punishment for violators of an organizational or societal code. This withdrawal of any type of attention makes

the individual feel they do not matter and the effect of no attention has been shown to be more hurtful than negative attention (Elliott, Kao, & Grant, 2004). Perhaps easiest to understand and most telling of why some people have a stronger feeling of worth and positive outlook than others is the definition of mattering meaning that one makes a difference in the life of others and has a sense of purpose for life (Elliott, Colangelo, & Gelles; 2005; Mak & Marshall, 2004). To feel one does not matter to others, to feel marginalized, is to feel one's life is meaningless (Baumeister, 1991; Marshall, 2001; Schlossberg, 1989).

### **Mattering Research**

Nancy Schlossberg (1989), whose research has focused largely on how people relate to and cope with life transitions, interviewed diverse students to study how they deal with marginality and mattering. She found that it was important that students felt they mattered, that they received attention, that they felt they belonged, and that rituals and ceremonies aid in connections to the institution that lead to retention. In their work *Improving Higher Education Environments for Adults* (1989), Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering hypothesized that adults who score high in mattering will be more involved in their higher education experience. Their study, research, and hypothesis, coupled with research by those like Astin and Cross, gives ample evidence that the feelings of mattering contribute to college retention of students in all categories.

Grant and Elliott (2004) used the constructs of self-consciousness, self-monitoring, self-esteem, alienation, and perceived social support, in their research and confirmed Rosenberg's assertion of sincere mattering to others being a primary factor of self-concept. Tovar et al. (2009) found research lacking on the connection between perceived mattering by use of a tested inventory tool. They developed the College Mattering Inventory based on the work of

Rosenberg, McCullough, and Schlossberg in order to gauge the sense of belonging that community college and university students felt, using a diverse student population. They found positive student experiences from faculty, counselors, and student-centered programming and policies to increase feelings of mattering and, in turn, greater feelings of self-esteem and college persistence. Due to only one community college and one university involved with the study and the fact that the fifty-five question inventory was distributed via an online survey with an offered incentive, the authors advocate for study replication and the study of special populations (e.g., immigrants and sexual minorities) and comparisons between groups, such as higher and lower socioeconomic status students.

From the concept's introduction to more recent studies, mattering, whether to parents or others, has been found to correspond very positively to self-concept and self-esteem and negatively to feelings of alienation and depression (Dixon, 2005; Elliott, Kao, & Grant, 2004; Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981; Taylor & Turner, 2001). Elements of mattering and their characteristics are described in Elliott, Kao, and Grant's chart on mattering in Figure 8.

<i>Awareness</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Reliance</i>
I am the object of other's attention	I am an object of other's concern	Other chooses/looks to me
<i>Other:</i>	<i>Other:</i>	<i>Other:</i>
Notices me*	Invests resources in me*	Seeks my advice*
Recognizes me*	Promotes my welfare*	Depends on me
Is familiar with me*	Is attentive to my needs*	Seeks support from me*
Remembers my name*	Provides emotional support for me	Seeks resources from me*
Is aware of my presence*	Takes pride in me*	Needs me*
Focuses attention on me*	Cares about what I do*	Misses me
Does not ignore me*	Criticizes me for my own good*	Trusts me to be there*
	Inconveniences self for me*	Values my contribution
	Sees me as an ego-extension*	
	Listens to me*	

Figure 8. Elements of mattering (Elliott, Kao, & Grant, 2004, p. 343)

Purpose is an important part of mattering, as well as contributing to feelings of connection and belonging. A national seven-year longitudinal study on the effect of spirituality on college students found that students with a stronger sense of purpose as more successful (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011). This feeling of purpose ties into the need to be needed in Schlossberg's mattering and marginality theory that has strong application to adult development, adult transitions, and career development (Schlossberg et al., 1989). A longitudinal study of freshmen to junior Canadian college students found that the meaning of mattering remains stable over time, but the results could not be generalized past this age group (Marshall, Liu, Wu, Berzonsky, & Adams, 2010).

Mattering has been correlated positively with being in relationship with people who listen, feeling connected to others, and having good friends (Seilgman, 2011). Schlossberg (1989) found that institutions that focused on student involvement, which helped students feel they mattered, saw greater student learning and long-term loyalty to the institution. At Saybrook University, where doctoral students are given mentors and creativity is encouraged, there is a strong student focus, and faculty mentoring is integral to their philosophy and success (Ockuly & Richards, 2013). At Washington State, pairing scholarship recipients in the Washington State Achievers program with mentors was found to increase college engagement and persistence, a result of the increased encouragement and support received from mentors (Hu & Ma, 2010). Drake (2011) described a quality advising relationship as one in which the student feels someone cares about them and cares whether or not they leave the institution. They found this caring relationship to be one of the strongest retention factors for college students.

Octavio Villalpando addressed mattering and marginality using critical race theory and Baxter Magolda's Learning Partnership Model to discuss the co-constructed classroom experience and the importance of students feeling they matter to the professor (Museus & Jayakumar, 2012). In their study on gender, cooperative education, contextual support, and self-efficacy on undergraduate retention, Raelin et al. (2014) also found that the mattering factors of friends and college support aided in retention. This was a confirmation of research by Torres (2006) on college persistence where he showed that feeling a sense of belonging at their college increased Latino student success. A recent study by Pichon (2016) further stressed the importance of students feeling they belong by showing that community college students taking classes at a four-year institution were more likely to persist if they engaged in classroom activities that made them feel they belonged. In a phenomenological study using the framework of mattering and marginality, Schieferecke and Card (2013) found that male college students were more likely to persist if they felt recognized and important to key college personnel such as their professor or a student group or team on campus.

### **Void in the Literature**

It is important to know what has already been written and researched on a topic in order to know if additional research will serve a purpose. Ideally, one wants to add to the current literature in order to build upon or create theory and to inform existing practice and decision-making. One way to determine where there is a void in the literature is to do a library search (Galvan, 2013). Though there is a good bit in the literature on mentoring, the practice, and its effects, the majority of mentoring programs and accompanying literature are centered on youth mentoring, mentoring in specific career fields, or mentoring in the workplace. In looking for peer-reviewed articles and texts on female mentoring at the community or two-year college level,

some articles can be found, but they have very specific focuses, such as females in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), female athletes, females at Christian campuses, and female minorities. More often, articles on female mentoring in college have to do with mentoring of faculty and administrators, or community youth mentor programs in which college students serve as mentors.

The largest number of articles referencing female college mentoring programs center on assisting female college students in the STEM fields, but even those reported studies are few in number. Of the texts found on mentoring, they were either of mentoring in the workplace or mentoring in a specific academic field. There is little to nothing on the experiences of females of all ethnicities and majors in an all-female community college program. Indeed, several mentoring researchers suggest that more research is needed on gender and mentoring, especially qualitative inquiry that includes storytelling (Allen, Poteet, & Burroughs, 1997; Gibson, 2004; Ragins, 1999). There is also the need for research exploring the effectiveness of personal support interventions on the academic success of community college students (Crisp, 2010). Beyond the effectiveness of mentoring, there is a lack of research that explains why mentoring is effective and what takes place in mentoring relationships (Schunk & Mullen, 2013). To narrow further, nothing was found on the experiences of female students mentored through a volunteer female college organization, such as the AAWCC (American Association of Women in Community Colleges). Additionally, there is little research that addresses the relationship between voluntary participation by mentees and mentors in mentoring programs and mentoring outcomes (Ragins & Kram, 2007).

This study adds to the literature on mentoring, on mentoring at the college level, and will help close the gap in the literature on volunteer mentoring of college females by college female staff and faculty. It adds to the research on what takes place in the dynamic mentoring relationship, what happens between mentee and mentor, but has not been studied much to this point. It helps to explain why mentoring is effective and provides critique that can improve the effectiveness of mentoring relationships. It also adds to the literature on the benefits of mentoring for mentors and their retention at the institution. Most specifically, this is a study on a mentoring program led by an AAWCC group, which adds another dimension to view mentoring programming. Because mentoring has been shown to help students persist and persistence to college completion is a major area of concern, especially at the community college level, this new two-year college female mentoring program and what mentees and mentors experienced in their mentoring relationship was worthy of study.

### **Conclusion**

Mentoring is becoming much more than a workplace tool to groom the next wave of management and business leaders, a community support program, or a unique innovation in higher education to assist with student adjustment to college. It is growing into a recognized high-value endeavor that can assist in every facet of work, school, and life development. Evidence of its usefulness has been produced through quality studies exploring every combination of mentoring. The growth of mentoring programs has resulted in enterprising individuals and companies creating mentoring consultant services and computer software ready to assist for a fee. Past the traditional one-on-one mentoring, beyond the less conventional group, team, peer, and situational mentoring, and more unique than technological virtual mentoring, there is now reverse mentoring for tech-savvy younger mentors to assist more

experienced, but less tech-knowledgeable mentees, and speed and flash mentoring for really busy people (Mangan, 2013). As many studies as there are on undergraduate mentor programs, they are but a fraction of the programs sprouting out across the country in the quest to increase academic success, retention, and college completion (Gershenfeld, 2014).

The beauty of mentoring, especially in the realm of higher education, is that it meets a great many student needs that have been proven to increase retention. Mentoring of college students has been shown to help students increase their self-efficacy, their career decision-making, their motivation via goal-setting, and their feeling that they matter, all factors that correspond positively to retention. Crisp (2010) took the proven work from student integration, student attrition, student engagement, and mentoring models, and confirmed prior research that validated mentoring as a strong factor in student persistence, especially for women. Literature on mentoring does report the importance of mentor program factors such as matching, regularity of contact, type of contact, training, and support to level of program success. Poorly planned mentoring programs with little or no institutional support tend to experience the least success. However, mentoring in general has been found beneficial to students, and programs that are well-planned help students to set goals, feel cared for, and develop confidence in their ability to persist and determine their career path, all major factors in college retention and completion (Capps, 2010; Crisp & Cruz, 2009, Dawson, 2014; Gershenfeld, 2014, Ramani et al., 2006).

As a relatively low-cost intervention, college mentoring can yield high returns for college retention and completion, a major focus of institutions and government entities. The premise of mentoring aiding in student success fits well with the realistic-constructivist philosophy, in that the benefits of mentoring both help the student change their perceptions of their abilities (self-efficacy) and change their actual ability by providing information, resources, guidance, and

support. Students in mentoring programs often persist because someone helped them believe that they could.

CHAPTER III:  
METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

*I wish to build a group of friends that will help me to become successful.*  
(Student comment in mentee survey)

Qualitative research was used for this dissertation in order to discover what mentees and mentors each think about mentoring and to learn whether the mentoring program set up at Georgia Highlands College can meet the needs of female student mentees. While prior research tends to show that mentoring programs help college students academically and personally (Crisp & Cruz, 2009), the mentoring program under study is new, loose in structure, and without a strong organizational framework. Therefore, study of the program can assist in guiding its continued development. Considering the very personal nature of this subject, the disparity between how much each mentor interacts with their mentee, and the needs of each mentee, interviewing students and mentors was the best method to elicit helpful answers that explain this case, give feedback to improve the program, provide insight for changes, and provide argument for administrative support and funding. Though other methods of evaluation are appropriate and useful, and were, in fact, used to supplement inquiry, the qualitative method best gets to the ‘why’ of participant answers and allowed participants a more open venue to relate their needs and limitations. When a mentee responds to a survey question with something like “Guidance is always a plus” or “I’m very hard on myself, and I get put down very quickly,” as in the end-of-term mentee survey, it is enlightening to discover exactly what they meant by ‘guidance’ and ‘get put down.’ Finding out how the guidance was of help to them, how they were able to

acquire the guidance, and whether they would like more guidance is crucial to know if the program is helpful and how it should be improved. Knowing what the student meant by saying she gets put down quickly (does she put herself down; do others put her down?) is needed before being able to help her feel better about herself. The ability to ask questions with an open-ended dimension, as well as an opportunity for follow-up, is extremely helpful when the inquiry is of such a personal and individual nature. Additionally, interviews, because of the time allowed for answers and the presence of the interviewer, cause the subject to think of and want to contribute more information than they would in an online survey. The broadness of the questions and the allowance for any type of response provides an opportunity to learn much more than what was first intended by the original question (Creswell, 2009; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013; Yin, 2014). The potential for a vast amount of information to come from interviews is exciting and yields the most helpful data to inform on the viability of the mentor program. Results are also instructive for the institution, as it just began a campus-wide success coach initiative.

In this chapter, I briefly re-state the purpose of the study and discuss the philosophical worldview for the research methodology, as well as how qualitative research is used, then provide details on the population in question, the sample used, the setting and environment, the specific methods and procedures used, an explanation of how data was analyzed, disclosure of personal bias and study limitations, and address potential ethical issues. Appendix items provide more detail on specific methodology and research protocol used to guide the process.

### **Review of Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of participants, female mentees and mentors, in a new college mentoring program. Examining experiences of mentees and mentors helped to determine the value of the program, as well as areas to target for improvement.

Study of this mentoring program is important in order to gain support from administration and possible grant funding, as well as to encourage and guide current and potential mentors. Study results add to the body of literature on mentoring and mattering theory.

### **Research Perspective**

... there is a real world independent of our theorizing; our theories can account for this reality ... (Noaparast, 2002, p. 52)

As something seems to someone, so it is in fact. (Lektorskii, 2010, p. 42; Plato & Denyer, 2008)

... constructivism has no mechanism that allows the distinction between knowledge and superstition. (Meyer, 2009, p. 340)

As the quotes above convey, it is my belief that there is a world, a reality, which is set but is knowable only through the varied and changing eyes of the viewer. This study is approached from the ontological view of realistic-constructivism, important to note because this worldview for research inquiry takes into account both the importance of how students perceive their world and the difference mentors can make in students' reality. Considered the first relativist, due to his dialogues with Plato and Socrates on the meaning of truth, Protagoras argued that individuals interpret truth (Long, 2004; Plato, Towle, & Sauppe, 1892; Politis, 2012). He was seen as believing there was no absolute truth due to his philosophy of the world occurring through man's eyes. However, Protagoras was not discounting the real world, but, rather, accounting for man's perception of reality helping to form the knowledge received by man, thus acknowledging that each person may view reality a bit differently.

### **Realistic-constructivism**

As far back as 1955, psychologist George Kelly with his *personal construct theory* was able to accept an independent reality of the world while stressing that we only experience the real world through the constructs we form (Paszowska-Rogacz & Kabzinska, 2012). Richard Rorty

made the same point in his book *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers Volume 1* by arguing that truth is not relative, but that how we see truth is relative (Barris, 2006).

Constructivism is the theory that research knowledge comes from the interactions between researcher and subject in the natural world, while positivism is the theory that a true reality exists independent of human interaction. Post-positivism merges these seemingly dichotomous paradigms, telling us that a true reality exists and that knowledge can be obtained separate from our experience, but that we can never fully understand it (Hall, Griffiths, & McKenna, 2013). Positivism can be equated to philosophical realism and post-positivism comes quite close to the belief of the realistic-constructivist. Brian Campbell (1998) provided a clear contrast between traditional realism and constructivism in his online article in the *Electronic Journal of Science Education*. He discusses constructivism as a theory based on observation and scientific study about how people learn. The theory says that people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world, through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences. When we encounter something new, we have to reconcile it with our previous ideas and experience, maybe changing what we believe, or maybe discarding the new information as irrelevant. In any case, we are active creators of our own knowledge. To do this, we must ask questions, explore, and assess what we know. Realism espouses that a reality independent of the observer; a reality that can be discovered and understood exactly as it is; a reality that can be experienced and shared by everyone in precisely the same way. Conversely, constructivism theory espouses that: Knowledge is constructed by the individual and/or society; a reality exists independent of the observer, but the question of what it objectively is like is unanswerable at best; a scientific theory is a good theory if it is useful in making predictions that fit the impressions of reality.

Realistic-constructivism, as proposed and shaped by modern philosophers such as psychologist James Gibson, holds that reality is not changeable, but that our interpretation of reality is dependent upon socio-cultural communications and interactions. We all co-create each other's reality because every interaction creates a context for the meaning we give to our environment (Lektorskii, 2010). Mentoring is just such a socio-cultural interchange. The experiences of mentees and mentors in a mentoring program are dependent upon expected cultural norms and unique interactions and how those interactions are perceived by the participants.

**Summation of research framework.** Though there is not much written yet on the combination philosophy of realistic-constructivist, this complimentary duo does a good job of explaining the need for and utility of qualitative research. It is this framework that best describes my belief in how interactions between researcher and subjects take place and are interpreted, how knowledge is best obtained, and the nature of reality itself. The joining of two seeming opposed frameworks as social constructivism and pragmatism expresses my belief that reality can best be found by the use of multiple methods that include both inductive and deductive (subjective and objective) means and also that the researcher, being a unique individual who brings specific experiences, biases, and interests to the study, affects the study from creation to conclusion. The use of different methods helps to approach questions in different ways and derive answers from different perspectives. The use of qualitative study helps to gain a more complete picture of a case than a single, one-dimensional quantitative method can provide. Realistic-Constructivism also reflects the belief that individuals can experience similar situations and experiences differently and that individuals may respond differently to efforts of support, encouragement, and attention. This framework is a good fit for the study of how individuals

respond to similar attempts to help them through a shared experience, such as college, and underpins the methodology used.

**Research framework applied.** The Realistic-Constructivist framework guides the construction of interview questions and analysis in this dissertation. Each participant was asked the same questions and in the same order to provide a basis for comparison and to adhere to a process that gives credence to the value of the scientific method. Some of the questions are very practical in nature, while other questions are more personal and call for very individual reflection. The broadness in the questions accommodates both the constructivism and realism tenets of relativism and predictive observation. Allowing for follow-up questions and possible follow-up interviews also adds to the rigor of the inquiry and the individualization. In analyzing the responses, I rely on the realistic view that there are certain truths, truths related to this study, that have been established by research and illustrated in student development theories on mattering, motivation, self-efficacy, career decision-making, and student retention. I also relied on the constructivist doctrine that stresses the importance of analysis and context for interpreting social phenomena and personal experiences (Cole, 1997). Axial coding aided in analysis of the participant responses and helped to satisfy the realists' need for a scientific method of evaluation. I kept a researcher journal to aid in maintaining the data collection trail, as well as my interview appointments. Understanding that what is important is accounting for and analyzing the individual's experience within a particular context, per the constructivists' view, guided my data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

## **Researcher Positionality**

Though not included as one of the mentors interviewed, it would be neglectful to ignore my own research experiences from this mentoring initiative, as I am able to add to the data in a first-hand account. I volunteered for four mentees at the start of the program. Two of those four students actually connected with me. My mentee in the fall term was a very promising student. I admired her success in making high grades in a difficult program despite working full-time and having the responsibilities of a husband and two small children. We met for lunch, on campus and off campus; she emailed me with questions; I checked in on her; and I developed a concern for her success. When I learned that she had not returned after two terms, I was distressed and emailed her to ask why. I was sad to hear she had encountered financial aid issues and understood but was disappointed that she then decided to take some time off from school to be available more for her children. My experience with my second mentee in the spring was similar to the first in that it started out well and with promise, then that mentee was not able to return to school for different, but similar reasons that involved family responsibility. My limited experience mentoring mirrored much of what the mentors in the study shared with me. My experiences and feelings over what felt like failed mentoring helped me to identify and relate to the stories told by the mentors interviewed, as did my experience with ego-extension. I relate some of my experience and feelings in Chapter V.

## **Research Design**

This study used qualitative research in order to best elicit candid responses to the study questions. Rather than force participants to choose from fixed responses, I wanted participants to have the freedom to say whatever is important to them and for the study to have the benefit of receiving information that was unanticipated but may prove helpful for the mentoring program or

students in general. Qualitative study best suited this topic, as can be seen by Stake's (2006) definitions of qualitative research and their correspondence to my purpose of conducting this specific study.

1. *Qualitative research is concerned with the study of relationships in a natural setting.* I wanted to study how the mentors and mentees interact and what benefit is derived from their personal relationships;
2. *Qualitative research is different from quantitative research in that experiments are not conducted and hypotheses are not tested.* I sought to learn about individual experiences and did not begin the study with set hypotheses or clear expectations;
3. *Qualitative research is about discovering what is already taking place (or has taken place) and the researcher is open to the research project taking her to a different place than expected.* I sought to learn from the mentee and mentor experiences that took place in this new mentoring program, no matter what I heard and where it led me, in an effort to learn about the experiences of participants and best determine the future of the mentor program; and
4. *Qualitative researchers tend to care about their subject matter and advocate for fairness and a democratic society.* I was a founder of the mentoring program and was a mentor. I care about helping students and about education, especially for its purpose of perpetuating democracy and advancing those who wish to improve themselves. Mentoring can help level the academic playing field for less prepared students or those undergoing exceptional challenges, which speaks to fairness and democracy.

Merriam (2009) captured the purpose of qualitative research and the desire of qualitative researchers concisely in her definition that emphasizes the need to understand “how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 5). One major difference between quantitative and qualitative research is that, while quantitative research strives for objectivity, qualitative research recognizes the lack of objectivity toward the subject studied and admits to any biases. With qualitative research, the researcher may be a part of the research and allows for and admits any relationship with the subject. The philosophical difference between the two types of research (and sometimes researchers) is that quantitative research seeks to discover relationships between variables and explain the causes, while qualitative research seeks to understand phenomenon from the point of view of the participants (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Precisely because of the definitions given above, I used qualitative methodology as I wished to learn what the mentees and mentors perceive and tell their stories of their mentoring experiences.

Of importance to any concerns about the trustworthiness of the study, especially due to the fact that I helped start the program and facilitated the mentor matching in the first year, is that I have no connection to any mentees at this point. I secured a professor involved with the program to take over my role of mentor-mentee matching and I removed myself from working with the program once beginning the research. I have no influence over mentees or mentors in ability to help or harm them, so they should have felt no compulsion to participate other than a desire to tell their story. My only desire in relating their stories is to hear and provide honest accounts in order to provide helpful data and to increase my own understanding of mentee and mentor needs, as I hope to continue to work with mentoring programs in the future. To insure trustworthiness of the study, mentees and mentors interviewed were allowed to view copies of

their interview transcripts to review and approve. This member checking gave participants the opportunity to correct anything that I misinterpreted due to my unique perspective (Major, 2013, p. 477). I also looked for the ‘negative case,’ one that seems an exception, in order to both fight against personal bias and to tell a complete story (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Additionally, early and midway into the interview process, I asked three colleagues (one involved with the mentoring program, one at the same institution as the program but not involved with the mentoring program, and one outside of the institution) to review preliminary findings and to give feedback, as Yin (2014) suggested as a counter to possible researcher bias.

Case study is the type of qualitative research used, as I wished to investigate a contemporary phenomenon (a case – specifically, the mentoring program) in-depth and capture the perspectives of different participants (Yin, 2014). This is an intrinsic case study, as my goal was to learn about a particular pre-selected case and to focus on particular issues and items specific to this case (Stark, 1995). As Rule and John (2015) pointed out in their discussion of case study research, intrinsic case studies have the potential to provide rich application and provide contexts for new research.

### **Case Study**

A case can be a person, event, or program or multiples of these (Yin, 2009). The study of the mentoring program at Georgia Highlands College fits case study research well as I wished to focus in-depth on one group operating in a real setting and provide a holistic description of what takes place in the group by spending time observing and talking with the members. What was learned in this qualitative case study is likely to be transferable and helpful to others in a similar situation or those contemplating a mentoring program. Such a study can provide depth and lead to unthought-of relationships and insights (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorensen, 2010).

The mentoring program at Georgia Highlands College is unique and has interest to me due to my work with the program and my desire to work with mentoring programs, but the study results have potential to instruct other mentoring projects in their design and implementation. The results provide useful information for female mentoring programs, other types of mentoring programs, and individual mentoring endeavors. Qualitative case study is particularly appropriate for this research, as the purpose of the study was to understand the experiences of participants, female mentees and mentors, in a college mentoring program. This case study was a great opportunity to explore in-depth the thoughts of mentors and mentees and has promise for designing a mentoring program to best meet the needs of female students at this institution and possibly at other institutions.

### **Unit of Analysis**

The unit of analysis is the mentees and mentors in the Georgia Highlands College AAWCC mentoring program. Boundaries of the study are the specific mentoring program at this institution, participants involved with the mentoring program, and a five-month period of study.

### **Research Questions**

Below are the five research questions I sought to answer, with the first being the central question of the study, as it is the one whose answer best informs the efficacy of the program:

1. What do GHC female student mentees experience in a specific female-led two-year college mentor program;
2. What do GHC female mentors experience as they mentor students in a specific female-led two-year college mentor program;
3. What commonalities do GHC female student mentees share in their experiences during their participation in a specific female led college mentor program;

4. What commonalities do GHC female mentors share in their experiences during their participation in a specific female led college mentor program; and
5. How do GHC female student mentees experiences relate to the tenets of mattering and marginality theory?

### **Propositions**

Propositions are helpful in limiting the scope and guiding the direction of the study and the consequential discussion (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Based on an extensive review of the literature on college mentoring programs and my own experience working in college settings, I cited the following propositions for this study:

1. Showing students they are cared for can help students persist in college;
2. When college students feel they have a personal resource and advocate, they are more likely to seek assistance;
3. When college students seek assistance, they are more likely to be successful;
4. Quality mentoring programs result in students having an advocate and them feeling they have someone in the college that cares about their success; and
5. Mentoring programs that result in students feeling they are cared for can aid in student retention and success.

### **Participants**

The participants for this study came from female two-year college students in a mentoring program and mentors of the program, who consist of female faculty and staff involved with the program between 2014-2015. The student participants had all entered the mentor program after completing at least one term at the college. All study participants were female adults over the age of 18 years, which is the age of majority in Georgia pursuant to Ga. Code

§39-1-1 (<http://www.ncsl.org/>). The participants in the study were volunteers solicited via email. Ten-dollar Barnes and Noble gift cards were given to each participant in the study. The personal identity of each participant was protected and their comments attributed to a pseudonym.

### **Setting and Environment**

The setting for this study was Georgia Highlands College campus sites where students and mentors were interviewed. GHC has six distinct campus sites in five counties. Each campus is very distinct. The original campus is mostly composed of the 1970 buildings with few upgrades other than the addition of classroom technology and a re-decoration to the library; the largest campus is the most modern with new buildings and attractive décor. There is a campus site renting space at a metropolitan university, and there are two small campus sites: one in a former government building in a small town and the other in a former strip-mall in a city close to the state capital. The majority of the participants were interviewed on the campus closest to them, while a few were interviewed via Skype and phone.

### **Methodology**

I collected two primary groups of data for this case study. Interviews with student mentees (20) and with faculty and staff mentors (13) are the main data focus. These semi-structured interviews were designed to cover the research questions but also allowed for additional comments from participants. Interview transcripts and notes were supplemented with artifacts collected from the mentoring program. Items, such as the mentoring guide, mentoring program events, emails, mentoring Facebook page, and event flyers, were reviewed for types and level of activities for mentees. Student answers and comments made in the mentee surveys were reviewed for student feedback of the program and used to support and triangulate the data.

The interview questions were developed prior to the interviews and were designed to collect the individual experiences of each participant. The protocol for the mentors and mentees was the same for each interview. Each interview was scheduled for 60 minutes and was audio-taped with the permission of the participants. I also recorded personal notes during the interview, recording anything noteworthy such as extreme emotion or expression (occasionally participants would cry or smile broadly with pride, for example). Following each interview, the recording was personally given to the transcriber and given a coded identification. The transcriber signed a confidentiality agreement and was instructed to destroy her copies of the recordings and transcripts at the close of the research (see Appendix U). These recordings were transcribed verbatim and stored electronically on my personal computer. I then reviewed the transcripts for themes and comparison between and amongst each group, mentees and mentors.

### **Sampling Method - Mentees**

Just as my case was selected purposefully because I have interest in a particular program, my sample of participants to interview were selected purposefully because I wished to learn all I could about a unique case, a new female mentoring program at a two-year college. Also called criterion-based selection, this method of selecting mentors and mentees best serves the purpose of looking for common experiences across the mentoring group, identifying and understanding cases that are information rich and relevant to the research questions (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2001). The type of purposeful sampling I used is maximum variation. Maximum variation sampling involves choosing participants across different criteria. In this case, selecting mentees to interview based on a cross-section of personal identifiers, such as age, ethnicity, marital status, and program of study, aided in identifying important common patterns across students in the mentoring program (Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2009). Part of using maximum variation sampling

is looking for outlier cases to test the main patterns, a practice that strengthens a study's results (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Maximizing differences of the sample members increased the probability of collecting varied data, while also "finding strategic similarities" (Glaser & Strauss, 2012, p. 56). I purposely pulled my sample to study from the mentee list those of greatest variation in age, program of study, time in the mentor program, as well as included variations in ethnicity. I searched for variation in perspectives in order to see through the broadest scope possible and then narrow in on common themes across the sample.

### **Sampling Method – Mentors**

As corresponding data collection, I interviewed 13 mentors in the program. Mentors were sent an email inviting them to participate in the study. I interviewed mentors of mentees participating in the study and mentors with mentees not participating in the study. Both staff and faculty mentors were interviewed from across all campus sites.

### **Mentee Demographics**

Performing purposeful maximum variation sampling of the mentee group in order to achieve a maximum diversity sample, I deliberately tried to enlist heterogeneous participants in the study by examining demographic concentrations of age, ethnicity, marital status, program of study, and time in the mentoring program of the mentees responding to the request to participate in the study. From this list of mentees responding to the invitation to participate in the study I chose mentees to interview based on representative demographics of the larger group, keeping the names of mentees and mentors hidden in order to avoid any potential subconscious bias. Twenty mentees were interviewed. The participants interviewed are representative from each major group, including outliers of mentees at the youngest and oldest age. Table 1 below details the breakdown of program mentees in each demographic area.

Table 1

*Mentee Population Demographics*

Area	Data
Age	Range: 18 to 49 years; Mean: 25 years; Median: 23 years; Mode: 21 years
Ethnicity	Asian: 4; Black: 24; Hispanic: 5; Hispanic or Latino: 2; Not Hispanic or Latino: 4; White: 46
Marital Status	Divorced: 1; Married: 11; Single: 68; Not Reported: 5
Program of Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Associate of Science mentees – 33</li> <li>• Associate of Art mentees – 19</li> <li>• Career Program mentees – 33</li> </ul> <p><i>Art: 2; Biology: 2; Early Childhood Ed.: 6; Business Admin.: 7; Chemistry: 2; Communication: 1; Computer Info. Systems: 1; Computer Science: 1; Criminal Justice: 4; Dental Hygiene: 2; English: 2; General Studies: 7; Health Info. Mgmt.: 1; History: 1; Human Services: 4; Physical Education: 1; Pre-Dental Hygiene: 2; Pre-Nursing: 27; Psychology: 9; Respiratory Therapy: 1; Undeclared: 1</i></p>
Time in Program	Entered Fall 2014: 50 mentees Entered Spring 2015: 36 mentees

*Note.* GHC Banner student records, June 2015.

The demographics of the mentee population of female students closely resemble those of the females in the GHC student body. The average age of GHC students is 24 and the average age of the mentee group mentee is 25 years. As noted in Table 2, the ethnic percentages are similar.

Table 2

*Mentoring Program Demographic Comparisons to GHC Student Body*

Ethnic Descriptor	GHC Population	Mentee Group
White	69.0%	46.0%
Black	17.0%	28.0%
Hispanic/Latino	8.7%	8.2%
American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian/Pacific Islander	5.0%	4.7%
Unknown (listed as Not Hispanic/Latino)	.4%	4.0%

*Note.* GHC Fact Book, 2014 and Banner student records, June 2015.

The sample for this study consisted of 85 students who enrolled in a female mentoring program either in the fall of 2014 or the spring term of 2015 and the 41 employees who volunteered to serve as mentors. Of these students, 59% began in the fall term and 42% entered the program the following spring. These mentees were matched with mentors in their academic area of study or as close to the area as possible. The campus site was also of importance and used for matching, though one student was mentored by a mentor at a different campus. The average age was 25 and the majority of the mentees were single. The largest ethnicities were white (54%) and black (28%). Twenty mentees were interviewed for this study. The demographics of the participants in the study followed closely those of the population. The average age of the mentees who participated was 28 years, 75% were single, 40% were white,

and 40% were black. Thirteen mentors were interviewed for the study, seven of which were faculty and six of which were staff. They represented each of the College campuses, proportionately to the student enrollment at each. There were no significant differences between the demographics of the population and that of the mentee participants interviewed. The majority of the mentee interviews took place in person at the various campus sites while a few interviews were conducted via Skype and phone (12 interviews in person, five interviews via Skype, four interviews via phone). Of the mentor interviews, 11 were conducted in person, two were via Skype, and one was via phone. Detailed demographics from the population and the actual participant group are provided in Appendices H, I, J, and K.

### Data Collection Procedures

For careful data collection, I followed Creswell’s (2013, p. 146) data collection circle of activities shown in the graphic in Figure 9.



Figure 9. Data collection activities (Cresswell, 2013, p. 146)

The participants for this study consist of a group of student mentees in the new mentoring program at Georgia Highlands College and mentors consisting of staff and faculty at the institution. The number of active mentees varies but 50 active mentees is the average. The

approximate number of mentors is thirty. Because mentees attend and mentors work at different campuses in the five county area, as well as online, my data collection site included every campus, using Skype technology to accommodate fully online students and some mentors at far campuses. I conducted 20 interviews with mentees (students) and 13 interviews with mentors (faculty and staff). Telephone and email was also used for participant communication. Artifacts used were electronic the majority of the time, gathered from emails or online surveys. For individual interviews, I used two digital recorders in addition to notes. I conscientiously strove to interview participants with skill and respect by asking one 'open' question at a time, provide probing follow up questions, and being sure to listen with my full attention and time. Observation notes were hand-recorded and a custom form was used to record thoughts during interviews and observations (see Appendices L and M). Collected data was stored on my personal computer and in my physical home file cabinet, with no one else having access to these electronic and paper files. Interview questions are in Appendices N and O. My interview protocols for mentees and mentors are in Appendices S and T. The participant consent form is in Appendix R.

**Recruitment.** Recruitment of participants was via email to selected mentees and their mentors via the mentoring program list. An email explained the purpose of the study, approximate time commitment of two hours, and explanation of anonymity (see Appendix Q). Potential participants were asked to respond to the email if they were interested in learning more. Those that responded were provided with the letter of consent (see Appendix R) to review and sign and were able to choose a date to interview from an electronic scheduler provided. After participation, participants were debriefed and their transcribed interviews confirmed.

It should be noted that no mentor or mentee was compelled to participate in this study. No mentee was my student or student-worker. No mentor was a subordinate or in any way under my authority or influence. At the point of invitation to participate in this study and at each point of contact, participants were instructed that their participation was voluntary and that ending their participation at any point would not reflect negatively upon them in any way.

**Other forms of data collection.** Although interviews with mentees and mentors are the primary method of data collection, I also collected documents related to the mentoring program and observed any interactions related to the mentor program possible in order to better understand and supply context to the mentoring program, evolution of the program, and level of involvement of mentors and mentees. I examined meeting agendas and minutes, newsletters, emails, marketing pieces, and the group Facebook page. Additionally, observations were made of meetings and activities when possible in order to supply additional background on attitudes, interest in, and involvement with the mentoring program. Observations involved watching for looks and expressions of enthusiasm about the program, as well as notations of comments perceived as positive, negative, frustration, or optimism. Specific use of words noted were power words, compliments, comparisons, repetitions, and inconsistencies. The connections mentees made with each other and the collaboration mentors engaged in were noted. Table three below details the methodologies of this study, the frequency of their use, and the timeline of data collection.

Table 3

*Research Methodologies Utilized in Study*

Method	Targeted group	Frequency	Goals of Data Collection	Timeline
Interviews	20 female community college student mentees in mentoring program	Single interviews; Approx. 1 Hr.	To discover experiences of female student mentees	July-Oct., 2015
Interviews	13 mentors (faculty and staff serving in community college mentoring program)	Single interviews; Approx. 1 Hr.	To discover experiences of female mentors	July-Oct., 2015
Observation	Mentor meetings and activities where mentees are invited	At least one meeting or activity per month	To observe and note what mentors say they have experienced and what they relate that their mentees have experienced	July-Oct., 2015
Document Analysis	Emails, meeting minutes, workshops, surveys, newsletters, Facebook page	All available to view or able to obtain	To note what female mentors and mentees report as their experiences in the program as viewed via artifacts.	July-Oct., 2015

**Participants and Artifacts Analyzed**

Female students in a new college mentoring program were the primary data source; female mentors in the program were a major secondary source. Mentees and mentors were interviewed during the summer and fall of 2015 from June to October. I sent an email requesting volunteers to participate in this study to all 85 students who had requested and received a mentor for the fall 2014 or the spring 2015 terms. Of the students who responded to the email, I selected 20 to interview base on maximum variation sampling. My goal was 20 mentee interviews and the data collected was rich, broad, and confirming of emerging themes, so I ceased mentee interviews when the proposed number of mentee interviews was reached. The mentees ranged in age at the time of their interview from 20 to 50 years old; there were single, married, and divorced mentees in the group; they were from white, black, Hispanic, and Asian ethnicities. Of

the 20 mentees in the study, ten of the mentees had mentors participating in the study. I then sent an email to the mentors in the mentoring program database to request mentor volunteers for interviews. My goal was to interview 10 mentors. I interviewed 13 mentors. The mentors were an even distribution of faculty and staff with seven being faculty and six being in staff positions. Of the 13 mentors interviewed, eight mentors had a mentee in the study and two of the mentors had two of their mentees in the study. I would have liked to have interviewed more mentees and mentors, as the interviews were fascinating in what they revealed about the mentoring experiences and it was satisfying to continue to build supporting data. However, with a total of 33 interviews I accumulated a great deal of data to analyze and felt the mentees and mentors were a good representation of the mentoring group. A range of responses and satisfaction levels were described and saturation was achieved, as similar stories and feelings were shared as the interviews continued. Artifacts, such as mentoring program surveys, newsletters, emails, meeting minutes, and testimonials used on a display for the president's inauguration were also reviewed and used as supporting documents.

### **Data Analysis Process**

Data collected was analyzed by means appropriate to the type of data and the purpose of my study. As Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) advocate, I searched for meaning by organizing, coding, and categorizing. I also utilized meaning condensation to summarize and find themes. Because of my knowledge of the program, general demographics of the subjects, and familiarity of the institution under study, intuitive analysis was a natural analysis method. In addition to field notes I made on the scene of any encounter connected to this research, I made analytic memos and diagrams on what I heard or observed each time I returned to the computer to enter data, as suggested by Corbin and Strauss (2008). These memos and diagrams, often on flip chart

paper in order to better see the big picture, not only helped to clarify observations; they also served as a personal diary to chronicle my thoughts on the data, reveal any changes in my assumptions, and help me to see relationships. Some of these notes and diagrams are appropriate to share in my final report, though the majority served the function of aiding my own ability to synthesize and make helpful connections.

My research perspective of realistic-constructivism informed my data analysis process by placing emphasis on how the participants interpret what they experience and in relating that information in the context of the literature surrounding this phenomenon. Theories on mentoring, mattering, motivation, self-efficacy, career decision-making, and student retention help explain and make useful to a broader audience the findings from the study. This is the ‘realistic’ side of my framework, what Paul Boghossian (2006) described as ‘universality.’ The individual variances in experiences and interpretations of experiences relate to the ‘constructivism’ side of my philosophical framework, what Boghossian refers to as ‘mind-independent reality’ or ‘belief-dependent.’ My philosophical framework also makes clear the need to confirm with each participant my final interpretation of the responses they shared with me because it is the participant’s perceptions that matter, not my own. Therefore, I was careful to listen to what was said and how it was said, review artifacts without personal interpretation, and observe without distraction. Acknowledging that each participant has a different perspective, I resisted the inclination to generalize without sufficient cause. My interpretations and feedback from colleagues on my interpretations are of importance, but much greater importance falls on the individual participant’s interpretation of what takes place in the mentoring program. The data analysis decision tree in Figure 10 informs my choices of data analysis methods.

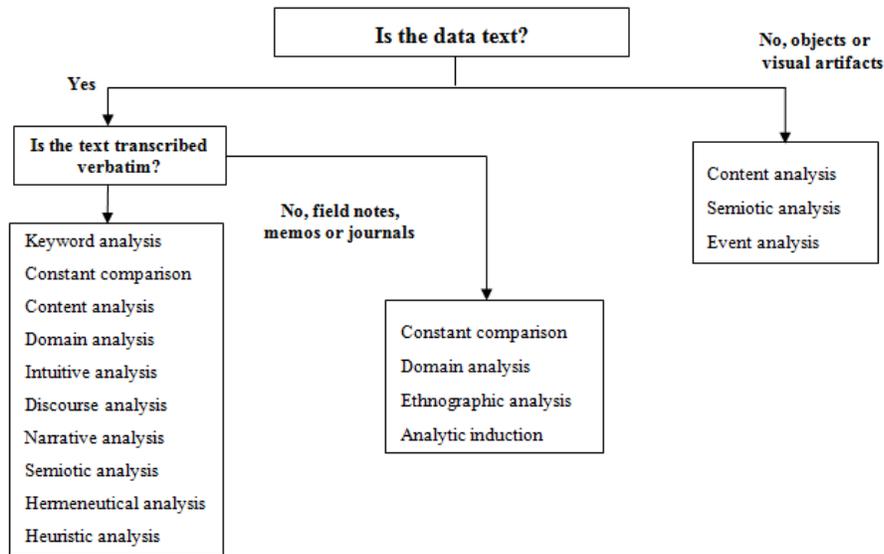


Figure 10. Decision tree for selecting a data analysis approach (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 447)

The tools of data analysis most appropriate for this case study were: Keyword Analysis, mainly looking at the repetition of terms, unusual terms, and context; Constant Comparison, identifying categories, coding, comparing, examining, continuing until saturation, and developing themes; Content Analysis, examining text and visual artifacts, and noting themes and frequency; Semiotic Analysis, studying visuals used and how they relate to the case; Thematic Analysis, spending large amount of time with the data, coding, and defining themes using intuition of researcher (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). I spent a great deal of time emerged in the data, reading and re-reading transcripts and my own notes. I compared what each mentor and mentee said to the other and interviewed until multiple participants said the same thing and new data was not occurring.

**Coding.** To analyze the interviews, I used a coding system, attaching key words and phrases to text segments to ease in identification and later comparison. I maintained a list of the code names and phrases and their meanings along with my thoughts about the codes. During the

interview process, I reviewed transcripts, coding and categorizing as I went in order to find themes, develop categories, and make connections while the interview was fresh in my mind. I wrote codes and notes to the side of the transcripts and used presentation sheet papers to display and connect codes. Afterwards, I verified, as necessary, with the participants that what they meant is what I had down on paper.

**Artifacts.** Artifacts are helpful in qualitative research to show what has been done and what people value, providing additional evidence of the environment and case under study (Major & Savin-Baden, 2010). To analyze the artifacts I gathered, I noted their authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning by commenting where they originated, the author, their relevance to the study, and if they are similar to other artifacts in the study. I made analytic memos of each artifact, as with the interviews, and attached themes to the documents and observations. I later compared the artifacts to what was discovered from interview analyses.

### **Quality Assurance**

Striving for the highest level possible of credibility, trustworthiness, confirmability and data dependability, I used the following case study tactics that apply to single-case study research. Of note for construct validity is my use of multiple data source measures and member checking to allow for triangulation, careful organization and storing of data, and participant review of transcripts. Of note for internal validity is my use of coding, comparing, matching, and explaining of consistency and inconsistency of responses. Of note for external validity is theory reported and applied to this case. Of note for reliability is my development of case study protocol and a case database. Below in Table 4 are Yin's (2014) case study tactics I followed.

Table 4

*Case Study Tactics for Four Design Tests*

Tests	Case Study Tactic	Phase of Research in which Tactic Occurs
Construct Validity	• Used multiple sources of evidence ( <i>artifacts from the mentoring program, such as emails, newsletters, Facebook page, etc.</i> ).	Data collection
	• Established chain of evidence ( <i>kept record of all data</i> )	Data collection
	• Informants review draft case study report	Composition
Internal Validity	• Pattern matching	Data analysis
	• Explanation building	Data analysis
	• Addressed rival explanations	Data analysis
	• Used logic models ( <i>coding, pattern matching, and explanation building was conducted; outliers were examined and discussed</i> )	Data analysis
External Validity	• Used theory in single-case studies ( <i>mattering and marginality theory used as conceptual framework</i> )	Research design
Reliability	• Used case study protocol	Data collection
	• Developed case study database ( <i>artifacts, interviews, and case notes were chronicled in electronic database at each step of data collection</i> )	Data collection

Note. Adapted from Yin (2014), p. 45.

**Bias and Limitations**

Any case study, by virtue of the proximity of researcher to subjects, has the potential for subjectivity, bias, or even preference with data collection and interpretation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Qualitative research and writing is more personal by its nature and involves the need to disclose the researcher’s position and even background, self-disclosing so as to reveal any bias, as well as experience that aids in the understanding and reporting on the subject. “How we write is a reflection of our own interpretation based on the cultural, social, gender, class, and personal politics that we bring to research” (Creswell, 2013, p. 215). Therefore, in addition to working hard to write well and clearly present ideas based on quality research and carefully analyzed notes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), I believe it important in qualitative research for the researcher to explicitly discuss his/her personal interest in the research, as well as educational and professional background that gives the researcher expertise in the area studied. In the interest of full-

disclosure, I share my background, views, and positioning so the results may be viewed with full clarity.

Because this research takes place in my current ‘back yard,’ as I was employed at this college during the time of data collection, I used multiple validation strategies as encouraged by Cresswell (2013), Lincoln and Guba (1985), Merriam (2009), and Stake (2006). My attendance at meetings related to the mentor program and my engagement with mentors from my vantage as an original program organizer provided me with close and long-term study with the participants and process studied. Triangulation was utilized to increase validity via multiple sources of data collection and theories. The participants had the opportunity to confirm the accuracy of their interview transcript. An additional measure includes a self-check by debriefing, which involves asking a colleague to review the findings and offer feedback.

During the entire process I strove to guard against bias, but I acknowledged my own feelings and experiences. In order to monitor potential personal bias as I interviewed and analyzed the interviews, I kept a journal of my thoughts and feelings, as recommended by Corbin and Strauss (2008). I strove to do the difficult task recommended by Glesne (2011) of making the strange familiar and making the familiar strange by questioning what I know and what I encountered. One way to do this was by looking for negative cases and data that disprove evidence. Lastly, I believe I provided ‘trustworthiness’ from the interviewer portion of my research because I am a mature professional with an honest desire to learn how best to help college students, how to make the new mentoring program at this institution worthwhile, and to add to knowledge of how mentoring can best be designed at other institutions.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations must be kept at the forefront from beginning to end of any research project. This study was conducted with the subject's welfare in mind and following the ethical guidelines from Kvale and Brinkmann's book *Interviews* (see Appendix P). Specific actions such as those below were taken to ensure no harm came to participants and that their statements were presented with accuracy:

1. Subjects were asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix R) and told they may opt out of their voluntary participation at any time without negative consequences;
2. Identities of students and mentors interviewed were kept confidential and protected;
3. All participants were able to confirm interview transcript;
4. Direct identifiers were removed as soon as possible;
5. Codes were substituted for identifiers;
6. Code lists and data files were maintained in secure location;
7. Pseudonyms were used for participants interviewed. Where a survey quote is used 'anonymous' is noted, as no identifiers were used with surveys;
8. Computer passwords were used; and
9. I adhered to the guidelines on conducting human research as reviewed in the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative Program's Human Subjects Research Training.

Additionally, the study was approved at the institution of study and by the researcher's institutional review board (see Appendix Z).

Because I follow the interpretivist research model of researcher and participant interaction, I kept in mind that the relationship is asymmetrical and consciously and continually considered and protected the rights of participants. I was mindful of the possibility that participants could become emotional and was sensitive to the need to pause, stop, or delay the interview. I followed guidelines advocated by Glesne (2011) and Kvale and Brinkmann (2009). As Herr and Anderson (2015) pointed out, reality is messy, but it is the researcher's duty to strive to make ethical decisions at every step and stage of the process.

### **Conclusion**

This qualitative case study sought to understand the experiences of mentees and mentors in a community college mentoring program for female students. Interviews are the data collection focus of this case study, though artifacts and observations were also noted. Best practices of research collection and analysis were followed utilizing tools, such as coding and constant comparison, to tease out themes of importance. Every consideration was made to protect subjects, maintain confidentiality, and present their voices with accuracy. The timeline for the study data collection and analysis was five months. Ascribing to the quest for verisimilitude, as described by Major and Savin-Baden (2010), I worked to approach truth by disproving what is not truth by careful reporting of all relevant data.

## CHAPTER IV:

### FINDINGS

*Reach out to your students. Even...if they don't want to come in to see you. You know, us students, we're like, why do they care? It's none of their business what we're going through. Or, they really don't care; they're getting paid for it. In other words, it's like, being a mentor is like giving a gift to the students, that's how I see it. That's why I'm becoming a mentor now. (Mentee Laura)*

Mentoring has strong potential for impacting student success, especially with community college students, who, as a population, have high risk factors for attrition. According to a 2014 Gallup study of over 30,000 graduates, long-term success is related to emotional support received from a mentor in college (Busteed, 2014). Gloria Crisp (2010), who studied the relationship between mentoring and factors that lead to persistence, found that mentoring promotes success among community college students by aiding their social and academic integration, their goal commitment, and their institutional commitment. With mentoring programs rising to the fore as retention solutions and few qualitative studies to draw from, it is important to examine what takes place in college mentoring relationships and why these relationships can be so beneficial to student success.

The purpose of this study was to explore what female mentees and mentors experience in a new mentoring program. A public, community college chapter of the American Association of Women in Community Colleges started this program in response to a request for female mentors. The program is continuing into its second year. This chapter reviews the results from the data gathered from interviews and artifacts and is broken down into eight themes. These themes provide the basis for theory-based and practical application discussion to follow in Chapter V.

## Themes

The experiences and feelings of mentees and mentors ranged from gratitude and happiness, to empowerment, to pride, to satisfaction, to disappointment. The majority of the experiences of both mentees and mentors were positive, though there was a range of satisfaction levels. Some experiences were less than hoped for and even negative. More often than not, a mentee cited their mentor helping them through a life crisis and a mentor said she felt valued and gratified by being a mentor. Regardless of the quality of the mentoring experience, all mentors and mentees said that they learned from it and would do it again. When the mentoring relationships were less than perfect, as when communication was infrequent, both mentors and mentees took responsibility. Interestingly, many mentees said that the experience made them want to mentor, even when their experience was poor. There was the feeling of knowing what the experience could be and should be even when their experience did not live up to expectations and the desire to be for someone else the kind of mentor they wanted and needed.

The eight major themes that emerged from the interviews of mentees and mentors, artifacts, and events were: 1) challenges of female community college students; 2) importance of listening; 3) power of encouragement; 4) the self-efficacy effect; 5) ego-extension; 6) desire of faculty and staff to feel they make a difference; 7) importance of connection to the institution and others; and 8) gratitude and appreciation. The stories of the mentees and mentors in Table 5 below are told through these themes.

Table 5

*Mentee and Mentor Study Participants*

MENTEES (Pseudonym)	RACE	MARITAL STATUS	AGE	MENTOR	MENTORS (Pseudonym)	CAMPUS JOB	MENTEE
Amy	B	S	20		Margaret	Staff	
Farrah	B	M	46	Joanne	Patty	Faculty	Mary
Florence	W	S	24		Hariette	Faculty	Mildred
Gwendolyn	B	S	21		Dorothy	Faculty	Wilma & Holly
Holly	W	M	36	Janie	Janie	Faculty	Rebecca
Janice	B	S	22		Wanda	Staff	
Laura	H	S	24	Louise	Olivia	Staff	
Mary	B	S	31	Patty	Ariel	Staff	
Melody	B	S	24		Louise	Staff	Laura
Mildred	Not H/L	S	24	Harriet	Betty	Faculty	
Quinn	H	S	23		Hazel	Faculty	Samantha & Terri
Rebecca	A	S	26	Wanda	Joanne	Staff	Farrah
Rhonda	W	S	29	Rhonda	Willow	Faculty	Rhonda
Samantha	W	D	50	Hazel			
Sarah	W	S	20				
Terri	W	N Reported	22	Hazel			
Whittney	W	M	28				
Wilma	W	M	24	Janie			
Winnie	B	S	23				
Wynne	B	S	48				

**Challenges of Female Community College Students**

*...you know, when you have nothing and you don't know anyone, it's really difficult; it can feel helpless and very lonely.* (Mentee Mary)

Most students today face the challenges of balancing classes, usually a job, possibly home responsibilities, and often the uncertainty of choice of major and future career.

Community college students tend to have especially challenging circumstances of full-time or at least part-time jobs, need for remedial work, low income, parental responsibilities, and being a

first-generation student (American Association of Community Colleges, 2015). The literature and my personal experience tells the tale of community college students often poorly prepared for college academically, having little home support, and without knowledge of the variety of majors and career options. The female students who took up the offer for a mentor in this program and followed through to connect with a mentor reflected the community college demographics of first-generation students, non-traditional students, unprepared students, and students with minimal home support. I begin with the major issues surrounding the first theme of student challenges. This theme emerged largely from the first interview question of what influenced the student's decision to request a mentor but also arose organically from several other interview questions. Students tended to repeat their individual and general challenges they encounter as students over and over throughout the interviews. Though it does not address any of the research questions, it is crucial to examine this theme and what the students report as their challenges in order to understand the students and how mentoring affects their situation and their academic progress. The five major areas of concern for these students are denoted by the codes of family issues, financial stressors, need for guidance, need for connection, and need for personal confidence.

Mentee need surveys that went to all mentees in the program during fall of 2014 confirmed these student issues. There was a 74% survey completion rate from the 50 mentees in the program at the time. From this initial survey sent to all mentees at the start of the program came the following needs results: over 81% of students cited either great or some need to learn about resources to help with their academic, career planning, and personal success; almost 73% of students cited some or great need for help with balancing work and family life with their academic goals; almost 76% of students cited some or great need for academic and career goal

planning; over 78% of students cited some or great need for help with job acquisition knowledge and skills; and almost 76% of students cited the need for emotional support and confident building (see Appendix V).

### **Cultural Capital**

Cultural capital is a very important, but often overlooked, factor in student success. A lack of cultural capital, which includes the beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge base about education, is common with first-generation and minority student, but it can be a hindrance for any student who does not come from a family that values, understands, and knows how to support their student in their higher education and career goals (Guiffrida, 2006; Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres, & Talbot, 2000, Sandoval-Lucero, Maes, & Klingsmith, 2014; Yosso, 2005). Students without this cultural capital to help them understand and navigate higher education often feel marginalized and uncomfortable in the higher education setting (Rice, Lopez, Richardson, & Stinson, 2013). Their confidence is often affected negatively.

This lack of cultural capital to help them persist through difficult academic and life situations routinely played out for the mentees interview through family issues that made it difficult to persist in college and a lack of belief in their ability to persist. Their families often did not have an understanding of the demands of college, they did not have the resources to deal with specific crisis situations, and they were expected to help care for and financially support their families. In most cases it was not a matter of family members not wanting to help but, rather, the students' families not being familiar with the stresses of college or how to advise on career choices. Parents and other family members who had not attended college were prone to give uninformed advice or have unreasonable expectations regarding college and work schedules. There were also instances of cultural differences creating conflicts in expectations

and stress from trying to please or take care of family while still pursuing academic and career desires.

**Families unaware of college demands.** The mentees interviewed often had a negative situation at home because their parents and other family members did not have a very realistic understanding of what college classes are like and the amount of study required to be successful. Some students commented that their parents did not think college was important and that it would be better if they worked full-time instead of attending college. Laura, for example, commented that her parents "...really didn't go to school in Guatemala." She said she asked for a mentor because she needed someone that would understand her college struggles and not tell her she is "too weak" or "you don't know nothing" when she needed encouragement, understanding, and guidance. Laura, a perfect example of a first-generation student, related that she felt Hispanic parents did not listen well and were more strict. Her concrete example of going to her mother when she was thinking of dropping her difficult microbiology class was telling.

Like yesterday, I told my Mom that I was thinking about dropping my class, in Micro. I do good in the lab part; I'm a hands-on person. Once you give me, like, book stuff, I struggle, because of my reading, because that's my second language, English. And, my Mom was like, no, you don't study enough. I'm like, you don't see me study. Like, I stay up until one and two o'clock in the morning studying. And, I feel like, if I tell them, it's like, I'm giving trouble, and if I tell Ms. Louise, she gives me tips on how to improve, not just be like, oh, you don't do enough of this, you don't do that, you're not good enough. (Mentee Laura)

Very self-aware, Laura stated, "I didn't know anything about college experience or anything like that. So I feel like my first year was hard because of that." Another first-generation student, Terri, shared a similar need to talk with people who understood what college was like and the challenges she faced.

Coming from a family who did not go to college, except for just a few cousins, - my parents didn't go to college, and my sister didn't go to college - so I was completely lost about the whole college scenario. I wasn't sure how things ran, and I knew that I would

need someone to help me push along, push through the hard times. Especially being in the nursing program, you get very stressed, very overwhelmed with the amount of work that you have to do, and I knew that I would need guidance along the way, guidance that my family, my church family, nobody could provide, except a college professor, someone here at the college.

Wilma lamented on the consequences of not having someone to help her navigate college and make wise career decisions.

And I feel like if I had that mentor at the beginning, because I really didn't have anybody; Most of my family has never been to college; My parents didn't go. So, I kind of feel like if I had had a mentor, they could have pushed me, because I started out wanting to do early childhood education, but I don't really know if you remember this, but it was in 2009 and 2010, that a lot of the teachers started losing all their jobs, and it scared me, and I was like – I don't want to go to school for four years, if I'm not going to be able to get a job afterward. And I kind of wish I had someone to talk to about that, because I just automatically switched, and looking back I wish I hadn't.

Mentees even commented on issues with their spouses not understanding the college system or their program of study when it came to things like timelines and planning. Holly stated that after talking with her mentor she was able to explain her program to her husband.

And discussing the slowing down part, and trying to get my timeline refigured with her, helped me translate it over to my husband a little bit better, too. Because he was thinking – hey, this is going to take two years, you know, and she'll be done. But the two years is actually the nursing program. So the prerequisites are taking me about two years, too, so it's basically four years, and I wasn't anticipating that to begin with.

Having someone who understood the difficulty of the nursing school was a big issue for Farrah, an older student who, though already an LPN, had tremendous stress adjusting to the demands of the nursing curriculum. In describing her experience, she talked about intense, deep, over the top stress that made her want to pull her hair out and hate school for the first time in her life. She said, "...I just needed something, somebody, to blow off some steam, so somebody could understand how I was feeling. It makes me feel teary eyed."

The mentors picked up on the effects of their mentees not having the family support or understanding they needed. Louise, mentor to Laura, talked about how Laura, a first-generation

college student did not seem happy before their mentoring relationship began, “But she just wasn’t bubbly, happy, and enjoying being in college. And after I heard about the mentoring program, I said – We have this, would you like to be my mentee?” Margaret, another mentor who choose her mentee from someone she has seen regularly in her student support area, related how her mentee’s father was pushing her to get a full-time job instead of attend college, hypothesizing his mindset may have been due to cultural differences: “...her father, being I guess the culture,...wanted her to go ahead and get a full-time job...She actually wanted ...to go to like, medical school, and of course, he’s like, ‘That’s more education; you just need to get a job.’ This push from her father to work instead of continuing on to a professional degree created stress and career indecision. She also felt pressure to take time off from school for family events. Said Margret, “...a cousin of hers was getting married in India, and it’s a big event. But now with her father kind of pushing her like that, she was looking at having to take like a statistics class, and so...”

When Margaret’s mentee opened up to her about family issues, career plans, and conflicts between the two, Margaret was able to help her figure out the steps she needed to take to accomplish all her goals, greatly lessening her stress in the process.

Mentees feeling conflicted between what they wanted to do and what their families thought they should do was a common tale. A disconnect of thinking college was the same as high school and the reality of college work was prevalent among the parents of mentees. Many mentors were able to serve as surrogate family members who understood better than their mentee’s family how to listen and advise in all things college related. This validation of things that they now knew from experience but their families did not understand, like the fact that it is not a good idea to work full time and attend college full time, calmed the mentees.

**Unfamiliarity with college structure.** For many mentees, they simply did not know who to ask what, and having a mentor took the stress off of them of having to figure it out or the negative consequences of not asking for assistance. Mildred shared,

Oh, yeah, like I never knew who to go to, or where to go to about just random stuff, about questions that you have, so I would just keep on going without asking, and now I just come to her and anything that she can help me find, or she can direct me to the person that I need to talk to, has helped tremendously.

Terri shared that she felt “lost about the whole college scenario” because no one in her immediate family had gone to college. She is trying to get into nursing, which is a very competitive program, and had the wisdom and self-awareness to know that she would need outside help. She stated,

... I knew that I would need someone to help me push along, push through the hard times. Especially being in the nursing program, you get very stressed, very overwhelmed with the amount of work that you have to do, and I knew that I would need guidance along the way, guidance that my family, my church family, nobody could provide, except a college professor, someone here at the college.

The anonymous comments from the fall and spring term mentee surveys reflected the need for and benefit from this extra guidance at the College. Said one mentee,

I think that having a mentor gives us an opportunity to do better because they are checking on us, making sure we are doing good in class, and if we have any problems they talk to us and give us options on how to approach it. (Anonymous Mentee from survey)

The non-traditional students seemed more aware of a need for guidance in figuring out how to do college. Samantha, over twice the age of a traditional student, stated that she had many questions about the nursing field that she wanted to enter. Questions about nursing, the predominate program of study at the college, yet the hardest to accomplish, was a major impetus for many of the mentees to seek help. Wilma also stated that receiving help in understanding the nursing program as her reason for requesting a mentor. She said, “I wanted someone... in the

nursing department, because I was looking into going into nursing. So that's why I decided to do the mentor program, for a little extra guidance."

Holly said, "I am a non-traditional student and parent of two kids, so after coming back, I'm in my mid-30; so, I figured I might need some help." Mildred sounded very much like Holley when she said, "Like, I was so stressed...because it was hard coming back to school after being out for so long, and then at that point having two kids. It was hard to manage my time really." Quinn, on the other hand, summed up the feelings of the traditional-age mentees well when she said,

We're still very young in our education, and we need someone to guide us, just like a parent. Some of our parents can't do that, and that's why we have our advisors, or a mentor, who's been through it, who can do that for us.

Farrah, 46-years-old at the time of her interview, spoke at length about her stress in the nursing program and about how the younger students were not at all prepared to function on their own.

...I don't think what a lot of people understand about our young people is that they are pretty well institutionalized. They come from kindergarten all the way through twelfth grade with somebody telling them what to do every step of the way, with structure, with this class, that class, we go here, we go there, and they don't realize that these kids go through depression after they leave high school, because I watched my own kids. I'm an observer; I like to just look. And I was like, my God, my kids, they don't seem like they're transitioning that well from this with all this freedom, and then you know, you're a number, nobody cares, you don't know the person sitting in the seat next to you, you don't know the person who's teaching. And you know, when they're in school, they've gone through school with these people for years and then everybody is gone, there's no more structure. There's no more nothing, and these people are flailing around out here as freshmen babies, trying to figure it out all on their own.

**Need for college guide.** Many students interviewed expressed a need for guidance for various reasons. They may not have had anyone at home to talk with about college, or they may have had bad experiences at the college, or they had a combination of experiences that may have led them to request specific guidance from a mentor. Some, like Winnie, a 22-year-old working student, expressed the need for direction and someone to help her persist, "...I told her about

needing direction, needing that push, needing accountability, someone holding me accountable, and it was great.” Wynne expressed concern about being a non-traditional student and a parent. Whitney said it would be nice to have someone to talk to since she was a working mom, and Rhonda expressed nervousness about going back to college after a break of several years and wanting someone to talk with who was older than the traditional-age student. Some students said they needed specific guidance on their program of study, but most students said in general terms that they needed ‘guidance,’ ‘direction,’ or a ‘go-to’ person. All of the students expressed a feeling of being lost, not knowing how to find or get the help they needed, and a desire for a knowledgeable guide. Even if they thought they knew what they wanted to do, some mentees said they needed confirmation and confidence.

In terms of needing someone to turn to for help, many times the fact that the mentors in this program were women was a big plus. Florence said, “I liked the idea that it was geared toward women...there’s more similarities, I guess, when you’re sitting there talking with a person of the same sex.” For the majority of the students interviewed, same-sex mentoring was their preference. It made them feel more comfortable. Some students related lack of assistance from other college resources. Samantha stated, “Well I had gone to some of the counselors, and I just didn’t feel like I got direct answers or a real connection, I guess.” Many of the mentees expressed a need for help with deciding their major, discussing career options, choosing classes, navigating the college system, and figuring out where and how to transfer. Sometimes they just needed someone they could call ‘theirs’ whom they felt comfortable asking questions.

Many students cited lack of help in general and lack of or poor help at the college, while some stated that they wanted someone outside of their family to guide them, even if they did have family willing to help. Whitney, a non-traditional, married, pre-nursing student, stated that

she was looking for “someone to talk to regarding classes...” and that she “was just trying to pair up with somebody just to kind of get the feel of the school, and kind of have someone there to help me along the way.” Similarly, Wilma, another non-traditional, married student said she “...really just wanted someone to be kind of like a guide. I needed a little more guidance than what I was getting.” Wilma needed help figuring out what to major in and do for a career. She started out in pre-nursing, but at the time of her interview was in general studies. Sarah, a business major and the youngest of the mentees interviewed, said that she knew that having a mentor would help her to feel more comfortable being in college, would help her figure out what she should do, and would keep her on track.

Many conveyed the need to have someone familiar with college that could give them an objective point of view, as expressed by this student.

...and sometimes I feel like you need someone outside your family to actually help you and guide you. Like, at school there's sometimes when you're not in school, so to just get a different perspective from someone else that's not as close to you, or your family. Being able to talk and open up to someone outside of my family helps me feel comfortable with telling them certain things, you know, to help me, whether it's personal, educational, or anything. (Mentee Janice)

There was an understanding by many of the mentees that their family members were not knowledgeable about college and were not the best sources of advice. Quinn, put it very clearly when she said she asked for a mentor because, “I needed help, and I felt like I needed some sort of guidance that I wasn't getting anywhere when it came to finagling through my schoolwork, and decisions on where I would go with my major.” Rebecca similarly stated, “I feel that in college you need somebody to go to; you need a go-to person to ask, you know; Am I doing this right; should I take this class instead of this class?” Rebecca went on to explain her belief that every student should have a mentor.

...because they're just coming in from high school, and they don't know exactly what they're registering for and stuff like that. When I went into the registration room, I was just given a course catalog, and they said – hey, just choose. So I felt really confused and stuff. So, I think especially the people coming in should definitely have one, and I would recommend it to anybody.

Many students stated that they needed help with understanding their program of study or even figuring out what program to pursue. Samantha was not the only student who expressed dissatisfaction with the assistance she had gotten so far on campus when she said,

Well, I had gone to some of the counselors, and I didn't feel like I got direct answers or a real connection, I guess. There was no connection of what I was really looking for, and I just didn't feel like I was getting the answers I was looking for from the counselors, so that was another reason. I wanted somebody that I could bounce all the things off of, as far as my career was going.

Florence stated that she joined the program to figure out what school to transfer to since her intended major is a little unusual. She advocated for her peers when she stated that, “We have a lot of students that come in that seem to be somewhat lost ...” Amy sought out and received help but believed she needed better and additional help.

It was because I had come into the school, and I hadn't had very good advising. Because I was supposed to finish my program in two years, but right now it has taken me three years because I didn't have very good advising. Because I'm always in the advising office, but for some reason I wasn't told exactly what I needed to do and finish in two years. So this is my third year, and I was basically trying to find somebody that could find me experience because it's all about networking. So if someone knew someone that was in my field, or could just give me advice that could help me, apart from the advisors that advise like, a thousand other people, that would have been better for me. So that's why I went for that.

Some students implied they did not have strong relations with their parents and, thus, could use guidance and even a parental figure. Wilma shared, “Now I really don't speak to my mother that much...” Her mentor seemed to have filled that role at least for a while. Wilma said, “... I can run and ask ... what she thinks I should do. I've just kind of really made a personal connection to her, as far as a friend, and she's just kind of like a motherly figure

anyway.” Sarah said that she hoped that her mentor would say good things about her because, she said, “She almost feels like a, I guess a mother figure...”

The mentors also cited specifics of students needing general help or better help than they had gotten thus far. In several instances, for example, mentees were in the wrong classes or had too many classes, issues that would hamper their success. Patty stated that she met her mentee at the beginning of the term and found that her schedule was wrong. She was able to get it corrected right before drop/add ended: “I took her downstairs and we got her schedule straightened so that she would not be taking these impossible classes when I knew that she struggled at certain subjects.” Another mentor discussed at length of how she helped her mentee get back on track academically after making a series of poor decisions.

Student P went to summer school and took 12 hours, something I never advise because summer is short; summer is fun. It’s hot in Georgia. You know, Aunt Sukie is visiting; people are having barbecues; you’re swimming and you’re fishing. It’s just so unstructured, and a lot of people are maybe on vacation, or they have a lot of unstructured activities going as well. And she made a D in her class. .... I like to think I suggested this, that she re-take that class immediately, if that’s possible, and make a better grade in it. (Mentor Louise)

Another mentor helped her academically struggling mentee in a similar manner.

There’s one particular student who I’m working with in regard to her academic plan, and her GPA was not very good. She was going into her third semester here and I sat down with her. We discussed a plan to improve her GPA so she can be back in good academic standing. So, I’m an advisor as well; so I’m the type of advisor to where I like to make a – I call it Let’s Make a Deal – type of situation. Because she wanted to take a lot of credit hours, like 12 to 15 credit hours, and she worked full time, and she just had a lot on her plate, and basically, being that she had so much on her plate, she had a problem struggling and managing her time well. So we made an agreement - we came to a consensus... to make a long story short, to where if she cut her hours to like take two classes for that particular semester...and if she made A’s or B’s or C or higher grades in those classes, then we can gradually talk about increasing her load for that next semester...and so we came to that consensus and that agreement. She came back to me after the grades posted and she showed me that: ‘I made an A in this class and I made a B in this class. So now, for spring, as we agreed, I can take maybe three or four classes now.’ I said, ‘Okay, we’ll do that because you have shown me that you can handle it. We’ll gradually start to increase the load as full, as much as you can handle.’ (Mentor

Olivia)

Many students stated their need for help at the college, which was confirmed by the mentors interviewed. Either the students did not know where to seek help, they did not seek help before joining the mentor program, or they were not happy with the assistance they received. Mentors often confirmed that the mentees had difficulty receiving the help they needed. Margaret stated that her mentee had difficulty in getting college staff to return her calls, so she counseled her to

...go see them personally if you can't get them on the phone, or get an answer ... and then when people weren't getting back to her, and people weren't following through, just telling her how to be obnoxious or persistent. I know that's horrible, but I mean ...

All mentees commented that they wish they had had a mentor sooner, even those mentees not entirely happy with their experience. They felt they would have been more comfortable at the College knowing they had a specific person to go to with their questions.

### **Dealing with Stress**

Many of the mentees interviewed did not have anyone to turn to when faced with extremely stressful events or long-term life stressors. Some had no family available to them, unhelpful family, or they did not feel comfortable turning to family for support, for various reasons. As Smeets (2014) discussed in her report of a self-kindness study on female students, it is important to help female students learn to be mindful of their stressful situations and to allow a time of understanding and self-care. This is often difficult for community college students who are often long on challenges and short on resources. Compared to their traditional university counterparts, community college students are more likely to have greater stress and college difficulty because they are more likely to be from lower socio-economic and less educated families, non-white, non-traditional age, have to work part- to full-time, and be more likely to

have suffered adversities and have psychiatric disorders (Daniel & Davison, 2014). These challenges exemplified the mentee students in this study. Because coping resources and mechanisms can greatly mediate the adverse affects of stress and help students persist in school is it vital that students are helped in managing their stress (Klainin-Yobas et al., 2014; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Steele, Lauder, Caperchione, & Anastasi, 2005).

Holly is the perfect example of a mentee needing help dealing with stress. She said the word *stress* 16 times during her interview. She talked about her mentor helped her learn to take on a realistic load and better manage her commitments. After working out a plan and learning time management skills from her mentor, like making to-do lists and balancing her goals, Holley reported feeling less overwhelmed and experiencing less stress.

I was just taking on too much at one time. I was really stressed, and she could see that...She really helps me relieve stress. When I meet with her, she gives enough guidance, and answers questions that it's just helpful for my stress level, you know? In addition, the way that I work well is if I have a plan, and a list, I do great and I don't stress as much. But when I have to fly by the seat of my pants, I'm just really stressed out. So she realized that, and so she's just helped me reduce my stress...It made me feel less stressed, but less overwhelmed. I'm trying to think back to phases and what my feelings are and all. Okay, I'm less overwhelmed and less stressed.

Practical advice and training were a huge help to mentees in dealing with both their acute and chronic stressors, but the personal relationship was also a major stress calmer for the mentees interviewed. These relationships bore out prior research that shows community relationships to be helpful in mediating stress for students, especially female college students (Frey, Beesley, & Miller, 2006; Frey, Tobin, & Beesley, 2004; Rick, FitzGerald, Whaley, & Gibbs, 1995; Stokes & Levin, 1986). The use of the word *friend* by many mentees to describe their mentor was telling. As Rebecca shared about her mentor, close, supportive relationships were formed that helped mentees deal with a variety of issues and especially with coping with their stress.

I feel like we've been very close. She's actually my go-to person for everything, not even maybe all the time school related; career related, job related, even not at this school, but moving on to the next school. I'm asking her if I should take this class, and if it will Transfer and if she thinks this would be a good university for me for this program. I don't think that it's specifically targeted towards...it's kind of a friend, or a person, that you can make for a long time. Every time that I've emailed her, she's always had a quick response, and sometimes I'll just email her to ask her, you know, how her day is going, and stuff like that. So, I feel like we're very close on that level.

**Need for help after crisis.** Some of the mentees interviewed shared very difficult life situations they were coming out of and recent personal traumatic events that made it difficult for them to succeed in school. Mentors also related several situations that would be very difficult for anyone to cope with while in college. Most mentees had a lot of stress in their lives, but these students had health issues, devastating relationships, horrific crimes, and personal shame that distracted from their collage goals and kept them from feeling comfortable opening up to others. Mary, a non-traditional student, related how much her mentor and the mentoring experience had helped her in terms of her difficult background and current situation.

...because I came to Georgia last May fleeing a domestic violence situation, and so I kind of was a little rattled and a little lost...I ended up marrying a man who was like my father, and he was abusive, and he had me very isolated...I didn't feel like I even had the intelligence to have a conversation...I would have ever even tried to, you know, make that move if not for her encouraging me and letting me know that there are options available, and it just gave me a sense of relief. It took a lot of stress off my shoulders knowing that I had someone advocating for me.

Terri, Hazel's mentee, related a physical condition that affects her personal life and was a very sensitive and difficult thing to share. She expressed great relief from being able to tell her mentor about it and her mentor demonstrating understanding.

I suffer from infertility, and I have been carrying that burden since high school, and I felt so open and confident that I could share this with [her mentor] that I finally was able to let it go after I talked to her. Struggling with the infertility and me, as a woman, I've always wanted to be a wife and a mother. But I carried that burden for five years, and when I finally talked to her, I just kind of laid my Isaac down. She really helped me just by listening, and not judging, and not saying, well, you shouldn't have done that in high school, and by not bashing me for having infertility issues.

Terri also talked about how she grew up fairly poor, had an embarrassing incident with the local social services agency when she was in elementary school, and intimated that she had struggled with depression.

I grew up in a trailer park. We had, you know, real simple suppers each night. You got cereal for breakfast, and that was it... DFACS was called in when I was 11 or 12, because my sister, she was, at the time, 18, and she thought, oh, I'm going to call DFACS because I don't want to live here anymore. And I thought, you know, getting pulled out of class in sixth grade with DFACS, I didn't know what was going on; I went home crying that day. So I know what it's like to have DFACS come in your house, and evaluate, and sit there on the couch, and watch your mother do every move, when she has had a rough life herself, and trying to do and be the best mother she can. I understand that. Like, I've got polycystic ovarian syndrome, which I don't know if you're familiar with it, but it causes infertility, depression, sadness, suicidal thoughts –

Terri seemed to be cognizant that her turbulent childhood impeded her ability to adapt quickly to college, making the need for a mentor stronger. Mildred raved about her mentor, Harriet, describing how she helped her through a traumatic life event.

When last semester I had a friend who was murdered and I found out when I was in class, and I went to her office, and freaked out for a good minute; And she helped me calm down. She notified my teachers that I wasn't going to be in class. She helped me get the work that I needed, and then throughout the months later since then, she's been constantly, you know, like asking me how I'm doing, how things are going, and you know, she stayed in touch about that because she knew how much it affected me. So that was like a really high point for me because that was a big deal in my life.

The mentors all remarked in some way about difficulties their mentees experienced.

Some mentors, like Patty, who only stated that her mentee opened up to her about her struggles regarding her work situation and her home life, spoke in general terms, while other mentors shared specific life trials. Margaret expressed how hard it was for her to hear about her mentee's "bad work environment" at a fast food restaurant "... the manager she ended up working under a lot ... was mistreating her, and so I felt kind of bad that she was stuck in that situation that she didn't have the opportunity to move on..." She was relieved when her mentee was able to change her work situation. Mentor Olivia shared that her mentee had been raped,

“which caused her not to perform well academically.” Mentors shared that hearing those sorts of harsh life situations and pains from their mentees was hard on them, though they were glad they could be there to help.

**Caregiver responsibilities.** Many of the mentees, whether single or married, had children and some of the mentees had older family members they helped care for, as well. Holly stated that the reason she wanted a mentor was because she thought that as a non-traditional student and parent of two children she would need help. Mary, who had just gotten out of a women’s shelter, told of how special it was that her mentor gave her a Target gift card for Christmas and how told she her to use it on herself because, as her mentor said, “it’s easy as a mom and as a student to... take care of everyone else and forget about yourself.”

The mentors brought up issues with their mentee’s family responsibilities affecting their academics more than did the mentees. The common thread was the mentor trying to get their mentee to learn how to better balance all of their responsibilities. They often advised them to take fewer classes so as to make school manageable, considering their other obligations. Janie remarked on one of her mentees having children, the other one not having children, but noting that they both had family lives to make time for along with their jobs and classes.

Well, one of my mentees, when she first came to me she was trying to take on a workload, a family life, and way too many classes, way too many classes...I kept talking to her and kept encouraging her to back off and slow down just a little bit, you know, so she could do good and not be so stressed out, because she was just really stressing herself out because she was trying to make really good grades, which I encouraged her to do the good grades, but to back off on some of her classes because if she didn’t, that she was not going to succeed in what she was trying to do.

Harriet spoke at length about her mentee, Mildred, who had just married and was having a hard time dealing with her children, his child, the mother of her husband’s child and all that goes with such complicated family interactions along with work and school.

And one of the things that she talked about was that she was having a really hard time trying to balance everything because she worked, she was newly married, she has two young children, and one is like really small, I think he might be maybe two or three, and I think the other one, I think she might have been maybe kindergarten. And then, of course, her husband had a child from a previous relationship, so you have this kind of blended family, and all the struggles of being a new wife, and a full-time student, and working a job, and dealing with all the issues that come with having, you know, to deal with your new husband's former relationship, and the fact that they've got a child and they'll be linked together, and so I said – You really need help with time management stuff...

Hazel talked about a mentee of hers that she tried to get back into school. This student started in the mentoring program, and then dropped out due to personal and financial issues. “She can't afford to pay her bills. She's got a special needs daughter and grandchild, and they're all sort of living at home with her, and she's single, no income.” Dorothy, a psychology professor, talked about how “lost and stressed” one of her mentees was because of the difficulty in caring for her autistic son. Even for the students who did not have children and were not even married, it was not uncommon to hear that they helped take care of a sick grandparent or parent and that they helped contribute to the household expenses, even when of traditional college age and living with parents. Janie, mentor to Wilma and Holly, discussed the difficult time one of her mentees had when her grandfather was very sick. Melody, a mentee, spoke about her need to help at home,

...because my Mom's a single parent and I have two younger siblings that I had to help my Mom with. Throughout my course here at Georgia Highlands...my brother was in a really bad car accident, where he had to have his face reconstructed, because he went through the windshield and came back, and went back through the car.

Many traditional and non-traditional age mentees help with family members whether they have spouses of their own or not. The time and energy they spend taking care of others makes it difficult to focus on their college life. Farrah, though 46 years old and in the very demanding nursing program, had just taken on the exhausting responsibility of caring for her two-year-old

grandson while her daughter served in the Air Force. She said that her husband helped some, but that he also had a lot to deal with.

And this is supposed to be the toughest semester, and I didn't know that was coming. He had just turned two, you know... my husband has PTSD, and he's trying to help. He works full time, but he's trying to help me in between doing everything. Then I'm concerned that I don't want to leave him with the baby, you know. He's not going to kill the baby, but you know, it was just like constant.

### **Financial Stressors**

One of the biggest barriers to a college education, if not the largest, is the ability to get financial aid to pay for school and to secure enough money to live on while in school (HanNa, Heckman, Letkiewicz, & Montalto, 2015; Harris, 2013). This challenge is especially large for first-generation students who are often on the lower economic end and have less financial self-efficacy (Mangan, 2015). Severe financial problems are common for community college students like Melody, a 22-year-old who was working three jobs when she started with her mentor and Mary, a single-parent with no financial resources. The two main financial challenges for these students were paying for school and achieving a work/school/life balance while needing to work while attending school.

**Ability to pay for school.** Many of the mentees shared difficulties paying for school and getting the financial aid that they needed. Most of these students could not attend without aid. Finances often hinder students' academic success because they put needed jobs ahead of study time. Laura is typical when she says, "Money is a big struggle in my family, so I have to work. Sometimes I can't even study." Melody was working three jobs until her mentor convinced her to drop one of them and Rhonda said that the difficulty of dealing with financial aid issues was one of her stressors. Terri said that she works two jobs, plus receiving help from her parents and her boyfriend. Samantha dealt with being unemployed when she started in the mentoring

program, but then got a job and had to put off her nursing program because of work and the time demands of clinical conflicted.

Mary came to the state to escape an abusive partner and was charged out-of-state tuition due to her lack of time as a resident. She credits her mentor for making it possible for her to stay in school by helping her learn the system and available resources.

One of the main things she helped me do was to get in-state tuition, because then I was able to get a bigger kickback for my reimbursement to help me with my living situation, and I would have never even tried to, you know, make that move if not for her encouraging me and letting me know that there are options available...it was difficult for me to get to school because I didn't have transportation at the time. She like, went and did some research, and found like Bartow Transit and different things that I could use to help transport me to school.

Other students, like Hazel, could not continue on in school due to financial issues. Sometimes mentors could find ways to assist their mentees, often by simply putting them in touch with the right person or resource. Other times, the students had to stop-out until they could improve their finances enough to return to school.

**Work/school balance.** Every mentee interviewed had something to say about their difficulty of making everything work – classes, jobs, and family. Figuring out how to strike the balance between jobs and earning needed funds and the number of classes they could successfully complete while working was a challenge many of the mentors worked with their mentees to realize. Samantha spoke of looking for another job because her “workplace is horrible,” but not being able to quit and also attend school, and Rhonda spoke of stress in dealing with financial aid issues and the need to work. Sometimes mentors were able to help a great deal. Other times, the circumstances were too much for the mentees and they had to drop out of school, at least for a while. Though the mentees all chorused the difficulty in working and attending school, what seemed a related need for all of them was help with time management and

learning how to cope with their multiple roles. Farrah felt bad about feeling so much stress. She felt that she should have been able to manage everything better because of her age and expressed that frustration about going to her mentor in a breakdown state.

Because like I said to her – How do you approach somebody and tell them the dog ate your homework? That’s basically how I felt because I had so much going on I couldn’t do anything. And, then on top of it, when you’re like me, a nontraditional student, and you’re like – the dog ate my homework. Really? So, you’re just like, you don’t want to go, but you want to go, and you’re like, here I am at 46-years-old and I’m having a breakdown, and shouldn’t I know how to cope with life, or you know, whatever. But it was just – yeah.

### **Academically Underprepared**

Many mentees shared that they were having a hard time academically. The non-traditional students were usually nervous about starting or returning to college after being out for a few years. Several students, like Laura, 24-years-old, said they dropped out of college when they were younger due to failing grades. A common assistance that the mentors provided revolved around study skills, time management, and other means of academic assistance like advice in seeking resources and how to talk to professors. Some mentees remarked on the difficulty of taking classes, such as via DVD, where a professor was not available to ask questions. Said Holly a 37-year-old mentee, “Plus, not having a teacher face-to-face, that I can ask questions has been a little difficult, too.” Mildred, a 23-year-old, remarked that she might have stayed in school the first time if she had been better at managing her time and had better study skills.

I know I’m better at managing my time, just from the study tips that, you know, she’s given me, and everything. Like when I first started going to school back in 2010, if I would have had it then, I don’t think I would’ve taken a two-year gap between coming back. I think I would have stayed and got it done. I would think she would say that I’ve made an improvement since the program, just because I was so flustered before.

Laura, also 23 when she entered the mentoring program, related a similar story. She had taken a year off school and said she did not know how to study. Her mentor gave her study tips and helped her to see school as more important than she had in her first attempt at college. She shared, “So I try my best, like I have to do my best in passing now. I study every night...” The classes to get into the nursing school, especially anatomy, proved a particular challenge for many of the mentees. Rebecca, a non-traditional student, talked about being discouraged after “getting a D in the first part of biology. Holly spoke of how her mentor helped her to improve.

My first lab practical that I had last semester, in the spring, I made a 35 on my lab practical, and I was devastated by that, and she helped me figure out that, you know, it was going to be okay ... And I changed my study plans and all that. I was just trying to do it all by myself, and so I started working with a study partner. She really encouraged that, she was like – you can’t do these biology classes without a study partner; you’ve got to have a study partner. So I adapted.

Farrah, 46-years-old at the time of her interview, spoke at length about her stress in the nursing school. She said,

It’s just different. It is just the most different thing that I’ve ever experienced, and I’ve been in school since the turn of the century. It seems like I’ve been in school forever, but when I got in there, it was just everything was different. It was the way everything was presented. It was just helter-skelter. It was just everything. And it was just like, I couldn’t catch myself, and you spend so much time just spinning your wheels and trying to figure out what’s going on, and you’re just so stressed out, and then this material is coming to your, and you’re just like – What is going on? And it’s just like non-stop...

Fortunately, many mentees performed better academically after they connected with a mentor. Mentors like Janie and Louise helped their mentees improve their grades by pointing out the need to take fewer classes while they had heavy work and home responsibilities and Harriet and Joanne worked hard to provide study tips to their mentees. Wanda was proud that two of her mentees went from academic probation to good standing.

## Career Assistance

The majority of the students stated that the mentoring match should be based on academic program (mentors being in or having knowledge of the mentees academic area), affirming their need for assistance in understanding their program, choosing their classes, and deciding on a career. Five, or 25%, of the mentees interviewed changed their program of study from the time they entered the mentoring program to the time of their interview and others expressed some uncertainty of whether they were in the best program for them. Gwendolyn put it this way:

Basically, I felt like I needed guidance because I was completely lost as to what I wanted to do in life, you could say. I didn't know how to go about some things that I wanted to do. Well I know what I want to do as a career; I just thought maybe a mentor could kind of help me build more confidence in what I wanted to do in a way.

Many mentees specifically stated that they needed someone to give them advice and help them get into their field. Amy, a 20-year-old student planning to major in pharmacy, said, "So this is my third year, and I was basically trying to find somebody that could find me experience because it's all about networking...if someone knew someone that was in my field, or could just give me advice..." Wilma knew what she wanted to do, but she needed help understanding the nursing program and how to apply to the nursing school.

Right. I understand more, I feel too, because she is in that department. I understood more about the actual nursing program process, whereas, you kind of get the top coat when you're being advised. But she goes underneath the layers, and she's like – well this is what you definitely need to do – which I'm sure you can get that from advisors, but having more time with her, I was able to really realize what needed to be done, and when, deadlines, and things like that.

Holly, a non-traditional pre-nursing student, was happy that she was matched with someone that worked in the nursing school for this same reason. Sharing the same sentiments as Wilma, Holly said, "It's good that I can connect with somebody that knows what they're talking about, because

she's one of the administrators for the nursing program... you know, she was able to answer some pretty in-depth questions that I had." Sarah had a vague idea of what she wanted to do, but did not know what career options she had with her major. Her mentor was able to help her devise a plan.

I think the biggest thing would be that she, I guess kind of helped me figure out what I want to do, because I told her I wanted to kind of do something with economics, so she got me on the track of, I guess classes. She sat down with me and told me – This is what classes you need to take...then she also offered a lot of different schools to me...we talked about all the different schools I could go to, and that helped me big time, because I had no idea where I wanted to go.

Rebecca talked about the great amount of effort her mentor put in to help her make her college transfer and major choices. She said that

... she actually made me decide on what school I wanted to go to next. So that, you know, was a big help. I was deciding on [school 1] or [school 2], and she told me to look into both of them, to maybe go and talk to the advisors over there, to go see what my options were as far as degrees and careers, and she gave me her personal opinion... she gave me the pros and cons of each school. I asked her about [school 1], and there was actually this one time where I was interested in doing the program that we have at [her campus]... and she gave me information about that first of all. I decided not to go to [school 1]. I decided to go to [school 2]. But she was a big influence in that factor. She talked to me about the majors, and about looking up the reputation of each school, and looking at the career programs, and looking at the career department to see who could help you the most, and about reading reviews, and stuff like that. So she was a big deciding factor in what I was going to do after [GHC], also, not just during.

Mentors seemed to feel career guidance was an important area where they could and should assist their mentees. Betty believed her career guidance might have prevented her mentee from dropping out of college.

...she was at the point where she was possibly wanting to pursue a different career, and talking to me allowed her to say, you know, that she was possibly even thinking about just dropping out of school because it was too much. But then, just having someone to say – I've been there; I've done that. It's helped her to see that it's important.

Margaret had known her mentee from her visits to the tutorial center but said that after she started to mentor her that she opened up about her career questions. Janie works as an

administrative assistant in the nursing school and had two mentees who were in the nursing program. She talked of one of her mentees who decided to switch to business, pointing out that she was well equipped to help her with her career questions since that was her field. Patty talked about students she saw that were close to graduation and in the wrong classes for their program; She explained why she thought there was a serious need for more and better advising and career assistance. She said,

I really do think we need to hit those groups that we're not serving well, or that – We know who drops out, and we know what groups drop out at higher rates, who don't finish, who withdraw in the middle of the semester and never come back – I think that's who we need to hit. I think we need to look at them and say – Hey, we know it's your first time back in 20 years, or hey, we know it's your first time back in five years. Let's give you somebody who can help you.

Florence, a 25-year-old, was a perfect example of how helpful it was to have mentors who could help with student career plans. She was in the two-year history program of study and trying to figure out what she should transfer to for a public history major. She was not sure of the program she needed or what colleges had the program she needed. Her mentor was a librarian and able to be of great help in guiding her and putting her in touch with a professor in public history at a nearby four-year university who could assist her with the next leg of her academic journey. Florence said,

No, she was great. My main concern was trying to figure out a school to transfer to... she was a great help recommending colleges, and giving me a personal account of what her college experience was, and she had similar background. I'm going to work toward the archives, and possibly historic preservation...she was able to get me in contact with the – I'm not sure what her actual title is, but the director, or the head, of the public history department at [possible college], and I was able to get an interview with her. I now know exactly what I'm looking for as far as schools, where she helped me the most, because before I was kind of poking around in the dark, and I didn't know exactly what I was supposed to be looking for. But then she explained it to me, how schools actually work in the public history department.

When asked how she thought a college mentor program should be set up, Florence said, “Of course, each mentor and each student would have similar backgrounds, or similar areas of study,” confirming the mentees’ desire to have someone knowledgeable who could provide them with specific career advice and guidance.

### **Need for College Connection**

Mentees and mentors all talked about the importance of feeling as if they were a part of the institution and in having strong connections with others at the college (staff, faculty, or students) for their personal happiness and success. It was also common for mentees to share that they needed someone outside of their family to talk with; specifically, a friend relationship was a need either explicitly or implicitly stated by several mentees. As Janice said, “Being able to talk and open up to someone outside of my family helps me feel comfortable with telling them certain things, you know, to help me, whether it’s personal, educational, or anything.” An extreme situation, Mary, who had just left a battered women’s shelter, described the difficulty of not having had safe connections. Mary stated that

It used to be a difficult task for me to even go to the grocery store. Like, to be around people; I mean, I think it was a lot of my childhood, and then I ended up marrying a man who was like my father, and he was abusive, and he had me very isolated. So when you don’t have interactions with people for years, you know, you kind of lose that ability and you lose the confidence. I didn’t feel like I even had the intelligence to have a conversation, so it’s been a process.

Rhonda, who started at the college when she was 23, then left and came back when she was 28-years-old, shared that she needed someone to talk with that could understand her more than the traditional-age students in her classes.

... and coming back ... it was just a whole different world, and I just felt like some guidance would be nice, you know, and also having someone a little bit older to talk to...I was getting married, and it would be nice to have someone who I might have things in common ...

The mentees who reported very positive mentoring experiences repeatedly used words like ‘close,’ ‘open,’ ‘honest,’ ‘trust,’ and ‘comfortable’ when describing their relationship with their mentor and what they needed. Terri shared that she was not prepared for college, even at 21 years of age. She had personal issues that made her hold back from forming relationships and she did not feel prepared academically, making her uncomfortable being in college. However, having a mentor at the college made her more at ease and gave her a safe place to unload her fears. She said,

It has made me more comfortable, more relaxed, getting that extra vote of confidence that I think every college student needs...The confidant that – you can’t necessarily tell your boyfriend, or your girlfriend, or your mom, dad, anybody in your circle, we’ll call it. Because there is that – Well one, there’s legal, you know, legal stature set in place for the mentor/mentee program, and to be a confidant –Yeah, confidential, that’s what I was looking for, but I couldn’t get it out...Because there’s been times that I’ve told [Hazel] things that I couldn’t tell anybody else, and as for me, that’s been mountain moving, monumental, paramount in my walk of life, and especially here at [Georgia Highlands College] college.

Even Whitney, who did not rate her mentoring experience very high, said,

Just having that tie to someone in the administration department, it kind of made me more confident in class, and I can’t really explain that connection, but it did make me feel more confident. I was actually excited about going to school, because I knew if I had any issues, I could reach out to someone, just because, when I first started at Georgia Highlands in 2010, you know, been out of high school for so long, other students were so much younger than I was, so I couldn’t really relate to anybody, and I kind of, you know, was in a shell, because I didn’t want to speak to anybody, because I knew we wouldn’t have anything, you know, relevant to each other... it’s hard to explain, but I think just having that person there if I needed them, because I’m almost 30, so a lot of the kids that, when I first started, they were fresh out of high school...But having someone at the school, to talk to in case I need anything, or help with the class, made me more confident in class.

The need for a connection the students could call their own seemed an instant boost to their sense of security and confidence, regardless the quality of their mentor. Though it may seem counter-intuitive, mentees in this study bore out the work of student development researchers who tell us that adult learners often feel “isolated and different,” making connections

and involvement in the institution even more important for them than for traditional-age students (Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989). While all of the mentees said connection was important, the older students expressed an even stronger need for connection to those with whom they had life experiences in common.

### **Need for Confidence**

It was clear from each interview that all of the students felt uncertain about at least one aspect, but often many aspects, of college, as well as in facing their future. Gwendolyn was direct with her reason for requesting a mentor saying, “I wanted more confidence to do what I wanted.” Other students intimated that their confidence was not strong due to lack of family support and others shared that they doubted their ability to handle college along with work and parenting duties. Wynn stated, “I don’t know if I can complete this all, because it was so heavy duty. I’m a single mom also, of five kids.” She related how her mentor boosted her confidence:

...this is what she said to me, that God would not put on me more than I can handle. And I had to put that into perspective. I was like, okay, yeah. And, I had to put that into perspective...And, I think the encouragement she gave me...You know, she really, in a loving way, was like, okay, if you can handle being a single mom fine, you can certainly handle this. It kind of just resonated with me, and I did it, so you know, it was a high point.

Some mentees described why they needed confidence, usually an insecurity carried over from childhood or a relationship that beat them down. Mary was timid around people due to her multiple experiences with people who put her down, including staff at a shelter whom she felt judged her unfairly. Sometimes weak confidence came from a weak academic history or simply not having a college role model to show them that they could succeed academically. Terri stated that she did not have confidence for college work because she was not made to be an independent learner in high school:

... high school did not prepare me for college, at all. We were babied. We had handouts for everything. We had diagrams and color pages...; completely different than through this mentor/mentee program. I've been able to completely transition into college.

Helping their mentees understand that they could be successful, either by sharing how others had overcome the same challenges or by building their confidence by helping them achieve small victories, made a huge difference in how the mentees viewed college. Many students, like Laura who talked about being very shy, needed an advocate and confidant to help them come out of their shells and try new things. Speaking of her mentor, Louise, Laura said, "She has helped me with reaching out to people when I need help." Amy said the same thing about her mentor when she described their interaction and how it helped her, "I'm not used to talking to people...she really helped me open up... it was like talking to a friend, not like a psychiatrist, or just talking to someone that just wanted to know what was going on with you." Confidence grew in mentees because they had an open door to someone who could help. Said Sarah, one of the youngest mentees, of having a mentor, "I feel more open, I guess to, I guess to different decisions, because...she told me that I could always go to her if I felt like I needed anything, like if anything was wrong or anything..."

### **Importance of Listening**

A common theme throughout each interview, especially when asking what advice they would give to a new mentor or mentee was that of listening. The mentees named good listening skills as the most important mentor characteristic. They also talked about the need to make the mentee comfortable enough to talk with their mentors about their lives. Both mentors and mentees said it was important for both sides to be open-minded and listen to each other for the relationship to be most beneficial. As Florence put so well, listening is essential for understanding what the mentee needs. She said,

In my personal experience, sometimes if people don't actively listen to what a person is describing, then it doesn't quite click into their brains, and they can't match up exactly what they need to tell the student, or what they might suggest to the student.

When asked what they would tell a new mentor, the mentors interviewed resounded with the instruction to listen to mentees and gave advice on how to do so. Providing a safe place where mentees could open up and be comfortable sharing, being patient, and asking questions were common suggestions. Joanne, who mentored Farrah and other students, said it was important to share themselves and listen with an open mind. She said,

Be yourself. Share with them. Listen. To listen with an open mind, and listen to what they're really trying to tell you... that's because you have to be a good listener, and you have to ask, you know, questions, and it's all about communication and talking and being real. Don't be phony and don't put airs up, you know, just come down to earth because you know, we were a new student at one time and very overwhelmed and wondering – how can we juggle school with life and kids and husbands and work – and you know, it was so overwhelming, and – how did you do it, you know – share with me, you know – and just to be open, to have that thought in the back of your mind, you know, they're probably having all this going on, and just be able to be a shining light to them in even one little place of their life, you know, saying – Hey, you can do it – and help to encourage them. Be an encourager to them.

Repeatedly, the mentees stated that it was easier for them to open up and talk with ease after their mentors had been open in sharing their lives. Knocking down some of the role barriers made it easier for mentees to feel secure and relax in talking about their needs. This awareness of college roles impeding the formation of a helpful mentoring relationship was alluded to by Rhonda when she advised fellow mentees. She said,

...don't let the fact that they're a professor create this boundary...you have to just be who you are...talk to them like they're an old friend, because we're just people, you know, and they just have some knowledge that you don't have, and you have knowledge that they don't have, and share it with each other.

Sticking too much to work roles seemed to hinder what the mentoring relationship should be.

Quinn, though not unhappy with her mentor, never got much more than library help from her mentor who worked in the library. She would have liked a deeper relationship with more sharing

and listening. She advised new mentors to start out by asking about their mentees to get to know them. Quinn suggested what mentors should try to find out about their mentee.

I'd probably have an office like this, and I'd have a mentor, like you, and they would start asking me questions like – Why am I here in this program in the first place? What am I trying to get out of it, and how can they help me? And then I would explain that. And I guess we'd make a plan of how to go about that. You know, if I'm curious about...where I fit it; where I'm going to go with my degree. Maybe they can help me figure that out...my interest, or if I have no idea, help me find what my interest could be.

As Mildred put it,

Just try to figure out what their needs are first. The same way you would with being a teacher, you try to figure out your students' needs before you try to teach them something. Otherwise, they're not going to learn it. So you figure out their needs before you start mentoring.

The mentees needed help in opening up, and then they needed someone to listen to what they had to say. As Amy shared, both sides need to

Just listen, because you might just be listening for exactly what you want to hear, and miss out on the little things that could actually add to another question that you did not ask. So just listen and like, be observant about everything, because everything is a learning experience. You don't want to miss it because you were distracted.

### **Mentee as a Priority**

Taking the time to listen to mentees showed them that they were a priority, that their mentor was sincere in their desire to meet their needs. Amy, a young pre-pharmacy student, spoke of how people in general tend to be rushed and that mentors “should just try to be more patient, and to try to give advice from different perspectives, instead of just looking at it from one perspective...to make sure that a person actually takes something out of your session together.” Amy was able to talk with her mentor like a friend because her mentor provided a “warm” and “open” environment for her to interact with her.

A negative case was with Melody who felt slighted when her mentor did not give her full attention. She felt her mentor was not sincere in her claim that she wanted to help. Melody was

still positive about mentoring and seemed to feel bad about saying she would like to take away her mentor's phone and computer so she would not be distracted during their meeting time, "That's so mean to say, but I really would." She went on to say with stoic practicality, "She's not a bad person, don't get me wrong. I just, I think I just got the short stick." Melody wisely sums up the importance of listening to and making time for one's mentee by stating

Get to know your mentee because that person may not have someone that actually will say, Wow, this person is really interested in trying to get to know me., or is really trying to. You know, show that you care... There are a lot of mentors out there that think if they send an email or shoot a text just to say, Hey, how are you? That that's fine. It doesn't work like that. Like, really get to know your mentee.

Joanne, a mentor who made her mentees feel special even though they met few times, pointed out the importance of focusing on one's mentee when she recounted the first time she met with her mentee who happened to be in a crisis state at the time. She said,

I had a nice solid time to talk to her, and there was no interruptions of someone needing help or my boss looking for me or anything. It was just, to me, I call it a God connection because it was just her and I being able to talk.

### **Safety and Security**

Giving mentees attention, giving them a place to go, and listening to what they needed to share made them feel more secure, safer than they had before at the college. This psychological comfort was crucial to mentee satisfaction and success. Without the feeling they could share in confidence and without judgment, mentees would not have been able to open up and develop the mentoring relationships that helped them persist. There was a clear demarcation of satisfied and less than satisfied mentees on whether or not the mentees felt safe in sharing themselves with their mentors. Physical proximity was not nearly as important as the feelings of trust and safety in the relationship. For example, Rebecca, who only 'met' with her mentor, Wanda, via email felt that she had been listened to, that she was safe in sharing anything, and she was very

satisfied with the relationship and help it provided her. On the other end of the spectrum, Melody saw her mentor many times in person, but she felt her mentor put her down and, thus, felt unsafe in sharing herself and her dreams with her mentor. How the mentors started the relationship with their mentees and the way they interacted with them also had a huge effect on how safe mentees felt talking about their lives. It helped the mentees to feel safe talking about personal issues when the mentors took the time to get to know them first. Sarah said she felt important to her mentor and more comfortable opening up because her mentor let her just talk about herself for a while before even asking about her program or classes.

It was really good. She just talked to me about what I wanted to do as my major, and she asked me what my interest were, just trying to get to know me. We had a whole conversation about getting to know you first off, and then we started talking about classes, and then it was really good I feel like because it helped me, I guess, get more comfortable with her, that she was willing to, I guess, open me up to different questions that she was asking me, and also that it helped me to just get more comfortable with all my classes and stuff... because, like our first session...she wanted to just meet me, she just wanted to like get to know me, and she was like, "Can we do another session and then we'll talk about your schooling?" She was like, "Because I want to kind of know a little bit about you and kind of what your mindset is about school."...so I was like, well that will help me a little bit, and it kind of, I guess, took the edge off of talking to somebody that I didn't know.

Farrah brought up the same thing some of the other mentees said about feeling nervous about sharing feelings with someone at the college "because they have your life in their hands, and human beings are human beings." There was a fear that letting their guard down could cause them to be treated differently and students did not want to do anything that may jeopardize their grades. It was also common for the mentees to have difficulty trusting due to negative past relationships and private situations they feared sharing. For example, Mary had difficulty trusting after enduring an abusive marriage and being treated badly at a woman's shelter, and Terri wanted someone she could confide in about very personal issues. To make mentees feel more comfortable in sharing, Farrah offered advice about being aware of one's body language.

She said a new mentor should

Listen and observe and make sure that they have an open posture. Because, you know, if you're closed off; it depends on your approach, your body language. That person may meet you one time and decide they don't ever want to come back. So you have to be – really, when you have that first meeting – make sure that you're open... You just really do have to look and you have to listen because not everybody wants advice and sometimes somebody just wants to talk, and you just have to look at that person and see if you can glean something of what they need and try and be there for them, and it might just be silence, and it might be, you know, "You can do it." But you know, just be open and look at the two-way communication, and the body language, and everything.

This astute advice reflects Farrah's more mature age and life experience as one of the oldest mentees in the program at 46-years-old and married at the time of her interview. The advice to listen, share, be open, and be patient with time paid off in mentees' feelings of safety with their mentors. Janice said this about her relationship with her mentor: "It's closer, where I've become more open with her, and be honest with her about some stuff... I feel like we have a trusting bond, that I can go to her and talk to her..." Samantha expressed her increased feeling of security, "I was just happy to have somebody that was looking out for me."

From the mentor side, Willow recommended establishing an email relationship before meeting to take away some of the initial tension of meeting someone new. After that, she said it was important to be available as an impartial person to listen and to keep an open door policy for mentees to come by any time to just sit, chill, and chat as they needed. She said her mentee seemed to feel comforted just knowing that this safe zone existed for her on campus. Janie, mentor to Wilma and Holly, said it was important to meet face-to-face with mentees to "see their expressions" because of what can be read from body language. She advised, "you need to be able to know when it's time for you to give your advice that has nothing to do with helping them with their classes and what they need to take next." Janie went on to say that mentees also need to be aware of when "they just need to listen and let their mentor talk..." Ariel cautioned

mentees to be patient with the relationship. She said that they may not feel it is “the perfect situation at first,” but that mentees should be patient...open...give it a fair shot.”

The strongest mentoring relationships seemed to take place when the mentors shared a great deal of their life stories with the mentees. Joanne, who had once been in the nursing school, was able to share her experiences with Farrah, her mentee in the nursing school. Harriet, who had been through a difficult marriage, shared her experiences with her mentee who had challenges with a new blended family. Sharing common trials and even allowing themselves to be vulnerable made it easier for mentees to see mentors as friends they could open up and speak with freely. Many mentees also said that they felt better, safer, knowing there was someone at the college they could turn to for help or just to talk. Sarah shared how she went from not knowing who to go to for help to having a mentor who made her feel more secure.

She said that she would always be there to help me, and I just feel like...my attitude changed because I got more, I guess, excited about school...I feel like you always have somebody to talk to that knows more and can, I guess, do more for you.

### **Mentor Insights**

From making their mentees a priority and helping them to feel safe enough to share their lives with their mentors, comes awareness and understanding of mentee needs. This awareness and understanding was powerful for some of the mentors, powerful enough to elicit a change in how they interacted with students. Because of the defined roles of student and faculty or student and staff and the busyness of everyone’s work day, there is seldom the time to get to know students on a personal level beyond their program of study and grades. Certainly, the mentees learned from their mentors and became more aware that they were cared about as individuals, as well as students at the College. As mentee Farrah put it, the program made mentees aware that people did care about them and their success, “...when you’re seeing somebody reach out to you,

it's like – Okay, somebody cares, somebody is reaching out to me.”

However, major revelations came from the mentors. Mentors spoke of how their eyes were opened after getting to know their mentees. Patty, whose mentee Mary had come from an abusive relationship, spoke extensively of how being a mentor gave her an awareness of the challenges her students face that she did not have before serving as a mentor. She said she was now a more understanding professor because of this awareness. She was now willing to work with students in ways she would not have before. Patty explained,

My first semester here as an instructor, I was really – This is how it is. This is not how it's going to bend. And now, I'm on them, but I give them, you know, realistic expectations, but I expect good things from them because I give them good things... Not to judge them, you know? And that was really – That's been a journey for me. I will tell you that now... Because we can be really, really hard with these students, but we have students that are very atypical of what you'd see at a four-year school, and we need to bend.

Oh, oh my gosh! It opened my eyes up to a whole different person, subset of the population's life, because it was a person that normally I don't think I would be in contact with- not in a bad way. She just would never have been in my sphere of influence. It brought somebody in who I would have never known, and it made me more mindful of what's going on in other's lives.

Hazel also said that she gained a greater understanding of student challenges.

It's really helped me to recognize some of the challenges that our students face, that I as a traditional student myself, never had to face, and really didn't have quite as an appreciation for it as I now do. So I've learned a lot.

Hazel's mentoring experiences also put her own life experiences in better perspective. Her greater self-awareness was startling. She said,

...I had some challenges growing up, maturing into a young woman, and in many cases I often felt like some of my own personal experiences were isolated, but in just having two mentees, I realize that we all go through struggles, and mine necessarily aren't as bad as I think they were, and I can use my own personal experiences and how I've sort of grown and sort of developed through hardships, to help explain, or guide students who are struggling through their own personal conflicts, and I can always tell them that I, no one, would ever want to go through something bad, but I can honestly tell students that as a result of my own challenges, I am a better, stronger person for it, and maybe help change

their attitude towards those sort of perceptions. So I've learned how to – I think – communicate my own sort of experiences in a way that can put a positive spin or twist and help guide and mentor someone else who's facing their own challenges. My perception of my own experiences has changed after having talked to the first mentee, and some of the things that she went through – homelessness and abuse and things of that nature... I look at my own experiences in a different light, you know, maybe they weren't as bad as I perceived them to be, and someone has always got it worse. No matter how bad my own plight seems to be, somebody else is in a worse case than I am. And so, you know, again, it makes me also look back and sort of, not appreciate, but appreciate what opportunities those challenges gave to me.

Dorothy, a psychology professor and mentor, said the experience made her aware that college students were missing friends and some felt lonely and isolated. She said, "I think it's very hard as an adult. Everybody is so busy. It's hard to trust people and it's hard to make the time." Louise said that the experience made her realize that it helped mentees to have someone of their own to confide in, that was not shared with other family or group members, especially when they were not in a romantic relationship. "It was like I was hers, so she didn't have to worry about sharing me with anyone else was what I think." This getting to know students on a personal level made some mentors aware of student demographics that could use special attention. Patty shared that her mentoring had "been so positive," then spoke of how she was now aware of how they should be helping non-traditional students. She said,

I really do think we need to hit those groups that we're not serving well, or that – We know who drops out, and we know what groups drop out at higher rates, who don't finish, who withdraw in the middle of the semester and never come back – I think that's who we need to hit. I think we need to look at them and say, 'Hey, we know it's your first time back in 20 years,' or 'hey, we know it's your first time back in five years.' Let's give you somebody who can help you.

Clearly, the mentors who received the most from their experiences were the ones who took the time to listen and develop an awareness that helped them better understand their mentees. These mentors were more sensitive to the needs and challenges of all of their students as a result of working with their mentees.

## **Power of Encouragement**

The word encouragement was used more than any other by mentors and mentees. The courage to persist came from the energy of mentors encouraging their mentees that they could do it, they could do college, they could overcome their challenges, they could be successful. Patty said that she became a mentor so that she could give women the courage she felt they needed, the courage that she needed to excel.

I feel strongly that if we don't empower women in this setting, especially in our area, because we're a rural area and a lot of women have never had any kind of backing that you can be successful; you can get an education; you can do whatever you want. And I feel, as an educated woman, who struggled throughout her life, to do what I've done, I need to give somebody else that courage, and I need to be the voice for that person.

The encouragement that mentees received was not tainted with bias that family members often have. It was motivating and supportive. Terri said she was "more prepared for life" after receiving "guidance that a mother could not give." She referred to the mentors' ability to be close enough to care but far enough away to push, "The uplifting, cheerful encouragement...the extra push, the shove – like oh, you're on a cliff, let's just fall off, and you're going to gain confidence, and sure enough – that's kind of what happened." Many mentees said they were shy, but did not seem shy during their interviews. Their demeanor during the interviews seemed to be evidence of increased confidence they derived from their mentor's encouragement. They admitted they had changed in the short time they had had a mentor listening, encouraging, and pushing them to do more. Amy said, "I guess I'm more outgoing. I'm more outgoing now." Laura said "I feel like I'm more confident now." After responding by agreeing with her that she did seem confident, Laura said, "I am. I used to be like a shy little person. You can ask her [her mentor], I would go in there and sit by myself for like, three to four hours." Wilma talked about her grandparents being sick and how her mentor told her life would come up and get in the way:

But she always told me to keep going for it. So my feelings were really good. It made me a lot more comfortable being able to be with someone who's already experienced so much in that department, and was able to push me, and tell me to keep going no matter what life brought.

## **Courage**

Rhonda's story gives a beautiful example of what encouragement can do for students.

Rhonda came back to college a few years after her first attempt. She was shy and having a hard time feeling comfortable being around younger and less serious students. When her mentor suggested to Rhonda, an art major, that she get involved with the school paper and literary magazine, she blossomed.

Well, she suggested that I join the [school paper] as a cartoonist and the [school literary magazine]... I guess I knew about them, but I never really thought that... I would be able to work for the newspaper, for one because I'm not a journalism major, and I didn't realize that you could just, as an art major, do cartoons, and that's been really fun. Both of those are really good experiences... With the experience of the extracurricular activities, I feel like my attitude is a lot more positive here on campus, because as a non-traditional student, it's easy to get what I call the 'grumbles,' when you're kind of like you know, all these you know, young 'uns, you know, we don't understand each other, and you know, they're not taking this seriously. But when you're being a part of those extracurricular activities, I got to be around more students that were taking it seriously, and did want to do something with themselves, and they weren't just here because you know, they felt like they had to be here after high school. It's really cool.

Rhonda said the experiences her mentor encouraged her to involve herself in made her more open minded about interacting with younger students and less hesitant to take part in activities because of her age. She is no longer intimidated by the age gap and her art work is up for a national award.

Mentees were embolden after their mentor shared their college trials. It seemed to help greatly to hear their mentors had persisted through difficult times while in school. They felt less alone and more hopeful of their ability to push through and manage everything until they earned a degree. Betty talked about one of her mentees who was uncertain she could attend college

while managing a job and a family. After Betty shared she had been in her shoes, juggling work, family, and school, she said her mentee, "...was about in tears and said, 'Thank you so much; I know that I can do this now'...it was a big eye-opener to her that, you know, knowing that someone had been there, had done it..." Harriet said the same thing about sharing with her mentee that she went through graduate school while working and in a bad marriage and that her own mother had gone to college after starting a family.

I was like – My mom started in college when I was in fourth grade, and here she's got three kids, you know, she's got to juggle that and juggle the fact that she's going to school full time, and juggle family life and my dad, and everything else. And so I said – I know it's hard.

This identification with mentees by mentors sharing their own college and family stories helped the mentees realize that they could overcome challenges and succeed in college. The mentees felt better knowing their mentors had also struggled, but empowered knowing that, even though it was hard for others to manage family, work, and school, it could be done; it helped them to see there was a light at the end of the tunnel.

Several mentees explained what it meant to them for their mentors to share their stories. They said their mentors gave them courage that they could handle college by pointing out all that they were already managing and all they had already accomplished. Many of these students had children and most of them worked. Wynne, 48-years-old with five children, said that her mentor told her, "...if you can handle being a single mom fine, you can certainly handle this."

Newfound strength can be heard in her own words.

What my feelings was that it was one of joy, and anticipation, and expectation, because I knew from talking to her before the type of woman that she was, and just glad to be in...I want to say capable hands, loving hands, someone who just was going to encourage me...I guess one thing that's different about me now that I have a mentor is that I just know that I have someone who's...encouraging me, and having that makes me want to go, it gives me motivation. I mean, you do have your internal motivation, I mean, that what's there, but in having her, it gives me strength, to continue to go after my passion.

Even Whitney, who did not build a close relationship with her mentor, said, “Having a mentor has given me confidence with participation in class and has helped me open up more with my fellow classmates.” She was emboldened to reveal herself and her needs just by knowing she had a mentor.

### **Persistence**

Pushing, cheering, and reminding them of how far they had already come were some of the ways mentors helped their mentees persist through the hard times. Wynne’s determination was fueled by her mentor’s consistent encouragement, “Even though...I’ve got some things ahead of me...I just know she’s always in my corner, you know, just cheering me on. I can do it, you know?” This psychological lift gave mentees strength to keep going, the faith they needed to know they could do, and the comfort of knowing someone understood what they were going through. Holly was having a difficult time in her biology class, but said she “managed to get a ‘C’ after her [mentor’s] encouragement. Her mentor, Janie, also encouraged her to get a study partner, which helped with all of her classes.

The mentees described academic and life situations that were kin to a runner fatigued and feeling the physical stress at mile three and being prodded on by cheering bystanders, then struggling to regain their purpose and stamina at mile four and seeing the race volunteers shouting “You can do it, you are over half-way there!,” then when they thought they were going to have to give up, their legs feeling like lead weights, their sides cramping, and their energy sapped, hearing family and friends yelling loudly, “You can do it; You are almost there; We’ll see you at the finish line!” Mentees like Sarah explained that receiving encouragement in her mentoring sessions to keep going, especially when she was disappointed in herself, helped her to persist.

... they make me feel a lot better about everything. I feel more, like, on track for school, and she makes me feel, I guess just better about, because like I got like not a bad grade, but it was...not what I wanted, and she was like – It'll be okay; all it takes is just more work. And, so she kind of encouraged me to keep doing it, which made me feel better.

It made Sarah feel good when her mentor complemented her, which made her want to keep working hard: "... and she always tells me how good I'm doing in school...always encourages me to keep doing what I'm doing because she said that it was crazy how I was working full-time and still had good grades. Harriet helped her mentee keep going after receiving a D grade by reminding her that it was good considering all she had just gotten through personally during the term: "...but I was like – Hey, a 'D' is passing, and after the semester you've had, I think we can call this a victory just in the fact that you finished the semester." Mildred, Harriet's mentee, shared that she did, indeed, persist because of Harriet's concern and push. She said, "[Harriet] is not only an amazing mentor, getting me on track and focused on my goals, she is now also an amazing friend." Sometimes reminding mentees to put their grades and progress in perspective of the challenges they were overcoming was paramount to helping them persist instead of becoming discouraged.

Encouraging words and belief in what mentees could accomplish made all the difference.

Several mentors remarked on how they could have used a mentor when they had started school.

Said Joanne of the mentoring program,

I wish I had it when I was coming here. There would have been – For me, being a single parent and a widow, it would have, I think, helped me be a stronger student...I would have probably stayed in algebra instead of withdrawing...now I have to go back and take it, and it's like – Ah, they probably would have talked me into it saying – 'Go see so-and-so, they can help you through it.' And, 'Don't withdraw, because you can do it.' You know, give me that extra.

## Gratefulness

Mentees expressed gratitude for the encouragement they received and mentors expressed gratitude for the opportunity to provide students encouragement. Several mentees used the words happy, joyful, and calmer to describe how the encouragement their mentors gave them made them feel. Laura, whose parents are from Guatemala and not able to relate to her college struggles, dropped out of college, then came back. She was very grateful for her mentor, Louise, for her encouragement that helped her persist.

I actually love talking to her... She gives me encouragement. She encourages me to do better in school... It makes me feel happy...she's trying to encourage me, and giving me tips on how I can improve to reapply to the nursing program. I feel like she has helped me a lot.

Mary also shared that she would not have tried to make needed changes in her life if not for her mentor, Patty, encouraging her that she could do it. In telling about how she was able to leave an unhappy living situation at a woman's shelter, Patty said, "I would have never even tried to, you know, make that move if not for her encouraging me and letting me know that there are options available." Wynne said of her mentor, "I was really grateful that I got someone like her."

Mentor Wanda summed up what mentees crave and successful mentors provide, this action that seems to have supernatural power. She said,

You know, it's a different need. It's really, I think what this whole thing is about, if I summed it up with one word, would be encouragement, because they go through so many different things, and some of them just need to be told that they can do it, or that you're very proud of them. I think even adults need that.

All of the mentors in the study expressed gratitude for the effect that mentoring had on them - the satisfaction they received from feeling like they made a positive difference in their mentee's life, the personal growth that they experienced from working with students on this level, and extra fulfillment they felt at work.

## **The Self-Efficacy Effect**

The mentoring experience empowered both mentees and mentors with greater self-efficacy because each had stepped into uncertainty and come out stronger, regardless of the details of their experiences. Mentees and mentors commented on their increase in knowledge, self-confidence, and abilities, and their desire to keep expanding their reach.

### **Knowledge**

Having more information made mentees more confident of their possibilities and spurred them to seek out more, either on their own or by asking others for help. Sarah's mentor had contacts at different schools that have programs in economics, what Sarah wants to pursue, from her time attending conferences. She said the information her mentor was able to provide helped her figure out what she wanted to do and where she wanted to attend. Having this information made her more likely to reach out with other questions and feel more self-assured; it made her feel she could and should take on more responsibility for her future. She said,

I feel...more knowledgeable. I just feel like I kind of know more about what I want to do, like she's helped me to know more, I guess kind of the track that I want to be on, and what, I guess, what I need to take, and I feel like I've changed because I actually have a mindset of being a college student, because I wasn't really. I felt like it was just high school again, but then she made it feel more like, you know, you're actually growing up, you have to, I guess face the bigger challenges.

Quinn's quote for a promotion of the program talked about how the knowledge she gained helped her as a student and in broader ways.

The [mentoring] program has helped me in ways I did not even think it would. I think it has helped me in communicating better with people and its given great information regarding college... is my mentor and she is absolutely great. She is very informative and just wonderful to talk to.

## **Empowerment**

Mentees and mentors spoke of how participating in the program made them more brave about stepping out and trying new things, mentor more, or make their own choices. For mentees, empowerment often meant feeling good enough about themselves to make changes that may not have been what others thought they should do. For instance, Wilma was in the pre-nursing program when she started the program, then she changed to General Studies and decided to pursue business after working in a business job at the college that she enjoyed, saying, “The [mentoring] program inspired me to go my own direction, to follow my heart, and know that someone is always cheering for me.” It helped her to have her mentor’s support in changing her program of study and pursuing a different academic and career path. Other mentees stated they now had the courage to pursue the program of study and career path they were interested in, rather than do what their family had told them to do.

Even mentors felt stronger after mentoring. Willow, an introvert who mentored a college student for the first time as a part of this new program, already signed up to be an alumni mentor at her alma-mater as a result of this experience. She felt the desire and confidence to branch out and do more, to move beyond her comfort zone.

Yeah. I had been a mentor for a part-timer faculty, but I’d never been a mentor for a student, and actually today I filled out a form for ..., where I graduated from, to be a mentor in their alumni program. So it kind of encouraged me to kind of reach out a little bit more to people. I just filled it out today, the form, but you had to list like what career you’re in, how many students you’d be willing to mentor. I put three because I didn’t want to overwhelm myself.

... I don’t know how they match you up, but anyway, it just got me more interested in trying to help, especially the career path of English majors, and that’s kind of a tough road right now, so – Maybe one of the things that I would like to do is maybe branch out a little bit, and feel comfortable enough mentoring anybody, no matter what major...

Willow wanted to mentor more after her experience, and she also felt more confidence that she could mentor. She felt braver to mentor students in different academic areas and as an alum for her university.

### **Ego-Extension**

The pride felt by mentors when their mentee did well came out strongly in their interviews. Some mentors had such pride from what their mentees accomplished and their part in those accomplishments that eyes lit up, smiles spread across faces, and chests seem to puff out a bit. It was obvious that these mentors took great pride, happiness, and fulfillment from the success of their mentees. It makes sense to think of mentors seeing their mentees as their children when several mentees said their mentors were like mother figures. As mothers would, the mentors answered the question about their high point or experience in the mentoring program with either something their mentee did that they were proud of or some way that they helped their mentee be more successful. Mentors saw mentees as extensions of themselves and their success as partly their successes, as would caring parents. Dorothy said of her relationship with her mentees, "I'm kind of their pseudo-mom, you know?"

### **Pride**

Harriet, not a mother herself, was very proud of how she helped her mentee get through a difficult patch, one that could have derailed her college progress. She spoke of her mentee as a caring mother would. The high point of Harriet's experience with her mentee, Mildred, she said was in helping her through a difficult time and keeping her in school. Harriet seems to take ownership when she says, "...it was really important to get her through that." She got emotional after talking about the 'good job' she did in helping her mentee. She was proud of her mentee and seemed also proud of herself.

It really was, it really was. Because I understood the importance of – Hey, you’ve got to get back into class. I know this is hard and I know this is really stressful, and emotional. But you’ve got to get back here because if you don’t get back here, you may not get to graduate in the fall, which is what we have planned for you. And so, I really do think, honestly I think that is really the most successful part that I’ve had of mentoring her in the whole last year. Even though it doesn’t seem like – I mean it might not seem like a success to some people, but for me, the fact that she finished the semester, and that she passed all of her classes, was a huge win to me. It really was.

... I didn’t think about it at the time, and I mean honestly, even now, it’s hard to kind of think about it in that way, but to think about it, that was a really good job. That was a really good job, and to know that me saying – Hey! You need to get back in class. Hey, here’s a resource that you can get counseling to help you cope with this, and the fact that she did make it through. To me, it makes me really proud. And it’s not necessarily proud of myself, but it’s really proud of her, that she was able to pull through it with just a little encouragement from me. I don’t know, now I’m getting all emotional. Now I feel like I want to cry.

Willow had a different, yet similar, experience with her mentee where she was very proud of her mentee’s accomplishment and her part in it. Willow was able to get her mentee into student activities that fit her major and career goals and witnesses her find happiness and accomplishments as a result. She said she was happy about her mentee being up for a major art award because

... I feel like maybe I had a little bit of a hand in her getting on the paper, because...she applied and got on on her own merits, but the fact that I had encouraged her to do it, I guess it was sort of like she’s getting recognition from someone other than her mentor who thinks she does great things anyway, and now all of a sudden, this big group of associated collegiate press people that think she does good things, too. Sort of a little bit of validation, I guess, and I think it was important to her that, you know. She hears people say, ‘Oh, you’re a good artist.’ But I think it was important for her to know it was, you know, this is a big deal.

Willow explained that she was happy for her mentee and proud of her. It made her happy to see her mentee, Rhonda, happy and recognized for her talent and work. She visibly exuded pride of her mentee as if she were her own child.

An extension of pride, mentors also expressed that they wanted their mentees to remember them and remember that they helped them. It made them feel good to know that their mentees knew they cared about them and that they made a difference in their lives.

Because, you know, when you're working, it's just a job, but when you can – I know after they graduate, and they probably might see me at a store somewhere, or working on me in the hospital, or whatever, I know they will come back and say – I remember you, and share a little something, or say a little something of how I've helped them or you know... what I'm saying, in a memory way they would remember me, you know.

(Mentor Joanne)

## **Disappointment**

Just as mentors felt pride and happiness for their mentees when they succeed and appreciation for the mentees making them feel good about their contribution to those successes, they also felt let down when mentees did not reciprocate as they wished. Mentees also expressed disappointment when their mentor did not meet their expectations. Disappointment on both sides was usually a result of insufficient contact and responses. Other times, mentees were disappointed because the experience and their mentor did not meet their expectation. Having high or specific expectations and reality falling short of those visions were the most common causes of disappointment for mentees. The main expectation of mentors was that the mentees who had requested a mentor would follow through and respond to their overtures of assistance. Mentors were disappointed, feeling it a lost opportunity, when their mentees did not take advantage of their help.

**Let down by mentor.** Holly had a mentor who was caring and helpful. Her mentor worked hard to accommodate her mentees and help them in any way she could. However, no experience was perfect. Though extremely happy with her mentor overall, Holly felt a little disappointed when her mentor did not get back with her on issues of importance to her. She said,

There was a couple of things that they were kind of speculating about with the nursing program – like whether they were going to keep the TEAS test or if they were going to add in a CNA program or something like that – and of course, she doesn't have all the answers, I know that. But she never got back with me on that, one way or another, whether it was going to get dropped, and then when I contacted her back about it, like probably about four or five weeks later to see if they had any information, she acted like she didn't know what I was talking about. She acted like she didn't know that I had asked those questions. She was like – of course, we're going to keep the TEAS test. That was her reply, and I was like, okay, she just doesn't remember that we had talked about that I guess. So that was one of the low points. But everything else went great.

It seems perhaps that because Holly's mentor, Janie, was so responsive and helpful the majority of the time that it made an impression on her when there was a gap. Though she went on to say that she did not take it personally, that her mentor must have just forgotten, the fact that she brought it up as something that bothered her is telling. Holly seemed almost hurt that something of such import to her could be forgotten by her mentor.

**Let down by mentee.** Not all students who requested a mentor responded when the mentors who chose them reached out to them. This was perplexing and disappointing to the mentors who wanted to connect with and help students. Mentors were also disappointed when the mentees they had worked with did not stay in touch. Ariel explained her confusion at her mentees not answering her emails. She said,

... I felt like – Why are they not reaching out to me? I'm emailing them. Why are they not contacting me? So that... was a low point because I kept trying to reach out, and I wouldn't hear back, and I said, well, I'm going to keep at it, I'm going to give it another shot, and I'll see.

Betty voiced the same frustration saying that, "The only negatives I have are... I had three people that I tried to contact on multiple times who never contacted me back... But just not being able to help them." Dorothy gave the same answer for her negative of the program, "It's probably the students that I reach out to and I don't hear back from."

Patty, a mentor who had very good success with her mentee, spoke of the need to mentor for the right reasons and to have good intentions, lest damage be done to the mentee. She gave sage advice about how not to be disappointed by one's mentee.

Don't have any expectations of your students. You're not in the classroom. You are not giving them assignments. You're giving them of yourself; you're giving them your life experiences, your failures, your successes. You've got to be pure of heart; you cannot have an agenda. You can't.

### **Desire of Faculty and Staff to Feel They Make a Difference**

When asked why they decided to mentor in the program, the mentors interviewed said they wanted to get more involved at the college, they wanted to help students, they wanted to empower and give courage to female students specifically, they wanted to have an impact, and they felt they had a lot to give. Harriet spoke of how it was “almost an overwhelming feeling to know you can have...and impact on someone's life.” She called that feeling “an elation.” Several mentors said they wanted to have one-on-one relationships with students and thought mentoring would be rewarding. Dorothy said she did not feel that she was doing her job if she did not make a connection with every student in her classes and “develop some rapport with them.” But, connections are hard to make when students usually only see faculty during class time or staff for a particular question or need. These faculty and staff wanted more – more contact, more connection, and more validation that they were making an impact. As Harriet put it, “It's enjoyable to me... knowing that you can help to mold someone into something bigger than themselves, something bigger than they ever thought they could be, and that's what's most rewarding for me.”

## **Affirmation**

It made sense that Ariel's high points were when her mentees voiced their appreciation for what she did for her. Ariel is an academic advisor who literally helps hundreds of students every term. The 'thank yous' are low in proportion to the number of students seen and advisors do not often get to see the fruits of their labors. Hearing appreciation and finding out that her efforts mattered were wonderful affirmations for her. She said,

... with one of my mentees... it was, for her, just having her be able to tell me that she appreciated it, and she also admitted that she wished we could have met more, but she did get a lot out of the process, and she herself said maybe she'll be a mentor one day. So that was one thing for me.

Betty also shared how much it meant to her when her mentee thanked her.

A high point actually was ... she was about in tears and said – Thank you so much; I know that I can do this now. And it was a big eye opener to her that, you know, knowing that someone had been there, had done it...

Janie came right out and said that she wanted to make an impression on her mentees; she wanted her mentees to tell others that she had helped improve their lives, that her time and help made a lasting difference. It wasn't ego or the need for flattery or attention, but, rather, a need to feel that she mattered, that what she did mattered, that she was serving an important purpose. Janie wanted, needed, and appreciated affirmation for her work.

I want to make that impression. I want to help them to where, you know, you hear stories - I heard a story of a student where a teacher had made such an impact in their life that it helped them to be a better person, and at the time, their family life was really drastic and bad, and things were going on, and this person didn't even want to live anymore, and the teacher didn't know what was going on in the home life and all that, but the teacher took time and went after that student and helped them out. And, then later on in life, he moved away out of town and he was able to come back, he found out that that teacher was going to retire, well no, they already retired, they were having some kind of a birthday for her because she was so old, and this student came back and told her how much she influenced his life, because he went on to be someone high in the community. I don't know if it was a doctor or somebody. But he was very high up in the, you know. But it was because of that one teacher, and how she impacted his life. I want to be an impact to somebody's life.

Dorothy shared that she felt affirmed by her mentees when they shared special news with her, sometimes making her the first person to hear of something wonderful that happened to them. She spoke of them holding her in the esteem a close parent would receive and glowed when she spoke of them valuing her.

High points, like I said, when [her mentee] told me about her nursing program, or the engagement to her boyfriend. It feels so beautiful that these students come out of their way to share. You know, they're not required to come in and visit; they're not required to sit down and have coffee or lunch with us. But they want to. And they hold us in such high esteem in their regard. They value us, and we don't get that from a lot of students. You know what I mean? You know?

One of Wanda's mentees gave her credit for getting through the college and on to her next institution, "My mentor... is the reason I got through [Georgia Highlands College]. [Wanda] went out of her way to help me and always makes me feel comfortable" (Mentee Rebecca).

Wanda talked about how good it felt when her mentees told her she had made a difference.

They all said – You're the reason why I had such a successful semester. You're the reason why I'm not on probation. You're the reason why I'm graduating. You're the reason why I don't ever want to leave [the college]. That's a pretty strong statement. There's a lot of pride.

### **Work Satisfaction**

The fulfillment mentors received from mentoring made them more satisfied with their jobs. It was common for them to speak of greater fulfillment, greater meaning in their work, being more engaged, and feeling it was a generally a better place to be, more of a family atmosphere, after mentoring. The individual relationships formed helped the mentors feel more engaged, connected, and involved with the institution, just as it did for the mentees. Several mentors also said they felt more productive and better used for what they knew and could share. Joanne expressed how she felt better about herself at work now that she was mentoring. She said,

I feel more productive, meaningful to others around here, being able to give more than just what my job entails, to share, to inject something into somebody else's life and help them become a better student because of me being a student for so long myself. As a widow and a single parent, I had some struggles and I had some – Well, I had to overcome my problems with English, and you know, different things, and I was able to do it, so you know, and being an older student, coming back to college after all those years, you know. So, I just feel having a mentee is able to make me feel more rounded, more - I don't know - useful.

Even, Margaret, who helped students individually in the tutorial center on a daily basis, shared that the closer connection with a mentee brought her more satisfaction than she normally received at work.

My experience or attitude at [the college] has changed. I've always tried to be really involved with all the students, and I get a lot of opportunity being in the tutorial center. But I think that rewarding experience - because sometimes when you're tutoring a student, you may get a student who comes in all throughout the semester, and you can feel happy for them with their success if they do well in a class and so forth, but I think that closer interaction with the mentees, more on the personal level, too, really made it more satisfying for me, and made me want to get more involved with our students here, not just from the standpoint of tutoring them on the material for the class, but maybe more.

## **Meaning**

There was not one mentor who did not mention that she derived meaning from helping her mentee(s). Dorothy spoke of how her mentees made her feel more value in her job.

Yeah, so these are the ones who want to be with us as much as we want to be with them. Just – oh, my gosh, I'm going to start crying. But it's just like my job here is magnified; it's worth it; it's a purpose. And I don't think we ever stop needing that...Needing purpose, needing to feel as though we are contributing or we've changed lives.

Joanne shared that her mentee had made a special visit to see her to let her know what she meant to her and how it made her feel, "... she ...came back and told me...how I meant something to her, and as she was going through things through school and life... she said I made an impact. I made a difference. I feel more enriched." Janie had the same 'feel good' from helping her mentee to slow down so she could be successful in the nursing program.

So, I kept talking to her because she wanted to get everything done and get into Nursing so quick, but I kept talking to her and kept encouraging her to back off and slow down just a little bit, you know, so she could do good and not be so stressed out, because she was just really stressing herself out because she was trying to make really good grades, which I encouraged her to do the good grades, but to back off on some of her classes because if she didn't, that she was not going to succeed in what she was trying to do. And, so then finally she emailed me back and told me that she had took my advice and that she had talked to some other classmates and everything, and she had decided to slow down and take just what she had to take, and that she basically, when she really figured it out, she was going to be coming in [graduated] at the same time she would have anyway. So I thought that was a real high point, that I had really been able touch her, touch base with her, to help her really realize, you know, what she really needed to do to actually really succeed, because when she gets into nursing, she's going to have a big load anyway. So she's going to have to realize what she can carry and what she can't carry to be able to succeed.

It just made me really realize that there's a lot of students that really just need encouragement and really just have someone to talk to, and it just really, really makes me feel good to know that I'm able to do that for them.

Wanda, someone who should be jaded after 30 years of advising, said that the 'thank you's' and the accomplishment from helping students succeed was exciting:

There's nothing more exciting than having a person say, "Thank you so much for listening and helping and encouraging me." It's a good feeling when you're actually doing your job, but the person thanks you for going over and above, because I felt like I was really just doing my job.

Even though I had so many other things to do - but this, to me, it's really important to have that kind of impact on someone, to see them grow from someone who has been unsure of themselves, isn't confident in themselves, maybe struggling, to someone that they know they can do it, and that they can move forward and become something much more than they thought. (Mentor Harriet)

Dorothy emphatically and emotionally expressed why she felt more work satisfaction after mentoring. She said,

This is the first ... first responsibility that I've had at a school where I feel like - gosh - I can actually put a title to something that's making the difference. You know how it is when we sit through these committee meetings and it's like - Oh, my stars, are you kidding? Like, what have we sustained? This is really the first, I wouldn't even say - It's not a committee, but this is the first responsibility - I go back to responsibility because I do see it, in a good way - that's really, it's done something. It's made a - It's not just made a change in their life, but in their families' and their academics.

### **Importance of Connection to the Institution and Others**

For some mentors, forging a stronger connection to the institution and to individual students was a major motivator for becoming a mentor. Most were already members of the women's group that started the mentoring program; others wanted to join such a group and participate more fully in service at the college. Harriet mentioned that she missed the connection she had to students from when she worked with an honor society group in the past. Having a connection to another person that had the level of closeness of a mentoring relationship had a huge impact on how both mentors and mentees viewed the institution and their place in it. These relationships created bonds that extended to the college, being the vehicle that brought them together and, for the most part, housed their relationship.

Mentees and mentors felt a closer tie to the institution because of their mentoring connection and mentees felt a sense of security knowing there was someone they could go to for help, someone that was 'their's.' Sarah said that her mentor made her feel more "at home" at the college. She said having a mentor "calmed [her] down" and made her feel that she had "a friend there at all times." Wanda commented on how one of her mentees asked her, "How could I stay here longer?" This level of comfort and reluctance to leave the college exemplifies how the mentees bonded to their mentors and, in conjunction, the college. Dorothy commented on how there was a "sense of comfort and connectedness" with the mentoring program that lent to the "family presence" of the institution overall.

Stress was a well-worn word used by the mentees to describe their lives, their precarious balancing acts of managing school, work, and family, and their academics. A reduction in their stress levels as a result of a mentor to turn to was also a common reason for the mentees feeling better about college and the institution in particular. Holly was one of several mentees that said

meeting with her mentor and receiving needed information and guidance reduced her stress.

She really helps me relieve stress. When I meet with her, she gives enough guidance, and answers questions that it's just helpful for my stress level, you know? In addition, the way that I work well is if I have a plan and a list. I do great and I don't stress as much. But when I have to fly by the seat of my pants, I'm just really stressed out. So she realized that, and so she's just helped me reduce my stress as far as trying to get into the nursing program... I'm less overwhelmed and less stressed.

Mildred said of her mentor's ability to put her at ease and calm her down, "I've been to her office bawling my eyes out, and come out not in nearly as bad of a mood." Some mentees, like Mary, were relieved of stress simply by having a mentor, "It took a lot of stress off my shoulders knowing that I had someone advocating for me." This general and specific lifting of stress from mentees was commonly remarked upon. Having a confidant that understood them and the stresses of college made a world of difference to all the mentees interviewed.

### **Gratitude and Appreciation**

Gratitude for help and appreciation expressed both for their mentor and the mentoring program in general was prevalent in each of the mentee interviews. Even the less positive interviews had elements of gratitude for what the experience brought them. Mentors also expressed gratitude for the opportunity to grow personally, to form a stronger connection to the institution and students, and for their experience of greater work satisfaction. Mentees spoke of what it meant to them to feel cared about and how they wanted to mentor now so they could provide such a relationship to others. Many mentors said they wanted to mentor more because of their positive experience and some spoke of how the experience made them feel special.

### **Feeling Cared About**

All of the mentees interviewed commented on the importance of feeling like someone cared about them and their success. Some spoke in general terms, though many gave multiple specific examples of what their mentors did that made them feel that their mentor cared and saw

them as an important priority. Where there was a negative experience or mentees felt they could have had a better experience, the mentees mentioned the need to feel their mentor cared about them or the desire for more interactions to maintain that feeling in the relationship. Some mentees mentioned that they felt the institution cared about them because the mentoring program was started. Farrah explained why she thought this kind of “reaching out” made students feel they were more than a number to the college and that someone actually cared.

I felt like when they reached out to me, just reached out to me in general, I said, ‘That’s neat.’ I was like, ‘that’s a big deal’... If they could just catch some of these young kids coming in. I’m like, ‘Wow – how much of a difference would that make!’ That’s awesome. So that’s what I thought, and it just made me feel like somebody cared.

Just having a mentor gave many mentees a feeling of caring that made them feel more comfortable and secure in college. Farrah appreciated her mentor trying to get in touch with her, “I’m kind of hard to get in touch with...but sometimes when you’re seeing somebody reach out to you, it’s like – Okay, somebody cares, somebody is reaching out to me, even if I don’t have the time.” Sarah said that she actually got “excited about school” because she had someone who “would always be there to help.” She liked the fact that her mentor, who was now one of her professors, checked on her every day they had class. Gwendolyn espoused on the refreshingly positive feeling having a mentor gave her.

It’s made me feel like someone other than close friends and family, like actually care enough to talk with you or to get to know you or try to help you in some kind of way; because we’re so used to everyone just being about themselves, or not really caring, you know. A lot of people can see someone homeless on the side of the street and just ride right past. But, I don’t know, for me, like when I see it, it kind of makes me sad.

Mentees usually expressed awareness that their mentor’s time was valuable and that they appreciated the room they made in their day to see them. Winnie mentioned several times about how her mentor worked around her schedule when they met for lunch or had regular visits on campus. Holly also appreciated that her mentor was “accommodating” with her schedule and

that she prepared for their meeting by first looking up Holly's program of study and current classes. Wilma, mentee of Janie, shared the same feelings when she said,

I guess a high point with me is that she was very lenient on when we could meet, because I had a hard time getting times to meet with her, and that really showed me that she really wanted to meet with me, and she was willing to work around my schedule, and that meant a lot to me because a lot of people may not – which I don't know any of the other mentors – but, you know, they're busy, and they have other jobs. So it meant a lot to me that she was willing for me to meet with her at times that were convenient for me, and that made the difference.

Gwendolyn shared that her mentor went to her job and talked with her after she got off work and Mary shared that her mentor would keep an eye out for things to share that "she thought would benefit" her. The gestures of taking a mentee to lunch, giving up their personal time, or remembering them in a special way meant a great deal to the mentees. Rebecca was appreciative of her mentor being amazingly responsive: "You know, the experiences that I tell people - like ... oh, I needed something - I'll just email...It's done. You know, even like on a weekend..."

Quinn acknowledged her mentor for going out of her way to help her. She said that

I was working on a speech in my class... and...she helped me get an outside source that I was really looking for, and I couldn't figure out on my own. She did it on her lunch break, so she didn't even have to do what she did. I was like, okay, she didn't have to do that, and she did anyway. So I really was like, wow!

Rebecca, Wanda's mentee, acknowledged the help her mentor and others had given her, almost in amazement that staff cared about students regardless of whether they were new students or about to graduate.

So I feel like, as students, we really appreciate that, you know, that you guys would take time out of your day, you know, to respond to our emails and stuff, because I know that you guys are busy, too. And, then we think you guys are doing nothing, but have all day to answer our emails...why would she care that I couldn't get into that history class? It was my mistake; I dropped it. You know? And stuff like that, and you know, with setting up this mentor program, why would they care about a student that's already about to leave and stuff?

Some mentees, like Samantha seemed to feel badly about taking up their mentor's time but were very appreciative.

I think I would have it so that they would have specific time away ... because like, some of the time that she was meeting with me was taking away from her husband, and taking away from her family, because she couldn't do it during the day while she was having classes... She makes a huge impact in my life, whether she knows it or not. She's always smiling, so very cheerful and wanted ...

When Mary's mentor gave her a gift card at Christmas and told her to use it for herself it made her feel cared for and that her mentor understood her situation. When asked how this gesture and comments that Mary was working hard and deserved something for herself made her feel she responded, "Like, she genuinely cared about me, she genuinely cared about my feelings, and not just having a success story, you know. So I really appreciated that." Terri commented over and over of how her mentor, Hazel, sacrificed her time with her family to help her and that she takes the time to ask her how she is and if she needs to talk. In response to asking how her mentor's actions made her feel, Terri responded, "Loved. Cherished. Wanted. Accepted. That extra push."

**Negative cases.** On the negative end, a few mentees related how it made them feel when it seemed their mentor did not make them a priority. Melody's experience with her mentor was the only one that was truly unsatisfactory. Her description of what took place when she met with her mentor in stark contrast to what the majority of the mentees reported. Hers is also an explicit cautionary tale of how not to mentor. Melody starts by confirming that it is ok to her to be honest. She then relates the events of her experience that did not convey to her that her mentor cared about her and made her a priority.

You want me to be honest, right? Okay. I don't think, I think it was just, honestly, in all honesty, I think she just wanted to do it just so she could say she did something, like quote/unquote good, or quote/unquote gave back. I never felt like she was the real – because I have a mentor, from high school that I'm still, with school, is still very active in

my life. With her I just felt like she was just doing it just because. Like, I never had her full attention or anything. She was always on the computers, searching the Internet. You know, doing whatever she was doing online. I mean sometimes it was – Yeah, I just never really had that connection with her, as far as a mentor goes.

How did it make me feel? I don't know, I just, I mean, as being a mentor myself and knowing when a student, or when my mentee, is crying out, or you know, venting, like, all my attention is on, you know, my mentee. Like, I would never be like, on my phone texting, or be like – Wait a minute, girl, let me answer this phone call real quick. Especially when, you know, you have someone who is almost in tears in front of you. Like, I just never felt like – There was no emotion behind it. So, I mean, I just did it, just because. But I never – It never got like, deep.

Melody went on to relate how she even felt put down by her mentor when her mentor competed with her on their choice of sororities. Her mentor was an AKA from her college days yet she was considering pledging Delta at the four-year university she was transferring to in the spring.

Well anyway, so I don't despise the AKA, but they are just really snobby, and really just into themselves, the ones I've encountered with. Well, their biggest competition is the Deltas. Well one day, she was talking about - telling me I should pledge AKA, of course. And I was like – 'Well, no offense, but I don't want to pledge AKA.' She said – 'Well, what do you want to pledge then?' I said, 'Delta.' And she said – 'Oh, that's fine; someone has to start at the bottom.'

I just think she did it for the wrong reasons. I honestly think that she was just doing it, you know, just to have something else under her belt, or to add to her resume, or something she could go back to tell her sorority sisters, you know, and just to be – what I would say is – in hip with them, and make sure she is where everyone else is. She's one of those people that has to have, she has to have something to say, you know, to show for it. Me? I'm the type of person that I don't have to have a title to prove what type of person that I am. So I don't really know exactly what I would change about her, because that was the question, right?

Melody said that her mentor should have made her feel as if she mattered by giving her full attention to her for 20 or 30 minutes, putting up her cell phone and staying off her computer. She recommended that she should probably have met with her in “a conference room, where there's not really any distractions.” She wisely shared, “Because if you're my mentor, I mean, obviously it could be some things that I really wanted to talk to you about, and if I felt, you know, like I could open up to you, I would want your attention.”

Melody's unhappy experience with her mentor was, thankfully, an extreme case. The other two mentees who did not feel they got enough from the program expressed dissatisfaction that had to do with the extent of help they received or the depth of the mentoring relationship not meeting their expectations. Their complaints did not come from a place of feeling uncared for. Quinn, for instance, wanted a more "hands on" and personal relationship. She wanted more personal guidance than the college assistance she received from her young mentor who worked in the library. Whitney felt that she did not have enough help or contact with her mentor.

We maybe only corresponded once or twice. So it was okay. She's definitely a great person, from what I can tell, but I feel maybe I could have been paired up with someone different that suited my needs a little bit better.

Whitney was disappointed that her mentor could not answer what she thought were fairly simple questions about her nursing program.

She did ask, you know, she went back to somebody that, I guess, deals in the nursing field for the school, and she got back to me, and told me about the workbooks, and the coloring, and the labeling, and all that stuff, but it took a little while to get that information.

The other mentees seemed to have received much more time and developed a personal connection with their mentors. The only things they wanted to change in their experiences were more time and personal contacts with their mentors. They all commented on how busy everyone is and how it was disappointing when they could not meet or they did not hear from their mentor. They also admitted that it was usually their fault when a meeting did not take place and that they could have reached out more.

**Life-changing expressions of care.** When Mildred found out about a close friend's murder, her mentor did everything from help calm her down, notify her instructors, and check in with her regularly to make sure she was ok. This help and attention at a devastating moment in her life made a lasting impression upon her, as well as made it possible for her to remain in

school. Similarly, Farrah went to see her mentor when she was at a breaking point from the stress of nursing school and needed help maintaining the will to persevere.

... and I was able to share my experience, and she understood what I was talking about and where I was coming from, and she shared some stuff with me, and it was good. It was almost like that point that keeps that escalation from happening. It was like the perfect moment, when you are still escalating into that stressed zone, and then somebody listens to you and it just kind of pulls you back down. And so, it was perfect.

Other mentees shared how their mentor helped them to do better in their classes and be happier in college. Rhonda said that she appreciated what her mentor did to help her be more successful.

... she's offered a lot of suggestions every time I see her, you know, and it turned out great. I brought my GPA up. You know, everything she's told me to do has gone in a very positive direction, or not told me to do, but suggested that I do, in terms of extracurricular activities, and just classes in general.

Mary, who left an abusive domestic situation with her child, would likely not have still been in school if not for her mentor helping her with the practical matters of in-state tuition and transportation and giving her needed encouragement.

It's given me a lot of hope ... Before I wouldn't have tried to, you know, make that move if not for her encouraging me and letting me know that there are options available, and it just gave me a sense of relief. It took a lot of stress off my shoulders knowing that I had someone advocating for me.

Mary went on to share how much her mentors made her feel cared about, "... it was a really good example of how to care for somebody and how to, you know, to share what you have, to share the gifts that you have with other people." Laura said, "It makes me feel happy. Excited, that somebody actually cares about my education." And, Holly expressed how it helped her to have someone else who cared about her success, "It kind of felt like I was part of a team, you know. It made me feel like they actually wanted me to succeed."

Many mentees commented on how the mentoring program was needed and was a good thing to have. Even mentees whose experience was not the best or all they had hoped for offered suggestions for making it better and said they were glad it was started. Amy concluded her interview with, "...thank you for doing it, and if there's any way we can make sure it doesn't die, they should. Yes, so thank you, I guess, if you're one of those that started it, thank you for starting it."

**Mentor appreciation.** The mentors interviewed all mentioned the enjoyment or satisfaction they received from participating in the program. Many mentioned gratefulness for what the experience gave them. They derived good feelings for what they could give, but also a stronger sense of self and what they could accomplish. Ariel summed up what many mentors felt when she said,

And I really appreciated them, too. So it was kind of good to be reminded of, you know, kind of stepping outside of your role a little bit, and being able to assist them on a personal level. So I appreciated them, too.

Joanne was pleased that her mentee, Farrah, whom she had not heard from in quite a while, came in to campus to interview for this research then went to visit her to share the impact her mentoring had on her success. Said Joanne, "...I was excited and happy because she came and talked to you, and I'm like, Wow!" She went on to say that "...having a mentee makes me feel more rounded, more, I don't know – Useful." Many mentors expressed appreciation for how mentoring made them feel about themselves and their work at the College. Joanne said that it made her feel "blessed." Louise said of the experience with her mentee, Laura, "It brought back some youthfulness in my spirit and in my mind." Margaret shared that her mentoring experience had been positive and that it made her happy to be a part of her mentee's happiness.

It was also common for mentors like Olivia to discuss how mentoring had made them better or stronger as individuals and in their jobs.

Well it has taught me how to become more – Let me see, how can I say it? It has taught me about awareness of, and how to be more not so much focused on me all the time, you know, it has taught me not to be selfish...It has pulled skills out of me that I didn't know that I had. It has taught me how to just be more compassionate, and sincere, and how to express a sense of love to others...It has enhanced my leadership abilities...I'm stepping outside my comfort zone...my leadership abilities are stronger now because I'm stepping outside of my comfort zone, because you can still be a leader within your own space and within your own comfort zone. But I'm being challenged more. (Mentor Olivia)

Harriet also said she was stronger now after helping her mentee through a difficult time, “with some of the things that have happened with her...have certainly made me a stronger individual in the sense...when you have someone start to cry in your office...you've kind of got to be the strong one...” Patty, Mary's mentor, was very grateful of how her mentoring opened her up to what her students go through. It gave her a greater awareness of their struggles and made her a better professor. As she put it,

It made me hyperaware of the situations our students are in. I know that a lot of them struggle, and a lot of them will open up to you. You know they're going through something, but a lot of times they don't feel comfortable telling you. Being a mentor, she opened up to me. She told me her struggles. Even like with her work situation, with her home life, and it was – I saw a complete picture of a student, and it made me more I guess open hearted, in a way, because now when I have students come to me, and they're like – this is going on – I'm like – All right, well, we're good. If this all goes down in the middle of the semester, and you miss time, all right, that's good. We reset the clock. We'll put you on an independent study, or we'll give you extended time. I don't want to be the hard ass that makes you quit school. I want to be the gentle one, where you can fall, and let's keep going together ...Oh, it was amazing. I was so, so blessed, because to me it was a great experience. (Mentor Patty)

Margaret expressed the same type of satisfaction in being a part of a student's success.

... I think that closer interaction with the mentees, more on the personal level, too, really made it more satisfying for me, and made me want to get more involved with our students ...

Rather than seeing their mentoring as an extra job, a burden, or a time drain, the mentors interviewed all seemed uplifted from their experiences. Dorothy shared that mentoring actually gave her a stress break and benefited her in the same way it did her mentees.

I feel less stressed by it. I feel less stressed when I'm speaking to the girls. I can only imagine they feel the same thing, whether they come in, whether I'm talking to them on the phone, or in here. It's just they decompress, but I feel as though I decompress. It's the same relationship we should have with another woman, where we should be able to do that, decompress.

Hazel spoke in a mentoring promotion of what she received from the program, showing her gratitude for the experience and the opportunity.

My mentee and I are a great fit! I find that I learn as much from her as she from me. We listen to each other's stories, laugh together, cry together and somewhere in the mix we truly connect. I chose to participate in the [mentoring program] because I benefited from a similar program when I was a student. I'm happy to have the opportunity to now pay it forward through [the mentoring program].

Satisfaction from the experience and appreciation for that satisfaction were a large part of each mentor's response to the questions asking how their experience or attitude at the College may have changed, in what ways they may be different after having a mentee, and what they might change about their mentoring experience. Harriet's sentiments were echoed from each of the mentors, "I feel like I get more out of it. I feel like there's a level of return on the investment that you don't get from teaching a class of 35 students..." As Joanne said, "I don't feel it as a burden; I feel it as a blessing." In her quote for a promotion of the mentoring program, Harriet, a history professor, called her mentoring experience a gift.

Mentoring students through the [mentoring program] has been one of the most rewarding things that I have experienced in my career. The [mentoring program] is about more than just helping them through their time at [the college] and with academics, as some of the other mentoring initiatives around the campus are intended to do. It is about friendship. It is about being women and understanding the special difficulties that many women face. It has been my privilege to encourage my mentee through a tough semester. She could have given up, but she did not. I have been proud to see her make a semester on the Dean's List and to get her acceptance letter to [university]. My mentee and I have

developed a friendship that will last long after her final semester at [the college]. This is one of the greatest gifts of all that comes from the [mentoring program].

### **Desire to Give Back**

Many mentees and mentors expressed that they now wanted to do more to help others after their experience as a mentee or mentor. Both parties appreciated what many called a ‘blessing’ and wanted to share the experience. Mentors wanted to mentor more and to help all of their students more. Mentees wanted to help others in general and become mentors themselves. Farrah, whose mentor helped her avoid a breakdown during her stressful nursing school classes, wants to help other nursing students in the same way.

I especially would love to do it and be a mentor for nursing students. I was thinking of actually going to ... the head of the fundamentals, and asking her if they have any students that are not doing well with their classes, if I could mentor maybe a group of students...After having a mentor, it made me realize how important it is to mentor people and to help people.

Janice was already mentoring at a high school, but said her experience in this mentoring program led her to reach out to mentor more. Laura said that because she had a good experience, she now wanted to give her time to help others.

I want to help somebody else. I’m doing elementary mentoring starting in August, so, like I said, the gift, you know, you’re not getting paid for it. But later on in life, when those children are grown up, and they have got a college degree, you know you were part of that.

Mary wasn’t as specific as Janice, but said that she was motivated to help others more now: “Like the encouragement that I got from her... So I’m just more willing to try and be myself and use the gifts that I have.” Rebecca also said that she was “able to appreciate helping people more” after having a mentor. Ariel, a mentor, shared that she felt more inspired to mentor because it made her feel valued. Even the mentee that had a negative experience, who was now a college employee, was motivated to sign up as a coach in the new success coach initiative at

the college that randomly paired five first-time, full-time students with a college employee.

I quickly signed up for it, just because I wanted to be – they call it a success coach, I call it a mentor – because I think I’m saying it’s basically the same. But I wanted that student, or students, to have that experience they deserve instead of the experience that I had, having a mentor here. (Mentee Melody)

Feeling they were cared about and receiving appreciation were powerful motivators for the mentoring relationships. The mentees all expressed some level of appreciation for their mentors, the program, or both. The mentors all expressed appreciation both for the satisfaction they felt from helping students in such a personal and long-lasting manner and in how they grew personally and professionally from the experience. Their gratitude for their experience made them all want to ‘pay it forward’ either immediately or with plans in the future to serve as a mentor. Ariel, summed up how mentoring affected her, sentiments strongly shared by other mentors.

I feel a little bit more valued I would say. I think sometimes with our job and our duties, we feel this is something I have to do, but this was something outside of my regular duties, and just to hear someone say ‘thank you’ or be appreciative of your time, and taking the time out to help them, regardless of how major or minor the situation may be. So, I know for me personally, I feel a little bit more valued and a little bit more inspired.

### **Conclusion**

These eight major themes that emerged from the 33 interviews I conducted with mentees and mentors who participated in the first year of the mentoring program (see Appendix W), and were borne out in the artifacts collected from this time period, testify to the need for and the benefits of college mentoring. Some of the themes may seem more expected than others. It is likely no surprise the many challenges that community college students face, nor the importance of student connections to the institution. However, some of the themes were surprising to this researcher. For example, the degree of increased satisfaction with work that the mentors experienced from their volunteer mentoring was unexpected. The effect of increased self-

efficacy and what it motivated on the mentee and mentor sides was also surprising. Both increase of self-efficacy and gratitude for help received (and in one case, effect of lack of help received) made both mentors and mentees want to mentor others. This ‘paying it forward’ effect was a beautiful result of the mentoring experience for many. Even the extent of the power encouragement and the psychic changes in mentees because they felt someone truly cared about them was an emotionally moving thing to hear. The positive effects of basic mentoring were shocking at times and certainly faith building in the importance of sincere human connections. As mentee Rhonda said when asked what she would tell a student who asked about the mentoring program, “I would tell them that they need to do it right away, and that you will get more benefits than you even realize are available.” Where there were negatives cited by the mentees, they were items that could usually be easily improved upon and important lessons for guiding and growing the program. In-depth discussion of the findings, application of the findings for mentoring programs, and limitations of the study are the subjects of Chapter V.

## CHAPTER V:

### DISCUSSION

The focus of this study was the lived experiences of mentees and mentors in a new, female mentoring program at a two-year, multi-campus, public college. As discussed in Chapter I, student retention is a problem of higher education and is an even greater problem for community colleges where only 34% of students complete any degree within eight years after leaving high school (Hsieh, Sullivan, & Guerra, 2007; Rosenbaum, Redline, & Stephan, 2007). The institution of the mentoring program studied here is no exception. Funding for this institution is minimal, student demographics, such as the high percentage of first-generation students, the need for more students to work part-time or full-time, and the responsibilities of caring for family members, makes academic success challenging. Coupled with these challenges, student support from the institution and students' families is lacking in the community college setting due to lesser resources than those usually found at larger or private institutions. Community college students in general lack the preparation to navigate college, make realistic choices regarding their majors, understand college policies and degree requirements, successfully plan for jobs and careers, and tend to be overwhelmed when bombarded with information overload at orientation and all they must do to stay on track afterwards (Rosenbaum, Redline, & Stephan, 2007). Ironically, community college students are in the most need of focused academic and personal services that are in less supply at community colleges due to budget allocations. Because of these student challenges and the lack of a female mentoring program similar to the institution's male mentoring program, a female mentoring

program was started at this institution. The study of this pilot female mentoring program was an exciting and important opportunity to learn what happened in these female mentoring relationships and possible effects on student persistence.

The five questions below guided the study, with the first question on mentee experiences being the primary focus:

1. What do GHC female student mentees experience in a specific female-led two-year college mentor program;
2. What do GHC female mentors experience as they mentor students in a specific female-led two-year college mentor program;
3. What commonalities do GHC female student mentees share in their experiences during their participation in a specific female led college mentor program;
4. What commonalities do GHC female mentors share in their experiences during their participation in a specific female led college mentor program; and
5. How do GHC female student mentees experiences relate to the tenets of mattering and marginality theory?

Female students in a new college mentoring program were the primary data source; female mentors in the program were a major secondary source. Artifacts were examined for supporting evidence. Twenty mentees and 13 mentors were interviewed. The participants were representative of the population and the number of interviews produced saturation of experiences and feelings shared. Mattering and marginality theory was found to be a strong theoretical framework for the study, as experiences discussed in mentee and mentor interviews addressed the five areas of mattering and marginality: attention, importance, ego-extension, dependence, and appreciation (Schlossberg, 1989). Both mentors and mentees discussed aspects of each of

the mattering constructs and each was evident in the negative, as well as the positive cases. The related theories discussed in the literature review were also present in the interviews, especially the mentee interviews. Aspects of self-efficacy, career decision-making, and motivational theories were mentioned explicitly or revealed implicitly. Mentees discussed the confidence boost they experienced and their increase in self-efficacy due to having a mentor. Mentors' experiences also related to self-efficacy. Career decision-making assistance was cited repeatedly as a need by mentees, one that mentors were able to address in various ways. Interestingly, motivational theory applied to both mentees and mentors in their relating of what their mentoring experiences meant for them.

This study was very important for adding to the research on what students need, what helps them to persist, and what makes for a successful mentor-mentee relationship at the community college level. For these students, sincere encouragement was a major factor in their persistence, along with the practical assistance and advice they received. A successful mentoring relationship for these students meant having a mentor who had the honest intention to be there for them, to meet their needs, and had as their goal their mentee's success. A personal, selfish agenda cannot be the reason for mentoring for the mentoring relationship to succeed and benefit the mentee. The mentees in this study could tell their mentor's level of dedication to helping them. This awareness added to their feelings of mattering and to their fuel to persist through difficulties. Each student matters, but they need to know that they matter, be shown that they matter, and feel they matter to someone at the institution. This program chronicles mentoring relationships that succeed because of the mattering factor. Examining what made these mentoring relationships work or not work and looking at other programs for comparison is important for the study of and furthering of mentoring programs.

Within this chapter, I answer the research questions based on the data collected, comment on expected and unexpected findings, discuss the challenges of mentoring, and outline the ideal mentoring relationship, as described by mentees and mentors. I then compare theory from the literature review in Chapter II to my data and discuss implications for designing and coordinating a mentoring program, limitations of this study, and recommendations for further study of mentoring and mentoring programs.

### **Research Questions Addressed**

Five research questions were answered through the 33 interviews conducted with mentees and mentors in this case study of a new, female mentoring program. While different experiences and views of those experiences occurred based on the quality of the mentoring relationships formed and the expectations of mentees and mentors going into the program, overall the stories told were quite similar. The human need for relationships, for feeling important, and for wanting to be a part of something lasting were seen in the answers to every interview question. The need to matter stood out boldly and the effects of mentoring were pronounced. While the developmental theories of self-efficacy, career decision-making self-efficacy, and motivation were intertwined throughout, mattering theory and its constructs dominated.

### **Research Question One**

The key components of mentoring, those of modeling, listening, and encouragement, have been found to help both young and older adults develop confidence, establish supportive relationships, and explore and achieve academic and professional goals (Mott, 2002). This study examined what female college students and mentors experienced in a specific college mentoring program at a two-year commuter college and found that in the array of experiences there were

some very strong commonalities within and between each group. Female student mentees derived a great deal of emotional support from their mentors. This support helped them to connect to the institution and gave them confidence in their ability to persist. The importance of students forming meaningful relationships that help them adjust to college and bond to the institution has been well documented as contributing to student persistence (Astin, 1984; Kuh, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Schlossberg, 1989; Tinto, 1993). A sense of belonging and integration into the college environment is especially important for commuter students, such as those in this study, who live a life apart from school (Alford, 1998; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007; Johnson et al., 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Since many of the mentees lacked strong support from home or peers, having someone at the institution they could confide in and receive understanding and helpful advice seemed invaluable. Several mentees stated that before they had a mentor they felt they did not fit in on campus, that they had a hard time opening up with others, and that they did not know where to go for help. Several mentees used the terms “mom” and “mother” in describing their mentors and other mentees used the term ‘friend.’ They expressed that having a mentor gave them a needed connection at the college and, as a result, opened them up to forming more relationships on campus.

Mentees received a great deal of practical help from their mentors in the form of information, instruction, advocacy, advice, and connections to further their education and careers. This practical assistance was especially important to students at this institution due to the large number of first-generation and non-traditional students. Few family members were able to provide college guidance, and many of the mentees worked and had care giving responsibilities, which made it hard for them to find time to forge on-campus relationships and

seek out help for themselves. Having an instant advocate gave many mentees a feeling of security that was lacking prior to being assigned a mentor. Many mentees said they felt less overwhelmed, less stressed, and less depressed. In describing the feeling about interactions with their mentors, mentees said they felt relieved, happy, comfortable, and content. There was almost a collective sigh from each mentee as they talked about how much better they felt at the college feeling that they had someone to look after them. One mentee said, “It felt like someone besides my family and friends cares about me.” Another said, “. . .now I have someone to reach out to.” The emotional support was a huge factor in helping the students persist, but the practical help of providing information and needed college and career advice made these students feel more secure. Even mentees who were less happy with their mentors said they felt better just knowing there was someone there for them to go to for help.

Emotional and practical help received from mentors were not clearly separated. Rather, one bled over onto the other and at times the two were more of a blend than different aspects of the mentoring relationship. Mentees spoke of their need for someone to understand their college challenges in a way their family could not, someone to listen to their needs and career aspirations without bias, and someone to be a confidant, a person they could share information and feelings they did not feel comfortable or safe sharing with anyone else. One mentee even talked about how she knew her mentor would not share what she told her in confidence because she thought there was a legal stature in place for such confidentiality. The mentees who were highly satisfied with their experience felt their mentors cared about them because their mentors gave of their time listening to them and working to help them. Caring about the mentees led to truly listening to their needs, which led to finding out what they really needed and wanted and, thus, the ability of mentors to help in practical ways. Encouraging the mentees that they *could* succeed and

providing concrete advice and a model of *how* to succeed was the combination of mentoring assistance that the satisfied mentees said pushed them to keep going even through especially difficult periods. The dynamic duo of emotional support and practical help was also what the less satisfied mentees said was missing in their relationships. Mentees who received little time or attention from their mentors or were disappointed in the help they received reported the least positive changes in themselves and the least positive comments about their experience. The mentees who felt their mentors cared about them said their mentors took the time to listen to them and they expressed the greatest increase in self-efficacy, career certainty, and motivation to persist. The closer the mentoring relationship, the greater mentee satisfaction and sense of self.

### **The Self-Efficacy Factor**

Mentees expressed the need to gain needed information, assistance, and confidence in their ability to fit in, choose their own path, and succeed academically. Across the board, mentees expressed insecurity in one or more of these areas. Often encouragement and an understanding ear was the main thing that mentees needed. For some mentees, needed information on the process (of the college, the program they hoped to enter, or how to balance school with other obligations) helped them to gain self-assurance. Since the two main student characteristics that influence student persistence, self-efficacy and goal orientation, are strengthened by strong mentoring relationships, it is not surprising that the satisfied mentees reported a stronger sense of self and determination to complete their degree (Burks, 2014; Hsieh, Sullivan, & Guerra, 2007; McCollum & Kajs, 2007; Putwain & Larkin, 2013). Career guidance, goal-setting, sharing of information and resources, and the great amount of encouragement that mentees received from their mentors gave them confidence in their ability to persist, increasing their personal and academic self-efficacy. This increase in self-efficacy was displayed in the

mentees' comments about how they were taking decisive career actions and wanting to become mentors themselves.

This increase in self-efficacy is of great importance when one puts it in context with the fact that studies have shown self-efficacy, belief in one's ability to achieve, to be positively related to the undertaking of STEM programs and academic success in general (Moakler & Kim, 2014; Poor & Brown, 2013). More graduates from STEM fields are needed today and more women are needed in STEM fields, however women generally have lower self-efficacy in STEM (Hill, Corbett, & St. Rose, 2010; Holmes, Redmond, Thomas, & High, 2012; Starobin & Laanan, 2008). Mentoring has been shown to increase academic, and specifically STEM, self-efficacy in females. This study added to the evidence that caring mentoring can make a difference in female student self-efficacy, even in male dominated STEM fields. It also adds to the evidence in the literature that students who feel more hopeful about their ability to persist and succeed are more likely to persist and earn higher grades (Davidson, Feldman, & Margalit, 2012).

### **Career Guidance**

Many mentees were unsure of what program to pursue, and if they did know the major they wanted, they were unsure of what career they could pursue and of every step in-between. The mentees who were sure of their program still had a great many practical questions they were not able to get answered elsewhere. This mentoring program gave the mentees someone to share their career ideas, goals, and fears. This career decision-making and planning assistance was especially important because the institution does not have a career center. Counselors provide career counseling as a part of their job description, but have very little time to give to students who are not in psychological crisis. Also, there is no career programming to expose students to different career options and methods of career exploration. Faculty are often the only people at

the college students can ask about careers and most students do not seek out faculty on their own.

When a mentee in the program received a rejection letter after applying to the college's nursing program, she did not have support or understanding from her family. She was able to turn to her mentor for guidance and emotional support. Together, they plotted out her next steps. Another mentee's mentor gave her contacts for the academic program she wanted at another institution. A high point in the relationship for one mentee was her mentor helping her figure out what she wanted to do for a major and providing her with transfer schools to consider. In cases where the mentees were only mildly satisfied with their mentors they mentioned the low points of the relationship as when their mentor was not able to help them with career questions. Even one mentee who was very happy with her mentor said a low point was when her mentor did not get back with her about important questions she had on the nursing program she wanted to pursue. Career advice, information, and support were very important for the mentees. Career guidance is tied to goal setting, which provides necessary motivation for persistence.

### **Motivating Goals**

As discussed in Chapter II, having clear and obtainable goals is a strong motivator for students. The mentees in this study said that they asked for a mentor because they needed guidance with college in general and with their programs of study in particular. When asked how being in the mentoring program changed them, most of the mentees provided a comment about making better decisions, setting more realistic goals, changing to a more realistic major, being a better student, managing their time better, having more purpose, having more direction, taking school work more seriously, and being more motivated to finish school. One mentee stated, "I know more of what I want to do and need to take" and another said, "I am more motivated, stronger, have more drive." Most of the mentees received help from their mentors in

setting goals and creating a plan of action, which made them feel more confident about their ability to complete school.

Research has shown that students who have realistic goals have greater self-efficacy, are more likely to put forth effort, are more likely to achieve academically, and are more likely to persist to graduation (Cheung, 2004; Giota, 2006; Heckhausen, Chang, Greenberger, & Chen, 2013; Pajares, 1996; Woolfolk-Hoy & Hoy, 2006, p. 127). The mentees interviewed, even those mildly satisfied or unsatisfied with their mentors, reported feeling stronger from the experience and more focused academically. Mentees who had helpful and satisfying relationships with their mentors reported that working on goals and academic plans with their mentors helped motivate them to continue in school despite the challenges of juggling class work with their jobs and family responsibilities. Mentees whose mentors told them to slow down in terms of taking fewer classes while working seemed relieved and much more confident in their ability to finish school because they had developed a more realistic plan that they could manage.

### **Mentoring Theory to Practice**

Mentoring has been shown to promote student success as evidenced in an increase in students' grade point averages and college persistence (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Kahveci, Southernand, & Gilmer, 2006; Pagan & Edwards-Wilson, 2003; Salinitri, 2005; Sorrentino, 2007). The dimensions of mentoring in the academic setting, those of emotional support, goal setting and career guidance, academic subject knowledge, and role modeling, are seen clearly in the shared experiences of mentees in the program studied here (Crisp, 2010). The mentees expressed more confidence in their ability to complete college. They discussed the concrete help they received, such as study skills and time management tips, speech writing assistance, financial aid information, career counseling, and transfer assistance, as well as needed encouragement.

Of the 20 mentees from the program interviewed, five graduated, 12 are enrolled and have an average GPA of 3.1, and three are not currently enrolled, though are in good academic standing with an average GPA of 3.3. Mentees stated that they benefited academically from what their mentors provided them, which was everything from study skills tips, career advice, personal guidance, encouragement, connections, and practical knowledge about college and resources. One mentee said she now takes school work more seriously and another said she overcame shyness and became involved on campus as a result of opening up to her mentor. The practical help and the relationships built were definitely a factor in the academic persistence and success of these students. The lowest GPA of all the mentees is 2.3, which is surprising given the demographics of this group, many being first generation students, most of them employed part- or full-time, and several of them with family responsibilities. They credited their mentors for helping them to push through and believe in themselves, the needed mindset for persistence.

### **Disappointed Mentees**

Though the majority of the mentee experiences were very positive, some mentees were left wanting more. One mentee would have liked someone who could help her more with the questions she had about her program of study. This was very important to the mentee because she wanted to get into the nursing program, but her mentor was unsure of program requirements and took some time in answering questions. It seemed as if the delay in answers caused this mentee to have less confidence in her mentor. Another mentee would have liked more of a personal relationship. She was seeking someone to give her wise advice from experience, a sage counselor, which was her idea of what a mentor should be and what she needed. However, her mentor was young and offered only more practical academic assistance, which the mentee appreciated and used but did not meet her need for someone to also help her with life decisions.

Only one mentee reported a bad experience. She felt a lack of sincere concern from her mentor, stating that she felt her mentor only signed up for the program to have another item for her resume. Based on the specifics that this mentee reported experiencing, it seems this particular mentor may have fallen for two of the pitfalls of new mentors, as related by Julie Starr in *The Mentoring Manual* (2014), those of allowing the idea of being a mentor to suggest superiority and that of low engagement. This mentor was preoccupied with other things, such as her cell phone and Internet, while meeting with her mentee and initiated a competitive stance on who joined the better sorority. The mentee in this case was unhappy with her mentor and her mentoring experience, but, interestingly, she was not negative about the mentoring program. In fact, her experience prompted her to become a mentor herself after she graduated and obtained a job at the college. She said she wanted to give students the experience she felt she should have had. Of note to the outcome with this mentee and her positive attitude in spite of a less than ideal mentor, she reported another female staff member in the office setting was a good example as an unofficial mentor to her. This woman, who happened to mentor others in the program, and that the fact that this mentee was happy with the college overall, mitigated the bad mentoring experience she had with her assigned mentor.

### **Encouragement Creating Confidence**

The term encouragement was used over 12 times by mentees in their interviews and many more words relating to encouragement were used, words like spiritual, support, understanding, expectation, trust, hope, relief, insight, strengthened, help, and better suggested the importance of helping students to believe they can succeed. The mentees happy with their mentors, which was the majority, stated that they felt their mentors cared about them, encouraged them, and made them feel less stressed. In answering the questions of how their

experience or attitude changed at the college after having a mentor and how they might be different after having a mentor, mentees said they were helped, were more positive in their outlook, reached out to people more, studied more, were academically stronger, felt more assured of their major, and gained career direction. Some mentees came right out and said they were more confident after the experience. Others said that they believed in themselves more, had more of a 'can do' attitude, felt more stable, were more able to make decisions, liked having someone they could reach out to, got to know themselves better, were more prepared for life, learned to adjust to change better, and were happier, all indicators of greater confidence in oneself.

This increase in confidence from the help and strong encouragement that the mentors gave their mentees was a result of mentors working to helping their mentees succeed. There was a correlation between mentee satisfaction with the effort their mentors put in and mentee increase in confidence and happiness with school. The mentees who raved about their mentors spending time with them and helping them realize that they could manage school along with work and family were the most vocal about having more positive attitudes overall and more certainty in their academic and career decisions. These mentees also glowingly remarked on how their mentors really cared about them. Caring mentors encouraged and helped their mentees, giving the mentees needed confidence and a boost in self-efficacy that enabled them to work harder and smarter resulting in greater successes.

### **Research Question Two**

The mentors interviewed reported a great deal of satisfaction from participating in the program. Rather than any comments on their volunteer mentoring being an extra burden, they related a great deal of fulfillment, enjoyment, and pride in their mentees and in themselves for

how much they helped their mentees. They all stated that they wanted to mentor to help students, to empower women, to be of service, and to be involved with students in a one-on-one situation. Some mentors had only one mentee, while some started the program with as many as five mentees. When asked about the interactions they had with their mentee, mentors said it made them feel good to help, that they connected with their mentees, that it was fun to find out things they had in common, and that they felt they made a difference. Some of the mentors said they made life-long friends. The only negative comments about their mentoring experience lay in the mode of mentoring and some of the challenges. Some mentors said they did not like communicating via email. They preferred in person or phone meetings. One mentor discussed the difficulty of having her mentee in her class and some mentors expressed disappointment when mentees did not follow their advice or stay in touch as much as they would have liked. The mentors said they gained a greater understanding of student challenges. This increased their empathy toward students and enabled them to be more helpful with their assistance and encouragement. In turn, the mentors found a strong sense of purpose and feelings of satisfaction.

### **Understanding and Empathy**

Mentors shared that their mentoring made them better in their jobs at the college. The seven faculty mentors talked about how it made them better in the classroom and better at helping individual students because they now had a better understanding of what their students have to overcome to attend college and be successful. One mentor said she was now “hyper-aware of students’ situations” and more “open-hearted.” She said she was “more mindful, more understanding” and “less judgmental.” Another said that mentoring taught her “how to be more expressive of compassion.” The common refrain from mentors was that they were more aware of students’ circumstances, more compassionate, and more open. The faculty mentors were

more apt to mention this greater awareness of student challenges and their realization of this demographic of students generally having more to deal with than they did in school or the students at the school where they last taught. This is likely because the staff mentors already work with students on a one-on-one basis in advising, counseling, tutoring, the library and other student service areas. Faculty tend to work with students in groups and, even when advising, rarely spend the time with individual students that would enable them to learn their stories. Getting to know their mentees on a personal level made mentors more sensitive to the needs of all students and more cognizant of their other students who needed encouragement.

This increase in understanding and desire to help and encourage students is quite relevant in the quest to help students persist. Encouragement has been found one of the greatest aids to student success and it helps students develop grit, a new buzz word for an old character trait that spells success (Fink, 2013; Pappano, 2013; Roy Stains, 2014). In this age of Millennials and all other Gen X, Y, and Z iPhone using students who are used to instant gratification, it is paramount to help students understand that learning takes time, success takes time, finishing takes persistence, and persistence takes grit (Crappell, 2015; Reuteman, 2015). As Angela Duckworth, a researcher of, expert in, and role model for grit, says, grit has to be supported and students need to be educated on the fact that their possibilities are far beyond what they have known in the past (Del Giudice, 2014). This encouragement that they can achieve and the patience borne of empathy to help students improve is what builds in students the “I can” mindset and what can be directly tied to graduation numbers. Because community college students often have many challenges, from lack of academic preparedness to financial difficulties, the encouragement that these mentors provided their mentees was vital in helping them to develop that ‘grit’ mindset that they needed to keep going.

## **Purpose and Connection**

Mentors said they felt connected to their mentees and several expressed a greater connection to the institution as a result of their mentoring. Family was a term several mentors used to describe how mentoring changed their work experience at the college. Mentoring was attributed to making the workplace a more family atmosphere, to making mentors feel a part of a group and a part of something positive, and as a team member, “a cog in the wheel.” This sentiment of connection and being a part of something beyond their specific job was voiced equally by faculty and staff mentors. Connection to an important program and to individual students gave mentors a sense of purpose and a desire to get even more involved in the college and in helping students. As one staff mentor put it, “I feel more productive, more meaningful at work, able to give more than just in my job, able to inject myself in helping students, more rounded, more useful...” The increased sense of purpose seemed an addictive tonic as most mentors commented on how they now wanted to mentor more, both at the college and in other venues. They said they wanted to reach out more, they were now “compelled to dig a bit deeper,” and they felt “enriched” and “blessed” from the experience. One mentor even said she felt she had stronger leadership skills, more knowledge, and was more challenged. For many mentors, mentoring actually recharged their batteries, making them feel refreshed and energized.

The mentor reports of greater connection to the institution and others and having greater purpose are important to be aware of when designing and implementing a mentoring program. Though it seems the focus is always on the mentees, without attention to the mentors in a mentoring program, especially one that is voluntary with no extrinsic rewards, it will be difficult to keep and recruit new mentors to keep the program alive. Fortunately, the intrinsic motivators of achievement, recognition, responsibility, and personal growth at work are more important to

most employees than pay and working conditions (Daft & Marcie, 2011; Herzberg, 1976). Understanding why mentors want to mentor is crucial for knowing how to enlist the best mentors, advertise for new mentors, and work to keep good mentors excited about their mentoring service.

### **Satisfaction and Fulfillment**

Mentors reported experiencing a great deal of satisfaction and professional fulfillment from serving as a mentor. The greater purpose at work described above carried over into mentors feeling more satisfied and fulfilled at work. They talked about how they knew they made a difference in their mentee's life and that made them feel good. The words 'gratifying,' 'satisfying,' 'exciting,' 'inspired,' and 'happy' were used to describe the experience. One mentor said that the experience made her feel younger and several said that they made a positive impact on their mentees. The mentors seemed to express the enjoyment of positive feedback that they do not always get in their job roles. Many of the mentors talked about how good it felt to hear their mentees say 'thank you' or showed their appreciation in some way. One mentor said that "the affirmation feels good." The mentors appreciated being appreciated and receiving confirmation that their work was making a difference.

### **Research Question Three**

Of the positive experiences the mentees shared, most discussed feeling security, encouragement, and connection due to the time their mentors spent listening to, helping, and supporting them. Even the one mentee who had a negative mentoring experience said that other women at the college provided unofficial mentoring to her that entailed these positive support factors. Mentees said that they felt more secure having a person to turn to for help. There was a psychological comfort knowing that they had an advocate, whether they needed her or not.

Having a mentor made them feel safer. They felt safer in terms of more comfortable in college, more willing to open up to others, and also in making their own decisions and speaking out in class. They were more brave.

The mentees also mentioned receiving encouragement from their mentors that they attributed to giving them more internal motivation and strength in persisting. Many mentees shared that they were more positive as a result of what their mentor provided them. They mentioned many times that their attitude changed, that they believed in themselves more. The implication from a few mentees who talked about switching their majors because of support from their mentors was that prior to having a mentor they did not feel confident in choosing their own program of study. They had been majoring in programs their families thought they should do. After spending time with their mentors, they felt empowered to choose as they really wanted. They felt that they could achieve what they wanted. They felt freer to be themselves.

Greater connection to the institution and to others was a common thread among mentees. They said they were happier at the institution, more excited about school, and that “school [the college] felt more like home” after having a mentor. Connecting with their mentor enabled many mentees to open up and be comfortable talking with other faculty and staff, as well as students at the college. Several said that they were now “more outgoing,” which helped them to make more friends. Some mentees said that they requested a mentor because they had not felt a connection with anyone else at the college. Overall, the connections between mentees and mentors were strong. Several mentees talked about how well they connected with their mentors and smiled with the delight of talking about a best friend when they mentioned interesting things they had in common. It was evident that this forged connection was a large part of what made the mentees feel more at ease and secure at the college and with themselves.

## **Byproducts**

Wonderful byproducts of the increase in security, encouragement, and connection that the mentors gave their mentee were those of increased confidence, emotional relief, and career direction. Mentees reported that they were more self-assured, more certain about their program of study and what steps they needed to take, and relieved. Mentees spoke of needing the confidence to do what they wanted to do in terms of major and career, needing guidance with their lives, and needing someone they could connect with and trust. The majority of the mentees had these needs met and felt relief as a result. Many said they were different people after their experience – more positive, happy, open, trusting – and it was visible during the interviews. The demeanor of these mentees was as if they had come into the room with a heavy rucksack they had been carrying for miles, and then sat it down as they started to talk about their mentors. The relief in having a confidant, an advocate, a friend at the college was visible and inspiring.

## **The Downside - Mentees**

To provide the entire picture, it is necessary to also share the negative or unsatisfactory experiences that mentees shared. Though few, mentees did have some disappointments from their mentors. Aside from the one negative case where a mentee felt her mentor treated her as an afterthought, not giving her the time and attention that she believed was necessary and appropriate for mentoring, there were a couple mentees who were somewhat disappointed by the experience. They simply wanted more. One of these mentoring matches was an online relationship and the other was with a relatively young mentor. Those factors could explain the lack of depth and immediacy they wanted.

Another reason for the difference in satisfaction could simply be explained from mentee expectations. Likely, a combination of the two factors resulted in these mentees being less than 100% satisfied. For all of the other mentees interviewed, their own disappointments were when they did not hear from their mentors or did not hear from them as often as they would have liked. One mentor went out of the country for the summer, which made her mentee sad. Another mentor did not communicate with her mentee over the summer term, probably because she did not realize she should or realize that her mentee wanted her to do so since her mentee was not in classes. These and more minor disappointments of someone having to cancel a lunch or both parties being too busy to meet at times were the only criticisms and complaints of the mentees. For most of the mentees, they simply wanted more of a good thing. They wanted more contact, more checking in on them and their progress, a better place to meet, time with their mentor off campus, or group meetings with other mentees and mentors. When asked what was a low point or negative experience in their mentoring relationship, 80% of the mentees stated that lack of time or gaps in contact were the only things they regretted.

#### **Research Question Four**

Every mentor interviewed shared that their experience was one of fulfillment, connection, and ego-extension. As discussed earlier, mentors felt great satisfaction in helping their mentees, and when mentees showed appreciation mentors had even stronger feelings of happiness that their time and effort with mentees made a difference. It made them feel good to be valued. Most said that they felt more rewarded from their mentoring than they did from their jobs. They felt productive and important, which made them feel happy about themselves and their place at the college. One mentor put it well by saying that the mentees remind them of why they are there. The one-on-one time with and appreciation from mentees seemed to help the mentors, especially

faculty members, get back in touch with what they enjoy about working in education. They felt more in touch with students, with each other, and with the college.

### **Byproducts**

Re-connecting to their love of being an educator or student services staff at the college made the mentors feel more connected to the college, more connected to students, more a part of the 'whole,' and more integral to the success of the college. Many mentors said they understood students better after having one or more mentees. They felt they could do their jobs better and enjoyed their jobs more. This increase in connectedness included closer relationships with their peers because they now had the mentoring experience in common and compared mentoring experiences at the monthly meetings of their women's group. They had a major shared experience they could bond over when sharing their challenges and successes. Their positive experiences made them want to volunteer for more groups and activities in the college, as well.

The mentors also felt a part of their mentee's lives in terms of an influence over them and their success. This ego-extension is a major part of mattering theory. In simple terms, the mentors found pride and happiness in their mentees successes and they were saddened when their mentees experienced disappointments or failures. Those mentors with the closest relationships to their mentees felt a part of their lives and rejoiced in their happiness. Mentee success was also a large part of mentor validation. They named their high points as times their mentees figured out what to do for a career or won an award. They experienced honest joy in being a part of their mentee's successes and happiness.

## **The Downside - Mentors**

Interestingly, the only real complaint of the mentees was the same for the mentors, that of time. The mentors would have liked to have met more, talked more, and been able to do more. As were the mentees when they did not hear from their mentors, mentors were disappointed when their mentees did not check in with them or had to cancel a meeting. A couple mentors were disappointed when their mentee did not take their advice, but were happy when their mentee realized their error and made corrective actions. I could identify with the disappointment mentors expressed when their mentees did not do well, as it was a let-down for me when my two mentees failed to return to school due to family and financial difficulties. I felt they were missing an opportunity to better themselves, to better their families. Mentors also mentioned the same issues and 'wishes' as mentees. Many would like to have better places to meet, to be able to meet off campus, maybe for lunch or an activity, and would like to be able to get together with other mentees and mentors.

As far as challenges to mentoring, the biggest issue, one that was, fortunately, experienced by only a couple mentors, but that has the potential to be a problem for others, was the blurring of the professional line. When mentees were in a class their mentor taught there was some difficulty in maintaining the professor-student relationship when there was already a mentor-mentee relationship. Mentors did not want to show any favoritism to their mentee students or have there be any appearance of favoritism. Sometimes other students picked up on the fact that their classmate had a closer relationship with their professor than did the other students, which made the professor-mentor a little uncomfortable. When the student-mentee was not doing well in a class their mentor taught, it made it hard for both parties to be objective. This situation could be compared to have one's child in class. Other students may become jealous,

favoritism could be perceived, the teacher may work to lean on the harder side so as not to appear too easy on the child (i.e. mentee), and the teacher may remain uncertain if she is handling the situation correctly.

### **Research Question Five**

Mattering and marginality addressed the mentee experience in this program well. Mentees were strongly affected by four mattering postulates of attention, importance, ego extension and appreciation (the fifth construct of dependence being present, but not as strong for mentees as for mentors). The attention mentors gave their mentees made the mentees feel important and, thus, good about themselves. This importance ties into ego-extension because the mentees saw that their mentors wanted them to succeed and they rejoiced in their successes and commiserated with them when they hit bumps in the road, either academically or in their personal lives. This ego-extension was very evident by mentors saying that their high points were when mentees experienced successes, took their advice, or had a positive job change. Because their mentors cared about what happened in their lives, the mentees felt that they mattered, that they were valued, and that they were important.

The attention mentees received from their mentors correlated with their feelings of worth and importance to their mentors. Taking the negative mentoring experience case as the perfect example, it was easy to tell that this mentee did not feel valued by her mentor because her mentor was distracted with other things when she should have been devoting their time together to her mentee and their relationship. This mentee felt pushed aside, marginalized, and could have been psychologically injured from the less than perfect experience had she not had prior and concurrent relationships with other staff at the college that were positive. Conversely, mentees who received attention from their mentors were happy and felt cared for. Comments

like “I love my mentor; she provides personal attention” and “She followed up; she wanted me to succeed” are indicative of the attention, importance, ego-extension, and appreciation most of the mentees felt and how cognizant they were of the concern their mentors had for them. Even the construct of dependence was a part of how some mentees felt when they tried to please their mentors or they worried about their mentors when they had not checked in with them.

Marginalization refers to individuals feeling that they do not belong, do not fit in, and are seen as lower in status, disadvantaged, or unequal, or peripheral and not needed by the dominant group (Cheng, 1999; Migliaccio, 2001; Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981; Schlossberg, 1989). Many of the mentees interviewed expressed these feelings being uncomfortable or self-conscious around others, a result of feeling marginalized (Schlossberg, 1989). The non-traditional students, such as Rhonda, an art major, expressed feelings of being an outsider and not comfortable around younger, less serious, students who had less life experience. Some of the first generation students stated that they felt lost on campus, not having an understanding of college jargon and where to ask for help. However, once these students connected with their mentors, their self-consciousness faded and they felt empowered with their new information and advocate.

### **Expected and Unexpected Findings**

I expected that mentoring would help the student mentees to persist due to the increased information and advice provided by their mentors and the range of literature that speaks to the benefits of emotional and practical support, as well as goal setting, career assistance, and advocacy that are the hallmarks of good mentoring (Crisp & Cruz, 2009, p. 532; Crisp, 2010; Elam, 2012; Lightweis, 2014). I also suspected that the actions of the mentors would influence the level of satisfaction and resulting success of the mentees based on the success and satisfaction male students derived from the college’s Brother2Brother mentoring program and

the literature that supports mentoring as important for student success, especially among specific demographics (Coonrod, 2012; Hu & Ma, 2010; Stephen Lenz, 2014; Yoder, 2013). However, there were some unexpected findings from the data collected from mentors and a great many nuisances from the mentee data.

The mentors were affected much more from their mentoring experiences than I expected, and the satisfaction of the mentees was greater overall than I had expected. I was shocked at times at how big an impact having a mentor had on some of the students. Not surprisingly, the time that mentors and mentees gave their relationships influenced how much each benefited from the experience. Certain challenges of mentoring, though they were few, were another area that I had not forecasted. The data both confirmed many of my suppositions and informed me of areas of mentor benefit that had not occurred to me.

The mentors who stated that they were previously unaware of the challenges of our student population surprised me. I work with students regularly on a one-on-one basis, as well as occasionally teach, so am familiar with the general demographics and life situations of the students in this community college. I took it for granted that everyone there had that same awareness. The staff mentors who tend to work more closely with individual students did not express this new realization, but several faculty mentors did discuss at length how they now had a new appreciation for what the students at the college have to overcome to attend and finish college. They expressed a new awareness and an increase in understanding toward all of their students as a result of mentoring one-on-one.

The one thing that surprised me the most was how much the mentors benefited from the experience. Every mentor remarked on how much satisfaction they received from mentoring and how much more valued they felt at their jobs due their work with their mentee. I had thought

mentors would see mentoring as more work and want it to take up less, rather than more, of their time. The reverse was the case. Mentors talked about taking on more mentors, mentoring for other groups, mentoring students out of their academic area, and how good it made them feel. The joy, fulfillment, greater connection to the institution, and increased happiness in their jobs due to serving as a mentor was a delightful surprise that came from the interviews with mentors. It seemed that many of the mentors were almost as surprised as I that they got as much as they gave from their time mentoring.

I was also a little surprised at how many students talked about wanting to meet as a mentoring program group. I thought there would have been more concern with privacy and not as much interest in meeting with other students, as they could do that by joining a student club. There are numerous opportunities to meet and socialize with other students through student life activities, clubs, and athletic events. As Chang (2015) addressed in her qualitative study on the role of social support for Asian and Latino American college students in coping with stress, self-disclosure and the thought of burdening others with their problems is a concern for some students. However, it became apparent early in my interviews that the mentees in my study wanted to be able to share their stories and support one another. It seemed they were interested in being able to connect with other females who shared similar challenges and experiences. Studies have shown that sharing experiences, especially positive experiences, increase happiness, life satisfaction, and feelings of belonging (Coleman, Tucker, 2014; Lambert et al., 2013; Sedgwick, Oosterbroek, & Ponomar, 2014). Having friends on campus that serve as a psychosocial support has also been shown to help with college adjustment and stress coping, especially for females (Bryant & Clement, 2015; Menzies & Baron, 2014).

Not as surprising, but still an eye-opener for me was the extent of time that mentees wanted to interact with their mentors and the fact that they seemed to crave a close relationship, one on more of a friendship level than a professional staff/faculty to student level. They wanted a confidant for their personal life issues, as well as a college resource and guide. There is little in the literature regarding mentee needs and specific time requirements to satisfy mentees, but this finding makes sense based on Tovar's (2015) and Ream's (2013) research on Latina community college students who do not tend to form close relationships with instructors and counselors easily and the research of Choen and Brawer (2008) and Dowd, Pak, and Bensimon (2013) who explain the difficulty of community college students in forming helpful relationships due to their propensity to work at jobs and help care for family. It also makes sense that mentees wish to meet regularly when one considers the important points that Beth McMurtrie (2014) made about the need to spend time getting to know one another so mentees will develop the confidence needed to reach out to their mentors.

### **Participant Suggestions for Designing a Mentoring Program**

This study confirmed the importance of students feeling they matter at their institution and the usefulness of mentoring programs to meet this need. It also showed how mattering is also important to staff and faculty and how serving as a mentor to students can satisfy the need for employees to feel valued and useful. At this time of restrictive budgets and salary freezes, mentoring is a cost-effective way for both employees and students to feel more valued at their college. It provides long-reaching benefits at minimal cost. Numerous studies have provided evidence that students who have a sense of belonging at the institution are more likely to be retained (Thompson et al., 2007; Tovar et al., 2009). It makes sense to examine what mentees and mentors want in a mentoring program and what practices bring the most rewards to each.

## **Program Design**

One of the questions mentors and mentees answered was how they would design a college mentor program. They also answered questions on what they would have changed about their mentee's or mentor's interactions with them and what they would have changed about their mentoring experience in general. These answers were very revealing. The majority of the mentees were on the same page with what they thought should take place, as were the majority of the mentors, and what each group recommended was very similar. Mentees and mentors all wanted more time together and many mentioned the desire to meet off campus and to get together as a group. They all said the mentoring relationship should be taken seriously and most said that the relationship should be given time to become comfortable and close. Both groups offered specific suggestions, as well as general best practices. Mentees recognized the time mentoring took out their mentor's day and proposed they be allowed time for it as part of their jobs, for example. Mentors suggested advertising the program to students from the admissions process and on through student life activities. Each group provided helpful ideas for the specific implementation of a mentoring program and gave frank advice to new mentors and mentees. Their recommendations of both parties taking the relationship seriously and having more structure and set times to meet match up well to those advocated in the mentoring literature (Crisp, 2010; Fajana & Gbajumo-Sheriff, 2011; Gabriele, 2010; Ragins & Kram, 2007).

**The beginning.** Mentors stated that they would like more training to better understand their role and how to "draw mentees out more." They suggested advertising more for mentors, perhaps at InService, and setting up instructions, rules, and training early. Some mentors suggested targeting a specific vulnerable demographic of female students, such as working mothers, due to the limitation of how many students can be mentored effectively. Mentors

believed mentoring should be voluntary on both sides, with matches made based on academic areas or career interests. They all advocated for early advertising to enlist mentors and mentees, early training, and a guide to use.

Mentees also advocated targeting certain students for the program, such as those who scored low on entrance tests. They suggested that mentors should be interviewed to be sure they will relate well to students. While one mentee suggested simply matching mentees and mentors by last name, the other mentees said matches should be made on majors and locations and by personality even, if possible. All but one mentee said mentoring should be voluntary for students and all but one mentee said females and males should be kept separate in mentoring programs. The mentees had specific suggestions of how to match mentors and mentees. Several suggested having a get-together or workshop where mentees and mentors could interview each other as a way to choose mentors. An assessment or evaluation could be used for this process, said one mentee. Mentees also talked about the need to advertise the program to students and providing a flyer on the benefits of mentoring. The suggestions and recommendations from mentors and mentees on how to start a mentoring program were strikingly similar.

**The interactions.** Mentors and mentees cited the need for frequent and quality interactions. They both recommended meeting off campus and engaging out at dinner or attending cultural events. They were all interested in meeting as a group in a social or field trip setting. Echoed repeatedly was the need for both parties to be open and attentive to the other. Listening is key for mentors. Mentors should not be preoccupied with other things when they are with their mentees. Staying in touch is key for mentees. Mentors were frustrated and disappointed when mentees did not respond to their attempts at contact and would have liked more visits from mentees. Making an honest effort to establish and maintain a relationship, with

each member taking equal responsibility in the relationship, is paramount for both sides to benefit from the experience.

**Advice for mentees.** Mentors and mentees both advised mentees to be open and honest with their mentor, to bring questions, and to make good use of this valuable resource. Mentors said they believe the networking, encouragement, and support mentees received was helpful to mentees and mentees counseled new mentees to be sure to listen with an open mind to get the most they could from the experience. Mentees and mentors also offered that students should feel free to ask for a different mentor if their assigned mentor is not a good fit. The two pieces of advice that all mentors and mentees wanted to share with mentees was for them to be open to advice and to stay in contact with their mentors.

**Advice for mentors.** Mentees and mentors were very forthcoming on advice for mentors, saying many of the same things, but with mentors providing practical ‘how to’ advice and mentees providing more relational advice. Mentors warned new mentors to go into it without expectations, but with an open mind. They suggested mentors ask mentees what they hope to get out of the program and to learn all they can to be able to help mentees. Counseling type advice, such as observing body language, listening to what mentees need, meeting in a safe space, and exchanging personal information to establish a connection and a comfortable relationship was shared. Mentors also cautioned new mentors to be prepared for the sharing of delicate information from mentees and not taking it personally if the match is not a good fit. Challenges can arise if professional lines are crossed, so mentors also warned of sharing too much of their personal information and said to be prepared to deal with having a mentee in class. Being positive, responsive, and persistent, was the most common advice shared and, according to mentee responses, the most important behavior mentees need from mentors.

Mentees encouraged new mentors to reach out to their mentees, without nervousness, without an agenda, and without preconceived ideas or expectations. Most mentees noted that mentors should check in with their mentees often and not wait on their mentee to ask for help. They spoke of the importance of mentors getting to know their mentees, being good listeners, and mentoring from “the heart.” Mentees, they said, want their mentor’s wisdom, knowledge, time, encouragement, and concern. They also wanted consistency, one of the foundational elements for a good mentor-mentee relationship according to Erikson (1980).

**To make the program complete.** While the one-on-one mentor-mentee relationship is paramount to the mentoring experience and these participants derived a great deal from their part in the program, participants recommended going a step further to include group gatherings or events to complement the program. They suggested group meetings, parties, social events, field trips, team-building activities, and fundraisers. They advocated getting off campus for mentor-mentee meetings, but also for events to include everyone in the mentoring program. They suggested working to make the program a national organization, involving alumni and community members as mentors, providing certificates to mentors and mentees, and having a point system for mentees to be recognized at graduation. Mentees and mentors said they would like to feel part of a group by meeting with other mentees and mentors. This joining together would keep them from feeling “isolated” and allow them to share their challenges and accomplishments with each other, they stated. The feeling was that occasional group meetings would provide another important avenue for encouragement.

## **Snapshot of Ideal Program**

Nora and Crisp (2007) found that students receive psychological and emotional support, degree and career support, academic / subject knowledge support, and a role model as a result of mentoring. Mentee participants in this study confirmed support from each of the areas above in amounts corresponding to their and their mentor's commitment to the mentoring relationship. To successfully create and conduct a mentoring program that produces these results that have been shown to help students persist, mentors and mentees in this study recommend a voluntary program with careful matching, trained and guided mentors, and regular contact. The ideal is to have off-campus interactions and group activities for those in the mentoring program. However, the most important aspects of a quality mentoring program that makes students feel they matter and encourages them involves caring mentors who listen to their needs and give their time to help them succeed. Funding for going off campus and planning events would accentuate a mentoring program and the literature on student success does state that rituals help tie students to the institution (Schlossberg, 1989). However, the one-on-one connection is the most important to mentees and their success (Starr, 2014). As one mentee said, "mentoring is giving a gift." Table 6 gives a comparison of what the mentors and mentees suggested for various stages of the mentoring program and process.

Table 6

*Summary of Participant Suggestions for a Model Mentoring Program*

Program Stage/Area	Mentor Suggestions	Mentee Suggestions
<i>Advertising for Mentors</i>	-InService -Recruit individually	-Faculty recruitment -Paid time to mentor
<i>Advertising for Mentees</i>	-At admissions process -Orientations -Club Round Up (Student Life event) -Put out flyers / posters	-Orientation -Email -Club Round Up -Meet-and-greet social
<i>Mentor Selection</i>	-Vet on seriousness about mentoring -Require training	-Vet on seriousness and maturity -Vet on knowledge
<i>Mentee Selection</i>	-Most said to keep to female mentees -Demographics of highest need	-Most said to keep to female mentees -Based on need
<i>Training</i>	-Require training before program start -Provide easy-to-find resources	-Provide expectations for program -Provide benefits of program
<i>Matching Criteria</i>	-Program of study -Campus Location -Don't assign (take) too many mentees	-Program of study -Campus Location -Personality inventory
<i>Areas of Need</i>	-Study skills -Career decision-making -Encouragement -Leadership	-Study skills -Career research -Time management -Encouragement
<i>Relationship Building</i>	-Mentees need to listen (take advice) -Mentors need to listen -Ask questions	-Mentors need to listen -Mentees need to listen (be open-minded)
<i>Time</i>	-Twice a month -Mentees should check in (reach out)	-Weekly or bimonthly -Random check-ins
<i>Communication</i>	-Share mentoring stories (issues, successes, suggestions) -Have regular meetings	-Share resources -Check in often -Highlight program
<i>Extra Activities</i>	-Workshops: social activities	-Social activities; field trips

## **Relationship of Results to Theory**

The main theoretical framework for this study was mattering and marginality theory, supplemented by the student development theories surrounding self-efficacy, career decision-making and motivation. The theories used to explain what took place in this mentoring program during its first year and discussed at length in the Chapter II literature review reflected the support given to the mentees by their mentors in this program and the personal development that took place on both sides of the relationships. Students were made to feel that they ‘mattered’ and several were brought in from feeling marginalized at the institution to feeling that they belonged and fit in. The same effect was also occurred for several of the mentors to various degrees. Self-efficacy, career decision-making, and motivation were also increased significantly for the mentees, as reflected in their stories of feeling more in control of their situations and more self-assured of their ability to be successful. Mentors also shared interesting stories of their own personal development and feelings of greater confidence in and motivation to engage in more mentoring service. The mentoring relationships strengthened both mentees and mentors, encouraging them to do more for their own future success and fulfillment, as well as in service to others.

### **Mattering and Marginality - Theory Supported by Data**

The theoretical framework of mattering and marginality theory describes the experiences of the mentees in this study and the resulting effects of those experiences. Interestingly, to this researcher, it also describes the experiences of the mentors interviewed and helps to explain some of the unexpected results of their experiences, such as their increased satisfaction with work. The mentor-mentee relationships were found to be dynamic, symbiotic, and with far reaching implications, largely due to the effects of mattering. More than any other theory

reviewed, mattering most fully describes both the experiences and the effects of those experiences of the mentees and mentors interviewed.

Nancy Schlossberg's work on mattering and marginality has to do with whether people feel they fit in, whether they belong in a place or situation, whether they feel it matters to others if they are there, and whether they believe anyone cares about them (Schlossberg, 1989; Schlossberg, 2011; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989). Marginality is the other end of the importance continuum. People who feel marginalized or marginal feel they do not matter to others, they do not fit in, that they are not valued. Schlossberg relates these feelings to times of change, a student entering a new school or a person moving to a new town, for example. She explains that it is important for students to become a part of the college community, to form connections so they will not feel marginalized. According to this theory, students need to have relationships with people at the college who they believe care about their success. In this way, they feel they matter to someone and their existence is validated. This is similar to Emile Durkheim's anomie theory and Vincent Tinto's student engagement theory, both of which stress the importance of people feeling connected and valued by those around them (Durkheim, 1897/1951; Tinto, 2006). Schlossberg took the work of sociologist Morris Rosenberg (1979) on mattering and its influence on individual actions, added to it, and applied it to what college students experience (Schlossberg, 1989). She also used her transition theory to show the importance of feelings of support from people and organizations when students are in transition and working to make decisions on their choice of major and career (Schlossberg, 2011; Workman, 2015). Her work demonstrates the need to help students feel they matter and belong. The mentoring program here confirms Rosenberg and McCullough's and Schlossberg's mattering dimensions of attention, importance, ego-extension, dependence, and appreciation.

**Attention.** The attention construct of mattering simply means that one feels that another is interested in them and that they are viewed as important enough to give of their time. Mentees expressed feelings of happiness that they had someone – their mentor – acknowledge them and their needs. The one negative case was a bad mentoring experience because the mentor did not give her mentee her undivided attention when they were together. The most effusive comments from mentees were from those whose mentors spent a great deal of time with them. The range of satisfaction levels from the mentees reflected the attention mentors paid mentees and the frequency of their interaction. Mentees stated dissatisfaction when their mentors were not in contact and gave lack of contact as their chief complaint.

Mentors also appreciated attention from their mentees. When a mentee stopped by unexpectedly to see her mentor and when another mentee was enthusiastic about giving a testimonial about her mentor for a special event, these mentors enjoyed the attention and recognition. They appreciated being valued. Mentors expressed dissatisfaction when their mentees did not stay in touch. However, mentors felt validated when their mentees wanted to visit with them and sought out their advice. Rather than any complaints of mentees taking up too much of their time (and some mentees did use their mentors quite regularly for support), mentor satisfaction correlated positively with time and attention from their mentors. This need for, appreciation of, and satisfaction from receiving attention from their mentor or mentee correlates to the research on mattering by Rosenberg, McCullough, and Schlossberg, as well as that of many student engagement theorists (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Rosenberg & McCullough, 1979; Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981; Schlossberg, 1989; Schlossberg, 2011).

**Importance.** The second construct, importance, involves mentees feeling that someone cares about their welfare, what they want, what they need, and what they do. Believing that one's success or failure and one's happiness matters to someone else makes one feel important. Mentees with the highest satisfaction told stories of how their mentors remembered them on special days, worked with them on school projects or events, and helped them figure out their majors. One mentee was appreciative of the school assistance her mentor provided, but intimated that she would have felt more important to her mentor had her mentor have asked about her life outside of school and her plans after leaving the college. She wanted help with more than just her class work. Mentor follow-through made mentees feel important. The converse was also true. Mentees said they wanted more time and attention with their mentors and that they wished their mentor would check in on them more often.

Mentors found that they felt more important at the college because their mentees sought them out for guidance and help. They felt needed. Additionally, several of the mentees formed close relationships with their mentors and developed a concern for their wellbeing. They described friendships that meant a great deal to them. When mentors were unavailable, as away on vacation or in Europe with a fiancée for the entire summer, mentees missed them. The need mentees had for their mentors and their concern for their happiness made the mentors feel they were important, and, thus, that they mattered. The more mentors were able to help their mentees, the more they expressed feelings of importance.

The feeling of importance that both mentees and mentors experienced due to the attention given them by the other and the status of the mentors by virtue of their elevated role further validates the work of Rosenberg & McCullough (1979, 1981) and Schlossberg (1989). It also confirms the work of researchers, such as Sheila Marshall (2011) who found that mattering to

others increases self-esteem, as does feeling one's life has meaning. Feelings of belonging at the institution have been shown to relate positively with student satisfaction and retention, making this mattering construct particularly important as an impetus to creating a college or university mentoring program (Coles, 2011; Crisp, 2010; Rodriguez, 2015; Thompson, Orr, Thompson, & Grover, 2007). It is important to note here and throughout the study findings that this study was of a female mentoring program and that there has been little research conducted on single-gender undergraduate mentoring programs between staff and students, especially at two-year colleges. It is possible that the results could be different or less pronounced without the sole female factor. This is an area where additional study could further illuminate the effects of mentoring on feelings of importance and the other mattering constructs depending on gender (Crutcher, 2007; Ensher & Murphy, 2011; Jacobi, 1991; Lockwood, 2006; Nora & Crisp, 2007; Strayhorn & Saddler, 2009).

**Ego-Extension.** The third mattering construct of ego-extension refers to a connection between how our successes and failures make another feel. It denotes the close connection between people who are genuinely happy for each other's happiness and feel badly about each other's disappointments and difficulties. Ego-extension was very apparent in the mentor-mentee relationships. Mentors expressed joy when their mentees enjoyed success. One mentor glowed with pride and happiness when describing her mentee winning an award in an art contest she suggested her mentee enter. She remarked over and over what the award meant for her mentee, how it was so helpful in boosting her mentee's confidence and validating that she did have talent. Another mentor expressed satisfaction describing how her mentee had overcome personal obstacles to persist in college. Graduation was a special day of pride for mentors, but also was a mentee passing a class that had proven especially difficult. The mentors expressed the feelings

of pride, disappointment, and satisfaction over what happened to their mentees and what their mentees achieved or failed to achieve.

This identifying with their mentees is comparable to the way loving parents share in their children's happiness and sadness. When a mentee was having trouble at work, her mentor felt badly for her and worried about her. When another mentee did not do well in her anatomy class, her mentor was disappointed. Because the mentors cared about their mentees, their mentee's successes and disappointments resonated with them. The time they spent with their mentees was an investment. The mentors understandably felt happy when their time with their mentees seemed to 'pay off' and disappointed when their mentees did not take their advice or work as hard as needed to make high grades. Several mentors mentioned pride at their mentees persisting through life trials. Beyond the time investment, the closest mentor relationships had an emotional investment. This identification of mentors with their mentees' accomplishments and failures made mentees feel they mattered. They felt important enough for someone else to be affected by what happens to them. This feeling of importance and validation, increased mentee confidence. Knowing that their progress mattered to their mentees gave mentees another reason to push themselves to achieve. They wanted to make their mentors proud and not let them down. Knowing that their mentees cared if they were proud or disappointed in them gave the mentors a feeling of importance.

A beautiful example of ego-extension and how much it can mean for both mentor and mentee is the auto ethnographic study of a dissertation student and his chair. In this true tale of learning challenges, teaching and learning frustrations, and eventual success, Gearity and Mertz (2012) chronicled an often torturous description of the dissertation process from the eyes of the student and the committee chair. It is, in effect, a mentor-mentee relationship, and the ego-

extension that takes place comes through clearly in the student wanting to please his chair (mentor) and the chair (mentor) profusely proud of her protégé (mentee) by the time of the dissertation defense. Their bond was forged so strongly through the trial of dissertation work that they later collaborated on this project about their experience. This example of ego-extension played out in several of the mentor-mentee relationships from this study, supporting this construct of ego-extension to feelings of mattering and satisfaction and resulting student persistence. This bonding and parent-child like caring between the mentors and mentees further confirms the research that has shown meaningful relationships in higher education to increase student retention and persistence (Crisp, 2010; Jacobi, 1991; Rodriguez, 2015; Tinto, 1993; Tovar, 2013; Webberman, 2011).

Additionally, and what should be of interest to higher education administrators, this ego-extension part of mattering from the mentor's perspective can increase staff and faculty retention. Job enrichment comes from forming meaningful relationships and performing meaningful service that is appreciated (Daft & Marcic, 2011; Herzberg, 1966; Herzberg, 1976; Herzberg, 1987). Mentor remarks on the satisfaction they received and pride they felt from mentoring confirm the power of meaning in and appreciation for work to employee satisfaction and retention. The mentoring experience here even made the mentors want to engage in more mentoring (i.e. more service to the college).

**Dependence.** The fourth mattering construct, dependence, refers to the degree to whether we feel others are dependent upon us. Though the extreme end of feeling needed or depended upon, is burdensome and stressful, a healthy amount of feeling needed makes one feel that they matter. Knowing another is dependent upon us makes us feel useful, needed, and valuable. Students who feel someone or some group at the institution depends on them, such as

a student club or organization, feel they matter because they are needed. Often students who are otherwise unhappy and unmotivated will keep going because they feel necessary to the success of another person, group, or project (Schlossberg, 1989). The feeling that their mentors wanted them to do well lends itself to this feeling of dependence as related to ego-extension. One mentee gave her low point, for example, as having to report bad news on how she had done academically, regretful of disappointing her mentor. However, this construct more directly applies to the mentors in the program who felt their mentees depended upon them.

The dependence mentors perceived from their mentees made them feel needed and valued. Feeling needed is a natural human need and desire; it makes people feel they contribute and, thus, have a place in their organization or society in general. Studies have shown that feeling needed at work gives people meaning, helps them feel connected, and is beneficial to one's psychological well being (Jung, 2015; Smailagic & Wiggin, 2013). The mentors interviewed all expressed the beliefs that that they were of help to their mentees, that they contributed to their mentee's success, and that these feelings made them happier at work. One mentor said, "I have a purpose; I feel I am contributing." Feeling needed made them feel important, and when mentees showed appreciation for their help and guidance they felt validated even more. This feeling of mentors being depended upon by their mentees and its effect on mentors has not been studied broadly to date, especially at the undergraduate level.

**Appreciation.** Appreciation is the fifth construct that Schlossberg added to the original mattering dimensions of Rosenberg and McCullough. This last area of mattering simply refers to the feeling that one's efforts are appreciated and it played a major role in the satisfaction of both mentees and mentors in this program. Mentees were appreciative of their mentors time and efforts and appreciated being recognized by their mentors for their efforts to persist. The

recognition that their mentors understood and appreciated their hard work was evident from several mentees who stated they believed their mentors were proud of their accomplishments, their persistence, and their ability to overcome difficult obstacles to obtaining a degree. Some mentees stated in the program survey and some in their interviews that they were just happy and appreciated having someone to talk to.

Mentors stated their happiness, their own appreciation, when their mentees told them they appreciated their help. Some said appreciation from mentees was their high point. One mentor gave her high point as her mentee wanting to talk about her at a special college event. Even beyond appreciation from their mentees, though, was the appreciation mentors had towards their mentees and the opportunity of the experience for making them feel better about themselves and their work. They expressed a feeling that they were stronger, better, more productive, and more valued as a result of being a mentor and they were appreciative of these positive enrichments to their personal and professional lives. Both mentees and mentors stated they wanted to become mentors or mentor more as a result of the experience, mentees wanting to ‘pay it forward’ and share their experience with others and mentors wanting to continue to receive the benefits of serving in this role.

### **Self-Efficacy**

Self-Efficacy, the extent to which one “believes he or she is capable of accomplishing a task under certain conditions” (Bandura, 1997) was increased for both the mentees and the mentors as a result of their experiences in this program. There was an increase in confidence explicitly stated or shared by example with almost every mentee and mentor interviewed. Providing information and helping students to feel more aware of their resources, options, opportunities, and responsibilities was an aim of the program. Helping students to feel more

confident about their ability to succeed was discussed occasionally in the abstract by the mentors, but became a reality as a result of the personal relationships that developed. Mentees talked not only about specific help they received, but also related with effusion of how they were now more confident, stronger, more outgoing, more adaptable, more prepared for life, more cheerful, more in-control, more future-oriented, more open-minded, and more positive. The encouragement factor was a major source of strength for the mentees, but simply providing guidance on what to do and where to go was extremely empowering to them. This imparting of what results in encouragement and self-efficacy has been found as very important to provide to college students at every step of the way, from their initial college adjustment, to the encountering of more demanding classes and projects as an upper-classman (Kitsantas, Winsler, & Huie; Lynch, 2008; Pajares & Schunk, 2005). Just as self-doubt is a defeating mind-set because it leads to inaction, self-efficacy is a predictor of success because it spurs the individual to action and feeds their persistence (Austin, 1978; Bandura, 1986, 1998; 2001; Bratman, 1999). To paraphrase Louis Pasteur's famous quote that "chance only favours the mind which is prepared" (cited in Bartlett, 1992, p. 502), students succeed because they are primed to succeed. The assistance that the mentors gave their mentees by observing what their mentees were doing and what they needed, by helping their mentees to reason out and reflect upon their options and imagine their success, by challenging them to do more and be more, by pushing them to make decisions, and providing them the information and encouragement to persist through their challenges helped them to develop the 'prepared mind' for success.

Interestingly, the mentors also increased in self-efficacy, as they learned of the power they had to help others on an individual basis. They were empowered by empowering their mentees. Mentors stated they wanted to get more involved in the college and with students after

mentoring. They wanted to mentor more and at other places, such as their alma mater. They also said they grew and improved in various ways, such as becoming more expressive of compassion, more mindful of others, more understanding, less judgmental, more open-minded, more positive, and stronger. Some mentors said that mentoring increased their leadership abilities, as well as their knowledge base, and helped them to communicate their own challenges better. The mentor responses of how they personally improved due to the experience seem very similar to those of the mentees. Though there has not been enough research conducted on the effects of mentoring on the mentors, there is evidence that increased self-efficacy of faculty and staff aids in their career retention, leadership abilities, and job satisfaction. (Cabaroglu, 2014; Ghosh & Reio, 2013; Pfitzner-Eden, 2016; Riggs, 2000; Strapp et al., 2014).

### **Career Decision-Making**

Helping students make career decisions was one of main objectives of the mentoring program. While the mentors did not engage in formal programming specifically designed to help mentees decide on or investigate their majors and career options, they did talk about these important areas and provide guidance on an individual basis, often at the request of their mentees. This study revealed that mentees did want and need a great deal of help from both career and academic advising and they felt comfortable receiving such from their mentors. The mentees who rated their experience highest reported that their mentor helped them find information on majors and careers, listened to them as they went through the decision-making process, and supported them when they felt they should make a change. The assistance mentors provided in fostering the motivation and ability for their mentees to make a career decision is vital for student academic success (Johnson, Nichols, Buboltz, & Riedesel, 2002; Kiener, 2006; Thompson & Feldman, 2010). Mentees confirmed the literature when they said that it helped

them to have a safe and understanding person on campus whom they could discuss their academic and career plans.

The most involved mentors did what a career course instructor or a career counselor would do with students, question their plans, question their reasoning, give them tips, pointers, information, and assist them with making contacts, researching transfer schools, and giving job advice (Reardon & Fiore, 2014). They also gave them a great deal of encouragement and boosted their confidence, helping them to see they could achieve and should aspire to strong goals. In this manner mentees were able to envision a better future and believe in their ability to set and accomplish goals. This goal-setting and planning inspired many of the mentees, giving them a more positive outlook and motivating them to persist, even through some very difficult personal issues and academic set-backs. Their responses to career aid bears out what the career literature has found. Students need a strong belief in a career goal and the possibility that they can reach it in order to have the stamina to persist in college, especially when they face many challenges at home and in school (Chien, Fischer, & Biller, 2006; Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1987; Osborn, Howard, & Leierer, 2007).

Another very powerful way that the mentors in this study helped their mentees with their career decision-making was in serving as a role model and a vision of the future. Often students from working-class backgrounds, as the majority of these mentees are, do not have a 'future orientation' that helps them to sacrifice now for better opportunities later (Argyle, 1994; Skeggs, 2004; Willis, 1997). Even though they have gone to college to better themselves, college students from lower-economic backgrounds, often first-generation college students, have been found to lack an understanding of what majors can be used for different careers, what the job market is like, and the importance of using resources, such as the college career center

(Greenbank, 2009). These students often have many incorrect assumptions and go more by what those closest, like family, tell them versus seeking out expert advice. Having a mentor they felt comfortable confiding in and seeking help from, gave these mentees a resource, an example, and a safe place to explore career ideas. A common theme was mentees praising their mentors for helping them decide on a major, choose a transfer school, and become involved in activities to bolster their career prospects. None of the mentees interviewed noted receiving career help from anyone else on campus, making their mentors a vital part of their career planning. This career decision-making help is especially significant in view of the large body of literature that points to student career indecision or poor choice of major as a contributor to low motivation to persist and student attrition (Folsom et al., 2002; Graunke & Woosley, 2005; Soria & Stebleton, 2013;

### **Motivation**

Motivation to persist in college was found to be a result of the mentees' mentoring experiences due to several factors. Mentees reported an increase in personal confidence from working with their mentors - they forged a connection, a relationship, at the college that gave them a sense of security, adding to their confidence. They became clearer about their academic major and career goals, and they were generally happier at the institution. These and other related factors made mentees feel more positive and, thus, stronger about their ability to succeed. Self-efficacy theory and studies have shown what these mentees expressed, that having the confidence that they can overcome obstacles makes it more probable that they will overcome their individual challenges to their college persistence (Bandura, 2006).

Researchers have found strong evidence that the more one has a resilient sense of efficacy, belief in self and one's potential, the more one can attain, and the same has been found for career decision-making efficacy (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996;

Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001; Earley, 1993, 1994; Gibson, 1995; Lent, Brown, Nota, & Soresi, 2003). These students expressed an increased belief in their ability to choose the right career and to succeed academically as a result of time learning from and being encouraged by their mentors. They showed by their learning better time management and decision-making that they increased their ability to self-regulate, which means reflecting on their actions, setting specific goals, seeking help, and utilizing various learning strategies, all areas enhanced by high quality mentoring (Kitsantas, Winsler, & Huie, 2008). Improved motivation came from increased mentee confidence that came from mentors sharing study tips, helping mentees to set goals, celebrating successes, working through challenges and disappointments, and being role models by sharing their challenges and how they persisted. Mentee testimonials of how setting goals and feeling more competent helped them focus more on their studies and future career further confirms the research on goal theory, self-evaluation, self-determination, and persistence, correlating stronger self-efficacy and goal-orientation with greater academic success (Burt, Young-Jones, Yadon, & Carr, 2013; Ciani et al., 2011; Giota, 2006; McCollum & Kajs, 2007).

### **Mentoring Summary of Effects**

There was no doubt that the mentoring experience benefited every mentee interviewed. Even the negative and the two mediocre mentee experiences were not a waste of time. Every mentee, including the few who did not have the best mentor experience, reported that they learned from the experience and that it made them better in some manner. None of the mentees interviewed said they wish they had not had a mentor or would not enter the program or a similar program again. Ideally, mentoring should help the student in a range of ways, and the results of this pilot mentoring program did not disappoint in showing how both the college students and

their mentors grew and were enriched from their experiences. As described when addressing the research questions, mentees received help, developed greater confidence in themselves and their ability to persist, learned to set goals, and received a great deal of encouragement from their mentors, encouragement that gave them the strength to get back up after a failure or disappointment and to push through difficult circumstances. The mentors also benefited greatly, reporting a better awareness of student issues, increased satisfaction and fulfillment in their jobs, and more confidence in their ability to help others. Mentoring has been touted as a way to provide students with emotional, as well as practical support, and this study adds to the current literature that recommends quality mentoring as a means to boost student success and mentor growth (Coles, 2011; Gabriele, 2010; Osborne, 2015; Webbermann, 2011).

An often overlooked area and issue for community college students, yet one that can make or break their ability to persist to graduation is their understanding of the hidden curriculum. This awareness of academic expectations, resources, how to request help, how to schedule classes, how to follow a program of study, how to be successful with class assignments, how to set goals, how to navigate the bureaucratic web that can often impede the progress of students, and how to advocate for oneself are often unknowns to college students. Mentoring programs have been found to be ideal resources to teach students the hidden college curriculum (Duggal & Mehta, 2015; Hubbard, 2010; Martin, 2014). As related by Buffy Smith in her text of mentoring at-risk students through the hidden curriculum of colleges and universities, mentoring programs can help students learn the college “norms, values, and expectations” they need to know in order to be successful (Tyson, 2014). The mentors and mentees in this program related a great deal of transference of the hidden curriculum by how mentors communicated to their mentees the best way to study, to ask for help, to deal with professors and administrators, and

how to operate in the bureaucracy of higher education. These mentors helped their mentees acculturate into the college by providing honest and practical feedback, advice, and information.

Perhaps the greatest overall benefit to mentees and mentors was a greater sense of belonging they experienced at the institution as a result of the mentoring program. The relationships forged, the referrals mentors provided mentees to others at the institution, and the fact that they were attached to a program at the institution helped mentees and mentors feel more connected to the college. Research has shown a sense of belonging at the institution to correlate positively with student retention (Alford, 1998; Hausmann, Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Schofield, & Woods, 2009; Soria & Stebleton, 2013; Tovar et al., 2009). The one-on-one relationship students form with a significant person at the institution, such as their mentor, has been found especially important for fostering this sense of belonging (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Soria & Stebleton, 2013).

As noted earlier, an unexpected benefit of the mentoring program was the greater work satisfaction of the mentors from feeling more connected to students and, thus, the institution and feeling that what they were doing was making a positive difference. Though there has not been much research conducted on what mentors experience, what has been reported confirms that mentors benefit from the interaction in ways similar to their mentees (Adedokun, Dyehouse, Bessenbacher, & Burgess, 2010; Busch, 1985; Campbell & Campbell, 1997). The mentor participants in this study related considerable intrinsic benefits to serving as mentors.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

With high college attrition rates and the reasons for student departure, especially in the first term, ones that mentoring has strong potential to mitigate (academic unpreparedness, difficulty with time management, adjustment problems, lack of goals, career/major uncertainty,

feelings of not belonging, etc.), it makes sense to consider mentoring programs as a means to help students become more college ready and feel they matter at their institutions (Busteed, 2014; Crisp, 2010; Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000; Fajana, & Gbajumo-Sheriff, 2011; Osborne, 2015; Tinto, 2001). It also makes good sense to work toward helping employees feel important and valued. Feelings of mattering help retain students, faculty, and staff by increasing self-esteem, providing social support, and connecting them to the institution as a significant part of the community (Elliot, Kao, & Grant, 2004). Mentoring has been found to be reciprocal in benefits for mentees and mentors in various ways and a tool to retaining all participants, so it is worth examining its use and best practices as a development, retention, and success program (Ghosh & Reio, 2013; Leadership Series: 'How To' for Mentoring. Part 1: An Overview of Mentoring Practices and Mentoring Benefits, 2016).

Based on recommendations from the mentees and mentors interviewed in this study and best practices from the mentoring literature, anyone starting a college mentoring program should create a mentoring program and resource mentor guide that includes a minimum of the following items in Figure 11 and ensure the discussed steps below are taken for creating and operating a meaningful college mentoring program that will suit the needs of the population targeted, as well as the mentors enlisted to serve.

## **Mentoring Program Steps**

- I. Create a Mission Statement & Objectives/Goals
- II. Provide Your Definition of a Mentor & Define Mentors' Role
- III. Create a Facebook Page or Website
- IV. Decide on Whether to Include Group Activities
- V. Decide on Matching Criteria
- VI. Recruit Mentors
  - a. Share Rewards of Mentoring
- VII. Provide Mentoring Best Practices & Training
  - a. First Meeting
  - b. Frequency of Meetings
  - c. Quality of Meetings
    - i. Making Mentee Comfortable
    - ii. Listening
    - iii. Observing Body Language
  - d. Provide Referral, Academic, & Career Resources
  - e. Making Your Mentee Feel They Matter
  - f. Cautions
    - i. Maintaining Professionalism
    - ii. Making Referrals When Warranted
- VIII. Decide on Mentee Demographic
- IX. Decide on Mentee/Mentor Contract
- X. Recruit Mentees
  - a. Share Benefits of Having a Mentor
- XI. Match Mentors and Mentees
  - a. Send Match Announcement and Contact Info. to Mentors & Mentees
- XII. Create Mentor Program Newsletter
  - a. Highlight Mentee & Mentor Accomplishments
  - b. Share Enriching Opportunities
  - c. Announcement Mentoring Events/Socials
- XIII. Email Mentors Reminders & Items to Share with Mentees
  - a. College Deadlines
  - b. Consistency of Mentee Meetings
  - c. Academic & Career Tips
- XIV. Create Surveys & Evaluations for Mentors & Mentees
  - a. Ask Mentees & Mentors Their Needs (for help and for training)
  - b. Survey Mentors & Mentees for Improvement Suggestions
  - c. Think about Holding Focus Groups for Feedback
- XV. Hold Periodic Training (and Refresher Trainings)

*Figure 11.* Mentoring program steps

## **Institutional Support**

For any mentoring program to achieve its potential and be able to continue from year to year, it must have the support of the administration. A recognized program coordinator is essential. To be able to complete the necessary tasks of recruiting mentors and mentees, developing and overseeing training, matching mentees and mentors, maintaining communication, organizing events, requesting feedback, maintaining records, filling in for absent mentors, completing an evaluation of the program, publicizing results of the program, garnering support and new members, and possible grant writing to secure program funds, an individual must either be paid or receive release time from normal job duties (Putsche, Storrs, Lewis, & Haylett, 2008). This support will need to come from the institution's administration, leadership that recognizes the immense benefits that mentoring can bring students and the institution as a whole. Ideally, this coordinator would be full-time or part-time, depending on the size and scope of the program, but at minimum the role should not be voluntary, as a program run solely by volunteers leads to inconsistency, lack of follow-through, lack of assessment, and vulnerability of the program's ability to continue term after term. At an institution the size and in the location of the one studied here, a full-time position with the average salary of \$40,000 and a budget of less than \$10,000 could do wonders. A model of what can be accomplished with institutional backing is The University of Alabama's doctoral mentoring program that was able to hire a coordinator, allowed for mentors and mentees to apply for travel grants to present their research, provided food at events to encourage attendance, and acknowledged mentors' service on their website (Holley & Caldwell, 2012). Such support, even on a relatively small level, can mean a great deal for program sustainability, member involvement, recruitment of new members, member satisfaction, student success, and publicity of the program that can, in turn, be a cost-effective

recruitment and promotion tool for the institution itself (Fountain & Arbreton, 1999; Yates, 2005).

There is also the simple practicality of time that seldom allows an all volunteer group to take care of tasks that should be covered in a quality mentoring program. Even if grant or other funds are used to sustain the program, the administration must recognize the importance of the program and assist as needed when a coordinator or funding is required. Without the ability to sustain a time commitment and incentives for participation supplied by the institution, mentoring programs have little chance of succeeding long-term (Law et al., 2014). Additionally, with institutional backing, it will be easier to enlist mentors for the program, as they will see it as something that administrators support and will be likely to reward (Parise & Forret, 2008). At minimum, mentoring service should be taken into consideration when reviewing tenure for faculty, performance reviews for staff, and merit increases and professional development opportunities for either. Such rewards for service to the institution would go a long way toward increasing the equity and career opportunities for dedicated employees, especially women who often take on such important, yet more behind the scenes, rolls that often go unrecognized (Thomas, 2014). On the honor roll of great colleges to work for are listed the smart practices of promotion of professional development, mentoring, staff autonomy, a focus on practices that encourage student success and achievement of their academic and career dreams, an environment that fosters employee dedication, self worth, institutional ownership, recognition, and organizational pride, all attributes that can be tied to the implementation and results of mentoring programs that benefit students and staff (Coles & Institute for Higher Education, 2011; Diverse Most Promising, 2015; Great Colleges to Work, 2015; Tierney, Corwin, & Colyar, 2005). Convincing administrators to put funding support behind a mentoring program should not be

difficult once they are educated on the studies that show mentoring to increase student persistence, academic achievement, and professional skills (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Terenzine, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996; Schlosser, Knox, Moskovitz, & Hill, 2003).

### **Define Purpose of the Program**

Though mentoring is in practicality a holistic endeavor because it is likely that every aspect of the mentee's life may be fodder for discussion, advice, and development, it is helpful to establish a main focus or foci so both mentors and mentees will have a clear understanding of what can and should be provided in the relationship. The purpose and goals of the program provide material for advertising to mentees, for explaining roles to mentors, for planning training, and for evaluation. The program studied here set out to focus on providing academic and career help to students, for example. Study tips, college guidance, and the psychosocial support of encouragement and a campus advocate were also seen as important to provide to mentees. While engagement with a caring member of the institution is a worthwhile goal in and of itself, establishing specific aims can make the program more powerful in effect and understandable to potential mentees, mentors, and supporters (Community College Survey of Student Engagement, 2009; Hoffman, 2014; Johnson, 2006; Pascarella, 1980). In order to make sure the concerns of mentees are met, it may be helpful to survey mentees as to what they would most like the program and their mentors to focus. This female mentoring program surveyed mentees as to how much need they had of help with career goal planning, balancing work and family life with their academic goals, learning about resources to help with academics, career planning, and personal success, job acquisition knowledge and skills, and emotional support and confidence building (see Appendix V). Such a survey to the population to be mentored or the

mentees already enlisted in the program can be extremely helpful in putting energy and resources where students can most benefit. A clear purpose based on both theory-based and proven needs and practices, as well as student reporting, will provide needed direction, goals, frameworks for activities, areas of assessment, and specific strategies for student development (DuBois, Holloway, Balentine, & Cooper, 2002; Miller, Drury, Stewart, & Ross, 2005).

### **Develop a Recruitment Plan**

It is important to think about who you want to have in the mentor program and who you want as mentors. Can anyone participate or do you want to limit mentees to a certain demographic such as first-generation students or single-parents? Both mentors and mentees suggested that a specific student demographic of high need, such as working mothers or first-generation students, be targeted because mentors are limited in this program. If your mentor numbers and resources are limited, narrowing down a specific group of students to accept as mentees may be a good strategic move, at least at the start of your program. It is also crucial to determine qualifications for mentors before starting a mentor recruitment campaign. Do you want mentoring open to all who are interested or do you want to establish personal criteria or completed training before mentoring? These are very important details to decide before jumping head first into recruitment of either mentors or mentees.

However the mentee and mentor selection is decided, it is recommended by the participants in this study and by experts in the mentoring field that mentoring participants be voluntary, as forced relationships are seldom begun with the openness and positive intention as are those entered into freely (Capps, 2010; Harrington, 2011). Expectations and benefits should be clearly delineated at the start so the relationship will be entered with both seriousness of commitment and anticipation of positive effects (Ramani, Gruppen, & Kachur, 2006). Mentees

in this program suggested telling potential mentees of the benefits of having a mentor. The same should be done for potential mentors. Testimonials from current or past mentees can be a great source of ‘advertising’ to recruit future mentees, so maintaining contact information on mentees is important. A plan for recruiting participants and marketing the program will help ensure its success (Jucovy, 2001). As with most things, the best advertising is positive word of mouth. Faculty and staff mentors can mentor newly recruited mentors, sharing what they have learned in their mentoring experiences. This method of recruiting was successful for the program studied here, as the mentors were able to testify to mentor prospects of the personal rewards they received from mentoring.

**Mentors.** Though some mentoring programs are mixed-gender and they can be highly successful, it is recommended to match mentees and mentors in a new college student program with the same gender. The female mentees in this study stated they were more comfortable with a female mentor and felt that a female mentor could relate better to their issues. Though there is some debate as to whether a single-gender model is best, female mentoring programs have been found to be successful and provide a female role model for the student, often providing them the assurance that they can overcome female specific challenges (Lockwood, 2006; McCarthy, 2015; Poor & Brown, 2013; Rhodes, 2013; Lenz, 2014). If there is the time and flexibly, a survey could be conducted among potential student mentees to determine their preference of their mentor’s gender. However, because many community college students already have a difficult time speaking up to ask for help and may not be comfortable with a mentor of the opposite gender, as the majority of the mentees in this study stated, it is recommended to use a same-gender model (Flynn, 2015; Smith, 2005).

Though it may be tempting to welcome anyone who wants to join the mentor ranks, it is imperative to screen and train mentors before they accept their first mentee. As much good as quality mentoring can do for students, bad mentoring can do harm and leave the student much worse than if they had not had a mentor (Kumar & Blake-Beard, 2012; *Study examines qualities*, 2013; Yuan, 2016). The mentees from this study echo the literature that cautions programs to make sure mentors wish to work with a mentee for the right reasons, that they are motivated from the heart. The one negative case from this study is evidence of how a mentor who seemed more interested in a resume listing than a mentoring commitment defeated the purpose of mentoring and all its potential benefits to the student. It is prudent to give prospective mentors a survey before they enter the program that asks them why they wish to mentor and to specify what they can commit to in terms of training and time with their assigned mentee(s). Making clear the expectations prior to accepting a mentee could help avoid cases of negative mentoring, as well as start mentors out with appropriate plans for a quality mentoring experience.

**Mentees.** It may be necessary to narrow the selection of mentees based on the potential size of the mentoring program. If the group wishes to target a specific demographic of students, choosing a group that can use extra help, either with academics or emotional support, may be prudent. First-generation students who need guidance in navigating the college environment, low-scoring students who need extra study skills, an at-risk minority group, or single-parents who may need extra encouragement and emotional support are groups who would derive great benefit from mentoring (Miller, 2010; Phinney, 2011; Schmid & Abell, 2003). Many of the mentors and mentees in this program felt it would be good to limit mentees to an at-risk or high-need group, and doing so can be cost-effective in terms of results from expended resources (Bettinger, Boatman, & Long, 2013; Phinney, 2011). However, the intention and goals of the

program should first be considered, along with the general student population of the institution, before limiting the mentees to a narrow demographic. Assumptions are often made about which students need the most help without basis in fact. From my time in education, my work as an advisor, and most especially as one who set up the first mentor matches and then interviewed mentees, I learned that it is not always apparent from afar which students are most in need and which could benefit the most from mentoring. As Terri, a Caucasian mentee, put it, “there is a minority in the majority,” meaning that there are non-minority students who grew up in a lower socio-economic state and could benefit greatly from mentoring. If the mentoring program is voluntary, as suggested by those in this study and the mentoring literature, it makes sense to try to serve all students who make the effort to reach out and request a mentor.

Another factor to consider when deciding on which students to include in a mentoring program is whether one’s group wishes to work with gifted or academically strong students. That was not the case with this program, as it was based at a community college and involved open enrollment. Some students were naturally academically stronger than others, but there was no screening of academics or other criteria for program participation. However, it is worth noting that academically gifted students also need help with career direction and personal development and can benefit greatly from mentoring (Muratori & Smith, 2015). Such students would be ideal for STEM mentoring programs, programs focused on career planning, leadership development, and programs that involve research with faculty mentors, though by no means would such programs need to include only students seen as gifted or academically strong (Kendricks, Nedunuri, & Arment, 2013; Little, 2010; Priest & Donley, 2014). The point is that the mentoring program’s mission should dictate who should be invited to join and the program planners should be careful about not excluding students who could benefit greatly from a mentor.

## **Create a Training Plan**

Training should take place before mentoring begins and continue throughout the program, with follow-up sessions and feedback sessions where mentors can compare their experiences, sharing what worked well, as well as challenges and problems encountered. Training should include the purpose of the program, the benefits to mentees (academic, career, and psychosocial support), the benefits to mentors (professional and personal growth and personal and career fulfillment and satisfaction), the benefits to the institution (increased student satisfaction and retention), expectations of mentors, and best practices for interacting with mentees, and resources. Ethical behavior and boundary setting discussions are particularly important when mentoring undergraduates, as students are vulnerable to those in power positions who may not have their best interests at heart or the maturity to act in their best interests (Anderson & Shore, 2008). Initial and subsequent mentor training sessions should allow time for mentor discussion, as these meetings can result in important bonding, feelings of community, understanding of purpose, and a sense of commitment and engagement in the mentoring program (Putsche, et al., 2008). Training materials should be posted on a shared site (website, shared drive, or other source available to all mentors). Part of training should also include what should take place if the mentor leaves the institution or needs to drop out of the mentoring program so that mentees are not suddenly left without a mentor or an explanation.

Mentors in this program stated they thought prior training to mentoring was important. Indeed, best practices in the mentoring literature advocate for careful screening of mentors, prior training and guidance, and availability of ongoing training and resources (Campbell, Smith, Dugan, & Komives, 2012; DuBois et al., 2002; Hobb & Stovall, 2015; Lyons & Pastore, 2016). Though initial and on-going training sessions were held, some mentors were disappointed they

could not attend due to class or other commitments. Training should be held at various times and recorded, if possible, so that all mentors can participate. What the mentors in this program seemed to crave, and enjoyed the few times they were able to have it, was time together to compare notes, share stories, and ask for suggestions. This may be the best type of on-going training and, indeed, reflects what Cynthia Sipe (1996) found to be the most effective mentoring training by reported by mentors, that of the mentoring process itself with the time to discuss experiences with other mentors.

**Online mentoring.** If the mentoring relationship is to take place via an online mode, particular safeguards should be adhered to for protecting mentee privacy. Though the mentees and mentors in this study preferred face-to-face meetings to online communications, it was utilized in this program when a mentor and mentee were at different campuses and meeting in person was too difficult to arrange and in another case when the student was taking only online classes. E-mentoring may be the only way to mentor online students and it can be very effective, if done well. Online mentoring, and even mentoring that involves some online communications, should be addressed in training and mentors and mentees should be made aware that what is said in this medium cannot be guaranteed to remain private, though every attempt should be made to ensure such (Diaz, 2015; *Ensuring quality in online*, 2016; Imbriale, 2013).

The students in this study derived great benefits from the in-person emotional support they received from their mentors, so online mentoring would not be the preference for a program such as this that wanted to focus on relationship building and personal encouragement. Nor would a totally online mentoring program be appropriate if students and mentors wanted to have events and social activities. However, online mentoring is likely to grow due to the increase in online degree programs and classes and the increasing logistical difficulty of meeting face-to-

face (Columbaro, 2009; Karcher, 2006; Lach, Hertz, Pomeroy, Resnick, & Buckwalter, 2013).

This form of mentoring provides a flexible mentoring option, is well suited to targeted goals, and has been found to be effective in helping certain student groups persist (Harris, 2012). Though the impact of online mentoring has not been assessed to the degree of face-to-face mentoring programs, such programs have seen success in helping students determine their career path, cope better with school and life challenge, and increase their decision-making abilities (Berg, 2010).

**Mentor support.** As part of training and continuous mentor support, mentors should share their stories. Getting together in person and via teleconferencing was very important to the mentors in this program. This mentoring of the mentors via sharing, encouragement, and feedback is recommended as one of the most helpful ways to help mentors grow in their skills and confidence (Coles & Institute for Higher Education, 2011; Sipe, 1996). A confidential online chat could also be set up to discuss mentee problems and successes, always protecting the identity of mentees, with the opportunity to offer suggestions to one another. Training should include resources for dealing with mentees of various identities and aspirations, regardless of sexual preference, career goal, cultural background, academically under-prepared, etc. Training should also include discussions on setting boundaries.

Mentors in this study expressed concern over how to deal with mentees in their class and the fear of showing preferential treatment. Maintaining a professional relationship, not meeting in places or behaving in ways that set a poor example for mentees, and holding mentees in class to the same standard as other students are the types of discussions to have and guidelines to set in order to safeguard that only a proper and beneficial relationship develops. It is also important to provide a clear guide of how to communicate with mentees along with real examples. As Dana Anderson and Wendelyn Shore (2008) emphasize when discussing undergraduate mentoring

programs, creating a relationship of trust, making the mentee's needs the priority, having pure motives for mentoring, maintaining accessibility, and maintaining professional boundaries are essential for healthy mentoring relationships. Mentors may need also to be coached in maintaining a positive approach as they work to motivate and support their mentees with high expectations and encouragement. It needs to be well understood by mentors that believing in their mentees helps their mentees believe in themselves and, in turn, increases their potential for success (Vance, 2009).

### **Matching**

As put by Schunk and Mullen (2013), "Mentoring relationships are socialized learning partnerships focused on protégé's interests and growth." Therefore, it is best to pair mentors with mentees who are interested in the same academic or career area as the mentor's expertise. It is also important to take into consideration cultural world-view and expectations for the mentoring experience, as such expectations affect satisfaction and ultimate mentee benefits (Cox, Yang, & Dicke-Bohmann, 2014). Though there have been few studies on the role of personality in mentoring relationships, a matching process that takes into account personalities of mentor and mentee may be beneficial (Ragins & Kram, 2007). This can be done using personality or interest assessments. The best method of identifying what each mentee wishes to gain from the mentoring relationship is to ask mentees to rank in order of importance the common areas of mentoring (academic, career, emotional, etc.) and ask mentors to complete a similar inventory that asks what areas they feel most comfortable addressing with mentees (Putche et al., 2008). A mixer where mentees can choose their mentor was suggested by some mentees in this study and this matching based on personal chemistry has been suggested by the researchers Yamada, Slanetz, and Boiselle (2014). Similarly, some successful mentoring

programs use a luncheon to facilitate the matching of mentors with mentees (Poor & Brown, 2013). The program in this case study asked mentees to answer a survey on their needs, which was helpful. However, this survey was anonymous. An individual mentee survey that includes questions on mentee interests would be more helpful for matching mentees with mentors, especially with mentors taking a survey on their strengths and interests for mentoring.

Perhaps most importantly for long-term mentee and mentor satisfaction, both mentee and mentor roles should be voluntary. Students forced into a mentoring program are not as likely to be receptive to mentor advice, or as open with their feelings and needs. Research shows that some students will not be interested in a mentor or psychologically receptive to the benefits of a mentor (Lunsford, 2011). Mentors forced to take on the extra job of mentor may feel resentment of the additional, yet unpaid, job, and not as open to training as they would if they had accepted the role voluntarily. As shared by Parise and Forret (2008) in their work on mentors' perceptions of the benefits and costs to mentoring, when mentoring is voluntary it is viewed as a more rewarding experience.

### **Build a Relationship**

In order to form a relationship that will create a beneficial mentoring relationship, mentees and mentors need to spend an adequate amount of time together and be consistent in their contacts. Mentees need time to communicate their needs and problems, mentors need time to ask questions and share of themselves, and the pair needs relaxed time to get to know each other. The more time mentee and mentor spend together, the greater the academic, career, and psychosocial benefits the mentee will realize (Noe, 1988). This time of a quality nature is essential for making mentees feel that they matter, as mentees must perceive that their mentors care about them in order to develop a sense of belonging (Ogan & Robinson, 2008).

The first meeting should be one of establishing the purpose and goals of the relationship and setting forth expectations and meeting plans, as well as getting to know each other. Listening is key, especially in the first meetings, in order to determine what mentees most need from the mentoring relationship. Participants in this study said that it helped them to get to know each other on a personal level before diving in to discuss issues of academic and career needs. This is also a good time to be upfront and clear about the amount of time that the mentor has available to give to the relationship, a conversation that is very important for creating clear expectations and a relationship of trust and respect (Moak & Walker, 2014). A commitment of a minimum of six months is necessary to form such relationships, but 12 months or longer relationships produce stronger and more positive results for mentees (Coles & Institute for Higher Education, 2011; DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, and Cooper, 2002; Foster, 2001; Sipe, 1999). Mentees and mentors in this case study who were the most enthusiastic about their relationships and the results of their mentoring experiences reported the highest frequency of meetings.

Establishing consistent times to meet is important in building and maintaining a connection, as is doing things together that involve more than the college environment and the mentee's role of student. Mentees and mentors recommend getting out of the office setting for some sessions. It was more difficult for the mentees who could not meet their mentors away from their mentor's workspace to develop a personal relationship. All of the participants that were able to get off campus to have relaxed time together agreed that it was very helpful for their building their relationships and the mentees who did not have such experiences expressed a desire for them. (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Putsche et al., 2008)

## **Celebrate**

Mentees and mentors in this program recommended having social events, parties, and events where everyone gets to meet each other. They seemed to want to share their challenges and successes, to create a support group beyond their one-on-one mentor-mentee relationships. Activities that bring the mentees together may increase the success of the program since peer relationships are significant for female college students' support and retention (Frey, Beesle, & Miller, 2006). Some mentees suggested a point system and recognition of participating in the mentoring program at graduation. Public mentee and mentor recognition was minimal in the program studied here. Some mentors and mentees were highlighted in a display at the new president's inauguration, but there was little else to encourage participation from mentors and mentees and to reward their work. There was an electronic newsletter that went out to the mentees and mentors, which would have been a good place to highlight individual accomplishments by mentors and mentors and provide a mentee-mentor spotlight section. This would be one easy way to help those in the program get to know more about each other, as well as provide personal recognitions. Such acknowledgement and celebration of the mentoring relationship has great potential in encouraging both parties and fostering an interest and excitement even from potential mentors and mentees (Parise & Forret, 2008).

## **Plan for Closure**

Though there does not necessarily have to be an end to the mentoring relationship (some mentors and mentees form friendships that they maintain past the college years), it is smart to plan for an end to the relationship and facilitate closure that is positive to each party. Graduation or mentee transfer to another institution is a wonderful time to officially signify the end of the formal mentoring relationship and should be celebrated with something of significance (a small

gift, special words of advice, a lunch out, for example) to the mentee. In the mentoring program studied, some mentees found satisfying closure when their mentees attended their graduation and gave them a parting gift. Having a mentor group party or outing at the end of each term right before graduation would also be a good way to signify the transition of ending the mentoring relationship, as well as provide the peer social support the mentees crave. One way to let the mentee know that the mentor still cares about their well-being is for the mentor to point out that they are passing them on (transferring them) to others who can nurture them in the development of new skills (Cheatham, 2010).

### **Evaluate**

Any mentoring program needs monitoring and regular evaluation to ensure it is providing for mentees and mentors what was promised and to make sure the program's goals are at the fore of mentor interactions and activities (Coles & Institute for Higher Education, 2011). To understand if the program has met goals set out in its purpose and determine if changes or improvement should be made, an assessment should be undertaken yearly. As with any learning endeavor, it should have desired outcomes that can be measured. The program in this study used a survey of yes, no, choice, and open comment questions to determine satisfaction with the program and the mentee's mentor and to ask mentees how they would make the program better. This was very helpful for a first year evaluation, but a more targeted evaluation based on specific program goals would be beneficial for determining if the program increased student success and in what areas.

There are many good assessment tools from student development theory that could supplement program satisfaction surveys. If career decision-making is the main goal of the program, Nancy Betz's Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy scale would be helpful to give to

mentees pre and post mentoring (Betz & Luzzo, 1996). If general self-efficacy is the goal, a scale like the College Self-Efficacy Inventory may be appropriate (Evans, 2013; Wernersbach, Crowley, Bates, & Rosenthal, 2014). If the goal is to help the mentees feel they matter to the institution and create a greater sense of belonging, an institutional tailed version of the College Mattering Inventory is recommended (France & Finney, 2009; France & Finney, 2010; Tovar, Simon, & Lee, 2009; Schlossberg & American Council on Education, 1990). Custom surveys that ask objective, specific, and open-ended questions are also helpful in evaluating individual mentoring programs.

The mentors in this program expressed that they felt a purpose in working with their mentee(s). This work brought them a great deal of job satisfaction and fulfillment. The experience was one of personal development, in both information learned and skills gained. The increased abilities, contacts, and knowledge made the mentors feel more confident, increasing their self-efficacy. The mentors felt they mattered more, both to their mentee(s) and to the college. This feeling of mattering made the mentors happier, an important factor in employee retention (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 2010). Similarly, the mentees in this program received assistance in terms of information and advice, and even more importantly from their standpoint, a great deal of encouragement to persist. This increase in their knowledge, contacts, and support, led them to keep learning and to try new things. This increase in personal development led to greater self-efficacy, the confidence that they could learn, achieve, and succeed. The mentees felt that they mattered because of the attention, time, and caring given them by their mentors. As the mentees expressed and the results show, feeling they mattered, with the strong encouragement that went with such a relationship, led the student mentees to persist and to their retention at the institution (Tovar, 2013). When planned and implemented

with intention and best practices as a guide, college mentoring programs should provide assistance, encouragement, and personal development for mentees. They should bring purpose, fulfillment, and personal development for mentors. The experiences of both mentees and mentors should result in increased self-efficacy, feelings of mattering, and retention for both mentees and mentors at the institution, as displayed in Figure 12.



Figure 12. Mentoring matters graphic

### Limitations

Limitations of this qualitative case study to outside generalization and use overlay the specifics of the case itself and the purpose of the study. This study was devoted to revealing the experiences of mentees and mentors in a two-year college female mentoring program at one specific institution. The purpose of studying this specific program was to understand those particular relationships and provide data for improvement of the program. The researcher had an interest in the program, having worked to start and coordinate the program. However, before embarking on the study the researcher separated herself from any coordination, planning, or participation in the program. Semi-structured confidential interviews with mentee and mentor participant volunteers created the majority of the data analyzed. While there is always the

possibility of the interviewees wanting to please and, thus, offer overly positive responses, the researcher had no power or influence over the interviewees and there were a range of satisfaction levels revealed, including one very negative experience. Participants were encouraged to give honest answers, even if they resulted in negative commentary on their experience, in the interest of providing helpful research information for this new mentoring program. The participants seemed very interested in helping the program to improve and were very forthright for that purpose. One mentee who had only an average experience stated for her final comment in her interview, “I would like to see this program grow and be better.” Though she did not receive all that she would have liked from her experience, she cared about the institution and believed the mentoring program could be good, so she tried to offer constructive criticism.

Though a quantitative survey could have been created to use with the participants, the use of open-ended questions and the ability to ask follow-up questions allowed for greater depth of responses from the participants and resulting understanding from the researcher. Excitement, disappointment, glowing expressions of pride, and tears flowing when discussing one’s mentee or mentor would not have been witnessed if a survey had been used. Without seeing and hearing the unbridled responses from the participants it would not have been possible to understand how deeply important so many of these relationships were for both mentees and mentors. Additional comments and revelations would not have been shared if the questions had required only selecting from choices in a list, numbers on a scale, or even short answers. Emotions of gratitude, relief, pride, fulfillment, and even hurt would not have been conveyed if the participants had not been able to tell their stories as they wished. The ability for participants to say whatever came to mind produced greater quantity and quality of responses than would have resulted without the personal interview.

Limitations to the study were few. Though a few mentees that stated interest in interviewing did not follow through on scheduled interviews, the goal of 20 mentee interviews and saturation of data was reached. The goal of 10 mentor interviews was exceeded by three and saturation of data was also reached from that group. However, artifacts to use in triangulating the data were not as plentiful or useful as hoped. Additionally, some of the mentoring meetings, which were to be used for the same purpose, were held via an electronic format that resulted in few members attending and little covered in the meetings. It should also be noted that the participants were all volunteers and, thus, could have had different experiences or reactions than those who did not interview.

The mentees interviewed represented over 23% of the mentee population and the mentors interviewed represented over 32% of the mentor population. However, the fact that they answered the request to interview and followed through when others did not could make them different in some way or mean that they had a stronger reason to share their experiences. Additionally, the mentoring program was but a year old at the time interviews were conducted. Mentors were both excited about the program and largely uncertain of what to do, so this study only a year out from the start of the program provides a unique snapshot of the mentees and mentees figuring out their roles as they go. However, it can be argued that mentoring relationships can be generalized. The human needs described in Schlossberg's mattering and marginality theory and correlated in this study are the same regardless of mentee demographics or time in a mentoring program. Specific goals of mentoring may vary in specialized programs, but the basic mattering needs of attention, importance, ego-extension, dependence, and appreciation that are highlighted in this college mentoring program can be related to other mentoring programs, especially those in colleges.

Though the results from this study could be used in creating or examining any mentoring program, I do recommend using the results with caution when looking outside the female to female relationship. As Gloria Crisp (2010) found in her extensive study of the impact mentoring has on community college students, females tend to experience more “psychological, degree, academic, and role model support” from college mentoring. Gender differences could affect mentee expectations, interpretation of mentor behaviors by mentees, and mentee satisfaction with what they received from the relationship. Similarly, male mentors may react differently than female mentors with female student mentees. Though most have been done on workplace mentoring, studies on gender and mentoring have revealed differences between what males and females want in a mentoring relationship (Darling, Bogat, Cavell, Murphy, & Sánchez, 2006; Ragins & Scandura, 1994; Young, Cady, & Foxon, 2006). The research is very inconclusive regarding gender and best mentoring outcome, as some studies show females wish to be paired with females, as did the females in this study, and greater satisfaction is often stated from the same gender match, but other studies show outcomes are not gender based (Blake-Beard, 2011).

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

There is much one can study about mentoring programs, especially those in the college setting, and there is need for more research in this area because the popularity of mentoring as a relatively inexpensive student retention program is growing. The majority of mentoring program research has been conducted with youth programs (i.e., Big Brother, Big Sister, Communities in Schools, and Across Ages) and work-place mentoring designed to promote both organizational and career success, though such research is still very lacking (Goulet, Jefferson, & Szwed, 2012; Rhodes & Dubois, 2004; Rollins, Rutherford, & Nickell, 2014; Tovar, et al., 2009; Washington,

2010). Research on college mentoring programs is in relative infancy, especially at the two-year level, but increasing as more colleges and universities are starting their own mentoring or success coach programs (Coles & Institute for Higher Education, 2011; Hu & Ma, 2010; Rhodes, 2008). The eight-year-old mentoring conference at the University of New Mexico in 2015 epitomized both the excitement for every brand of mentoring and the need to learn more about how to do mentoring. Mentoring is a wonderful student intervention and retention tool, but it is also something that can harm students and the institution if not undertaken with care and oversight.

I am very satisfied with the results of my research, feeling the data gathered provides support for continuation of the specific mentoring program studied and helpful feedback for improvement. However, there are several ways that study of this program or another college mentoring program could be enhanced. If I were to study this program again, I would give the mentee participants the College Mattering Inventory (see Appendix X) as a pre- and post-survey. This validated instrument would provide a strong quantitative supplement to the interviews and provide a measurable indication of change in mentee feelings of mattering at the institution (Tovar et al., 2009). I would adapt the College Mattering Inventory to a shorter, applicable version for the mentor participants to also gauge any level of change in their feelings of mattering to the institution from before their mentoring experience to after they mentored in the program. This measurement would help the institution evaluate the effect of the mentoring program on students and employees and could serve as a guide toward any needed changes to make both groups feel more valued at the institution. There is little research on how mentoring affects mentors, thus this is an important area ripe for in-depth study. There is also a need for more study on the effects of gender on mentoring. Because this type of student interaction is so

personal and involves serving as a role model, it would be helpful to better understand the implications of matching mentees with mentors of the opposite gender. It would also be helpful to examine the structure, process, and results of mentoring in different geographical regions, as the willingness to share personal aspects of one's life varies depending on the culture of the area. Comparing two-year, four-year, and graduate mentoring programs, as well as those focused on student demographics, would also be helpful, as each institutional level and student background comes with its own challenges, advantages, and mentoring needs. Greater study and examples of how best to select, vet, train, and monitor mentors is also needed in order to provide the best mentoring programs possible and to avoid negative situations that could harm students.

I believe the questions asked of mentees/mentors encouraged broad answers with plenty of room for participant elaboration and elicited the information I wanted to learn. However, the following questions to mentees could increase the richness of the participant answers:

1. Can you describe any ways your mentor or your experience of having a mentor has influenced you in altering a decision or doing something in school, work, or home differently;
2. Why do you believe your mentor chose to serve as a mentor in this program;
3. Did you notice any changes in your mentor throughout your time together;
4. How would you react to being asked to become a mentor to a college student or in another capacity, such as to a youth or at your work;
5. How would you rate mentoring programs as worthy of the time from mentors and mentees; and
6. How would you feel about the student activity fee being raised to fund a mentoring program at the college?

These questions could be appropriately adapted for use with mentors, as well. Additional questions I would like to ask mentors are

1. Are there any ways you can describe that your mentee has changed during your time together;
2. What other activity, job, or role would you compare to your mentoring experience;
3. Can you describe your relationship with someone you would call a mentor to you;
4. What would be your opinion on compensation for mentors, either through pay or work release;
5. Why do you believe students need mentors; and
6. What is the hardest part about mentoring?

### **Conclusion**

It is well-known throughout the research over the past 50 plus years that students need guidance to be successful in college, especially in the first year and especially if they have personal challenges, uncertainty of career choice, and competing priorities (Astin, 1984, 1999; Tinto, 1993, 2012; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). It has also been documented that mentoring can provide needed guidance, encouragement, a sense of community, and support to enhance academic success, especially with community college students who have little time to integrate academically and socially due to work and family responsibilities (Lightfoot, 2000).

It is easy to argue that female mentoring programs are important to consider in higher education when recognizing that women are still not provided pay equal to their male counterparts and women are still not selecting higher paying careers, such as those in STEM (Rafter, 2016; *Why STEM fields*, 2012). Women also still tend to take fewer highly visible

positions with responsibility in business and government and assume more responsibility for the home (Northouse, 2012; Sandberg & Scovell, 2013). With the challenges that many female students face in trying to juggle work, home, and school or prepare for dealing with what can be multiple full-time jobs, mentoring can help these students to develop themselves, their strategies, and their coping tactics that will enable them to rise up without burning out (Northouse, 2012; Sandberg & Scovell, 2013; Sandberg & Scovell, 2014). The role model, advice, and encouragement of a mentor, especially a female mentor who has done or is doing what the female student is attempting in trying to improve her life situation while managing all her personal responsibilities can make the needed difference in the student's motivation to push through challenges.

Mentoring is powerful. If done well, mentoring can have an amazing impact on students, especially community college students who often do not integrate themselves into the college in other ways. As beautifully put by the special assistant for ethics and professional integrity of the Office of the Navy Surgeon General:

Mentoring is not about academic advisement...real mentoring is about entering into companionship in what is the inevitable vortex of human relationships at those junctures of human life that are most vulnerable...It is much like the image of Virgil who accompanies Dante throughout his journey into the Inferno. (Gabriele, 2010, p. 64)

Gabriele describes mentoring as helping the mentee who trusts in their mentor to serve as their mirror, to see who they really are and to help them discover how to improve and develop a practice of continuous improvement. This type of servant mentoring takes honesty, transparency, and the dedication to help another find their mission, their strength, and their best self. The mentors in this study who made the greatest impact on their mentees and received the most from their experience followed Gabriele's edit of non-maleficence. They also had the wisdom to look at themselves first. Their motives, their biases, their weaknesses must be

acknowledged before they can take on the task of helping others. Mentoring should be viewed as an honor and, as such, entered into with seriousness and commitment. This commitment can also go a long way toward retaining and eventually graduating students. It provides the social connectedness, psychosocial engagement, and psychological well-being that is vital for students to thrive in college (Schreiner, 2010). These mentees became more positive, more academically determined, more engaged in their classes, more connected to others at the college, and more interested in helping other students, matching each of the five factors of thriving in college as described by Laurie Schreiner (see Appendix Y). These mentored students became more involved in their coursework and gained self-assurance, validating research on the effect of faculty and staff mentoring on students (Kim, & Sax, 2014; Whiteing Williams, 2013; Wilson, Naufel, & Hackney, 2011). Institutions that do not look seriously at creating quality mentoring programs for their students are failing to use what could be their strongest retention tool (Busteed, 2014; Collier, Morgan, & Fellows, 2007).

Mentoring can involve a lot of programming. The bells and whistles that funding could provide, with resources and activities to connect students to the institution even more than the one-on-one mentoring relationship would be wonderful. But, this study showed that the simple one-on-one mentoring relationship can make a world of difference to students, to their academic, career, and life success. As the quote from one of the mentees conveys, mentoring can make a world of difference for a college student.

I would tell a new student to enter this mentorship program with high expectations, knowing...that they can feel comfortable and be safe, and that at the end of it, progress will be made. And, I'm pretty sure they'll be changed forever. (Mentee Winnie)

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APPENDIX A:

MENTORING PROGRAM OVERVIEW

AAWCC Mentoring Program Overview  
Georgia Highlands College

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**Objective of Program**

Provide one-on-one mentoring and group activities to enhance academic and career success of GHC female students.

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**Mission Statement**

The Mentoring Program's core mission is to offer support, resources, and educational opportunities that will increase the academic and career success of GHC female students through one-on-one mentor relationships, workshops, motivational speakers, and other inspirational and educational activities.

GHC's AAWCC recognizes the value of all individuals, the importance of challenging, supporting, and encouraging one another, and the symbiotic rewards of mentor relationships.

AAWCC strives to support female students at GHC, recognizing the unique challenges that female students encounter as they pursue college degrees and career advancement.

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**Goals**

In addition to emotional support and encouragement to persist in college, AAWCC mentors will focus on:

- Career counseling and planning
- Time Management Skills: Balancing work and family life with academic goals
- How to make best use of GHC's resources
- Job acquisition knowledge and skills
- Networking Opportunities
- Financial Counseling
- Leadership Skills
- Recruiting Mentees and Mentors

Source: Georgia Highlands College AAWCC Mentoring Program Mission Statement (Sept. 2014).

## APPENDIX B:

### OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

AAWCC: American Association of Women in Community Colleges  
(<http://www.aawccnatl.org/>)

Axial Coding: Crosscutting or relating concepts to each other (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 195).

Case Study: An in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system (Merriam, 2009).

Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy: The individual's belief that he or she can successfully complete tasks necessary in order to make career decisions (Taylor & Betz, 1983).

Coding: Deriving and developing concepts from data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 65).

Comparative Analysis: Comparing incident against incident for similarities and differences (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 195).

Concepts: Words that stand for groups or classes of objects, events and actions that share some major common property(ies), though the property(ies) can vary dimensionally (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 45).

Conceptual Saturation: The process of acquiring sufficient data to develop each category or theme fully in terms of its properties and dimensions and to account for variation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 195).

Constructivism: A social scientific perspective that assumes that people, including researchers, construct the realities in which they participate. Constructivists acknowledge that their interpretation of the studied phenomenon is itself a construction. We all co-create each other's reality because every interaction creates a context for the meaning we give to our environment (Charmaz, 2006; Lektorskii, 2010).

Cultural Capital: Can include social capital, aspirational capital, familial capital, and navigational capital and, in regards to higher education, refers to the student's beliefs, values, attitudes, support system, and knowledge base that aids in their access to, self-efficacy with, and ultimate success in achieving a degree (Rodriguez et al., 2000; Greene, Marti, & McClenney, 2008; Yosso, 2005).

Mattering: The construct of mattering refers to the perception that we are significant in our world and somehow make a difference. It is a dimension of the self-concept (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981).

Maximum Variation Sampling: Identifying and seeking out those with the widest possible range of characteristics of interest for the study – often involves looking for outlier cases to test patterns (Merriam, 2009; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

Mentee: One who is being mentored (Merriam-Webster, 2014).

Mentor: A trusted counselor or guide; a tutor or coach (Woolf, 1977, p. 718).

Mentoring: Many definitions exist. The closest general definition to fit this study is ‘A one to one relationship between a more experienced and senior person (mentor) and a new entrant or less experienced person’ (Haggard, Dougherty, Turban, & Wilbanks, 2011).

Motivation: Motivation is an internal state or condition (sometimes described as a need, desire, or want) that serves to activate or energize behavior and give it direction (Kleinginna & Kleinginna, 1981).

Pragmatism: A philosophy developed in the early 1800s that involves observation of natural behavior in natural contexts and believes research should ‘reconcile theory and practice’ and should be designed according to the circumstances (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 22).

Purposeful Sampling: Most appropriate sampling strategy for qualitative research – Researcher selects sample from which the most can be learned (Merriam, 2009).

Research Problem: The general issue or focus of the research (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 19).

Research Question: The specific query which the research is designed to address. The question(s) sets the perimeters of the project and suggests the methods to be used for data gathering and analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 19).

Saturation: Saturation is usually explained in terms of “when no new data are emerging.” But saturation is more than a matter of no new data. It also denotes the development of categories in terms of their properties and dimensions, including variation, and if theory building, the delineating of relationships between concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 143).

Self-efficacy: Beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments (Bandura, 1997, p. 3).

Transferability: The degree to which the findings of a qualitative study can be applied or generalized to other contexts or to other groups (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorensen, 2010, p. 501).

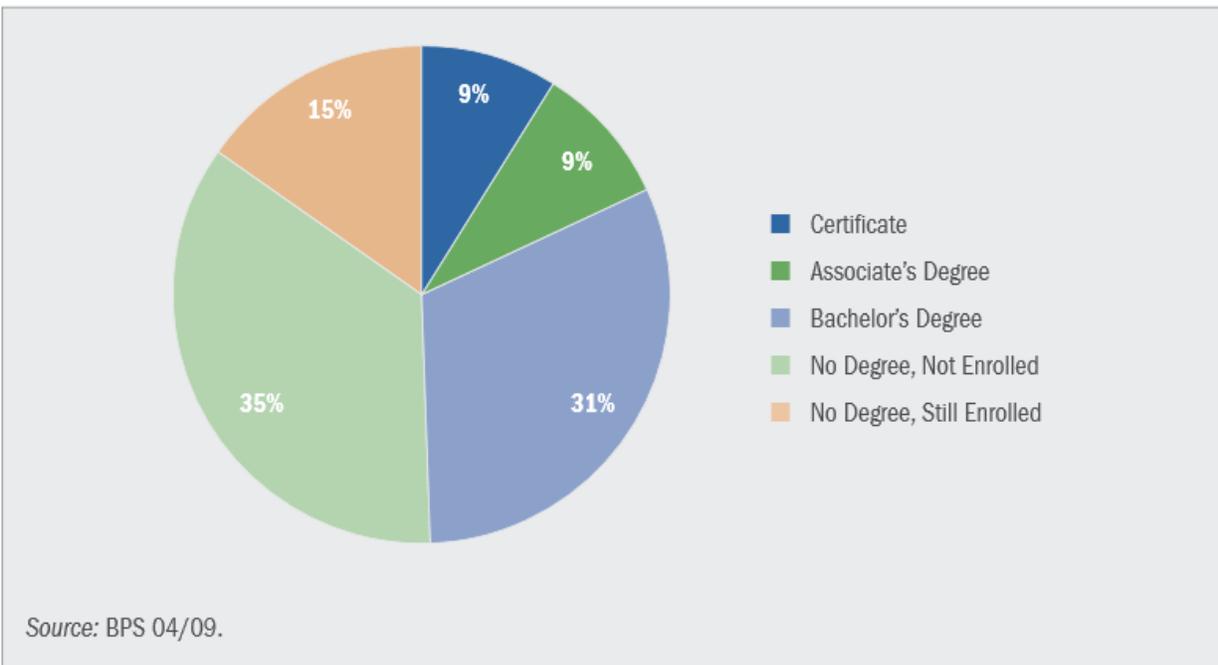
Triangulation: The use of different types of methods, researchers and or theories in a study in an attempt to maximize the validity of a study (Major & Savin-Baden, 2010, p. 183).

APPENDIX C:

THE ATTRITION PROBLEM

Thirty-five percent of new undergraduates in 2003-2004 who sought a degree or credential failed to complete one by six years.

Figure 1. Degrees and Attrition for 2003–04 Students by 2008–09



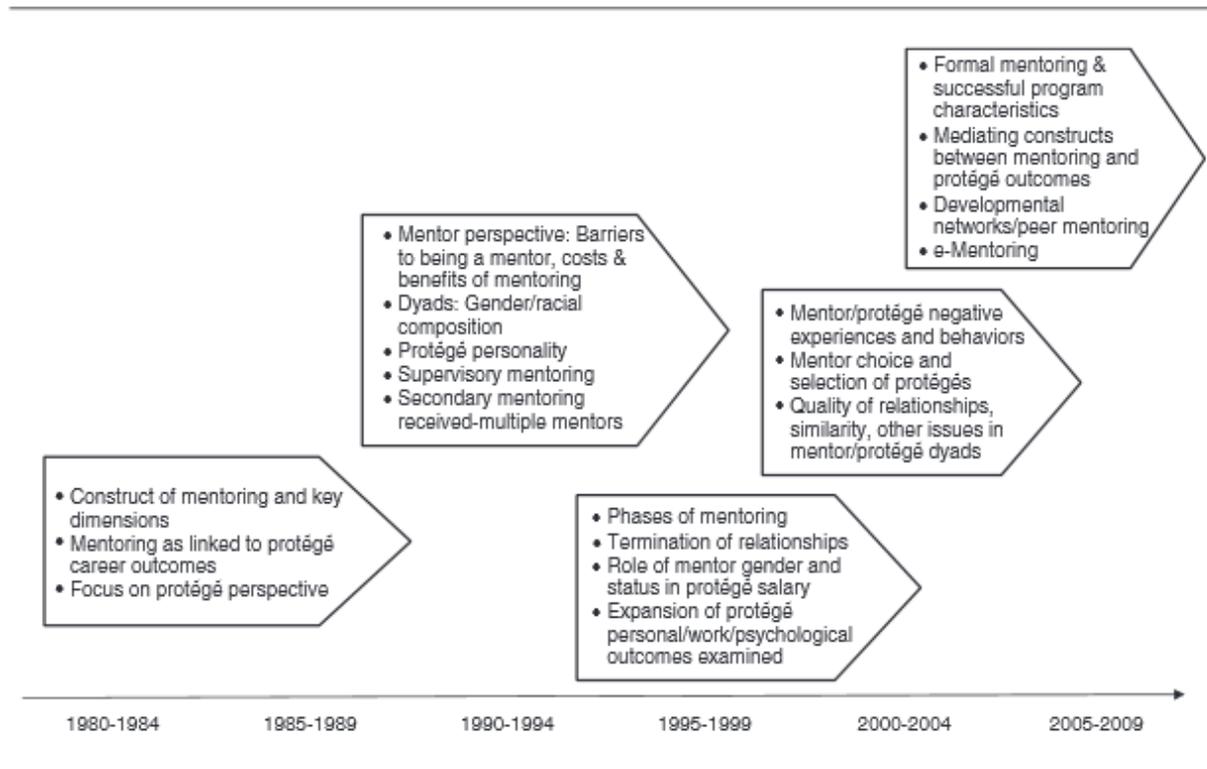
<sup>1</sup> Tables and charts that rely only on BPS data are taken from the public-use data interface available through PowerStats at <http://nces.ed.gov/datalab/>. Tables that are cited as BPS and Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) data used the restricted-use BPS data set, matched to the (nonrestricted) institutional-level expenditure data available in IPEDS. For more details, see the appendix.

Data Source: Johnson, N., & American Institutes for Research. (2012). The Institutional Costs of Student Attrition. Research Paper. *Delta Cost Project at American Institutes for Research*, p. 2

## APPENDIX D:

### SPAN OF MENTORING RESEARCH

#### Notable Topics and Developments in Mentoring Research across Time



Data Source: Haggard, D. L., Dougherty, T. W., Turban, D. B., & Wilbanks, J. E. (2011). Who Is a Mentor? A Review of Evolving Definitions and Implications for Research. *Journal of Management*, 37(1), 280-304. doi:10.1177/0149206310386227

APPENDIX E:

PHILOSOPHICAL ASSUMPTIONS FOR QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Assumption	Question	Characteristics	Implications for Practice ( <i>Examples</i> )
Ontological	What is the nature of reality?	Reality is subjective and multiple, as seen by participants in the study	Researchers uses quotes and themes in words of participants and provides evidence of different perspectives
Epistemological	What is the relationship between the researcher and that being researched?	Researcher attempts to lessen distance between himself or herself and that being researched	Researcher collaborates, spends time in field with participants, and becomes in “insider”
Axiological	What is the role of values?	Researcher acknowledges that research is value-laden and that biases are preset	Researcher openly discusses values that shape the narrative and includes his or her own interpretation in conjunction with the interpretations of participants
Methodological	What is the process of research?	Researcher uses inductive logic, studies the topic within its context, and uses an emerging design	Researcher works with particulars (details) before generalizations, describes in detail the context of the study, and continually revises questions from experiences in the field

Data Source: Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

APPENDIX F:  
CHARACTERISTICS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design

Natural setting (field focused), a source of data for close interaction
Researcher as key instrument of data collection
Multiple data sources in words or images
Analysis of data sources inductively recursively, interactively
Focus on participants' perspectives, their meanings, their subjective views
Framing of human behavior and belief within a social-political/historical context or through a cultural lens
Emergent rather than tightly prefigured design
Fundamentally interpretive inquiry – researcher reflects on her or his role, the role of the reader, and the role of the participants in shaping the study
Holistic view of social phenomena

Data Source: Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

## APPENDIX G:

### DAWSON'S 16 MENTORING DESIGN ELEMENTS

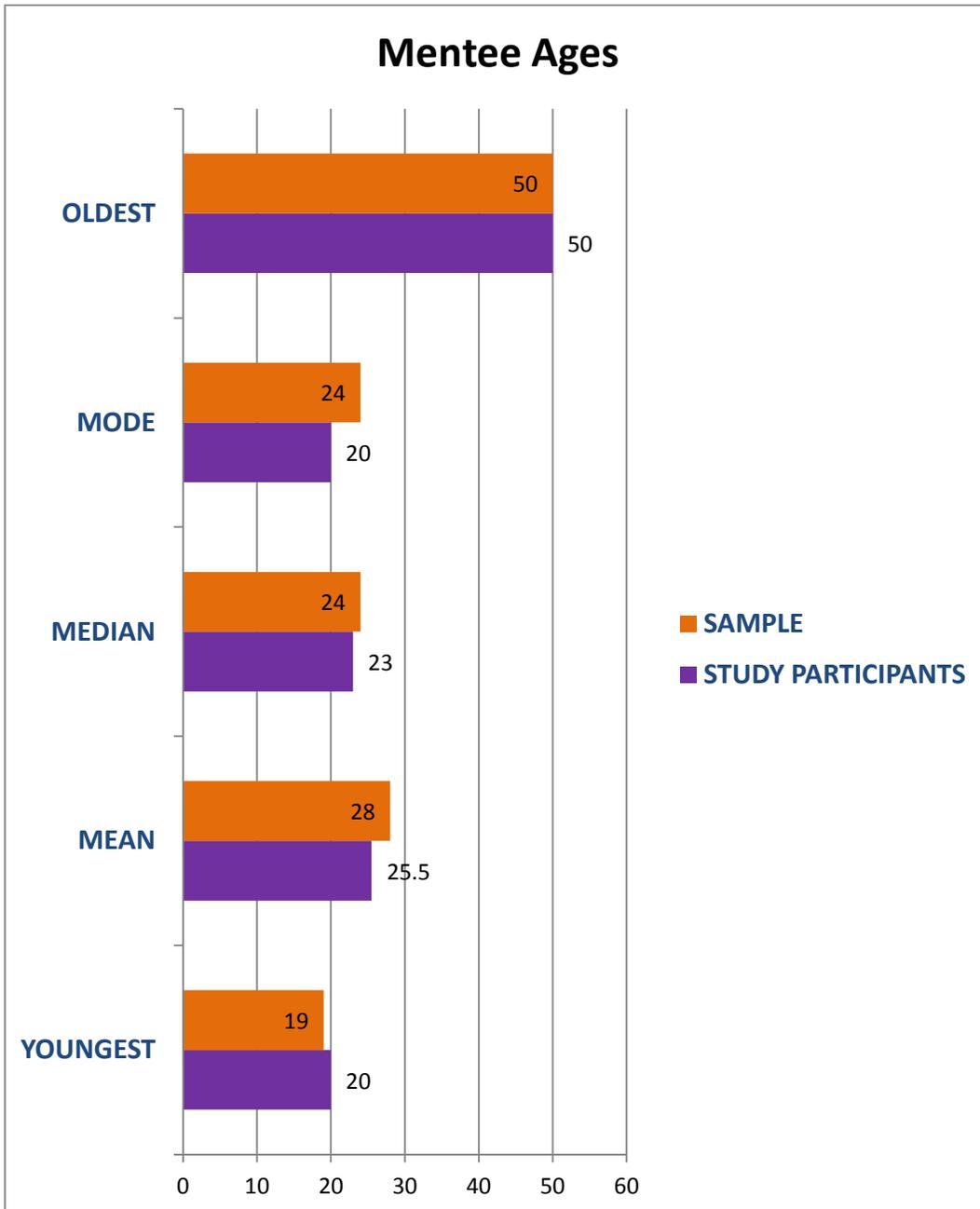
Element	Identified or Discussed In	Supplemental Instruction	Peer Assisted Teaching Scheme
Objectives: the aims or intentions of the mentoring model	Miller, 2002	Development of knowledge and academic skills specific to a unit of study, social skills, self-efficacy as learner	Improvement in mentee's student satisfaction survey results, development of teaching skills
Roles: a statement of who is involved and their function	Hawkey, 1997	SI Leader (mentor), students (mentees), SI Supervisor, lecturer/professor	Mentor, mentee, program coordinator, faculty learning and teaching leaders
Cardinality: the number of each sort of role involved in a mentoring relationship	Darwin & Palmer, 2009; de Janasz & Sullivan, 2004; Pololi & Knight, 2005	One mentor to many mentees	One-to-one
Tie strength: the intended closeness of the mentoring relationship	Higgins & Kram, 2001; Marsden & Campbell, 1984	Weakly tied	Strongly tied
Relative seniority: the comparative experience, expertise, or status of participants	Ensher et al., 2001	Step-ahead in terms of progress through degree (e.g., mentee is 1st-year; mentor is 3rd-year)	Step-ahead in terms of teaching excellence or expertise with a particular learning/teaching area
Time: the length of a mentoring relationship, regularity of contact, and quantity of contact	Noe, 1998	1 hr/week over a semester; leaders also prepare for sessions (1 hr/week) and attend lectures	Nine 1-hr sessions: 3 before semester, 4 during semester, and 2 after semester
Selection: how mentors and mentees are chosen	Ganser, 1995; Rose, 2003	Criteria for mentors: academic, interpersonal, and recommendation from faculty No criteria for mentees; however, SI is attached to "historically difficult" units of study, and mentees must be enrolled in unit	Criteria for mentors: excellent teachers; recommendation from learning and teaching leaders Criteria for mentees: volunteer; or unit of study in need of improvement
Matching: how mentoring relationships are composed	Hala, 2000; Jackson et al., 2003; Karcher, Nakkula, & Harris, 2005; O'Neill, Waller, & Sha, 2005	Mentee choice, timetable convenience	Criteria: same discipline; matching done by department head or by mentee choice
Activities: actions that mentors and mentees can perform during their relationship	O'Neill et al., 2005; Raabe & Beehr, 2003; Rickard, 2004	Flexible, recommended: group work, discussion, note-taking	Prescriptive: seven specific tasks, including setting goals, gathering informal student feedback, peer observation of teaching
Resources and tools: technological or other artifacts available to assist mentors and mentees	Gilbreath, Rose, & Dietrich, 2008; Kaja, 2002; O'Neill et al., 2005;	Mentor-designed worksheets, reference manual, stationary, meeting room	Workbook/manual available in hard copy and online form, peer observation instruments
Role of technology: the relative importance of technology to the relationship	Ensher et al., 2003	Non-CMC, although CMC adaptations are emerging in literature	CMC-supplemental
Training: how necessary understandings and skills for mentoring will be developed in participants	Kane & Campbell, 1993; Kasprish, Single, Single, Ferrier, & Muller, 2008; Pomeroy, 1993; Wang & MacMillan, 2008	Pre-mentoring 2-day face-to-face training	Pre-mentoring orientation/training meeting
Rewards: what participants will receive to compensate for their efforts	Ehrlich & Hansford, 1999; Schulz, 1995	Mentor: payment Mentee: increased mastery of content	Workload allocation, financial reward for improvement in student evaluations, improved teaching
Policy: a set of rules and guidelines on issues such as privacy or the use of technology	Ensher et al., 2003	Inherited policy from organizational context, statement of duties	Inherited policy from organizational context
Monitoring: what oversight will be performed, what actions will be taken under what circumstances, and by whom	Gaskill, 1993; Long, 1997	SI Supervisor observes initial sessions and provides feedback to Leader; written report provided to faculty at end of semester	Meetings with coordinator at beginning, middle, and end of semester; written report provided to department head and learning and teaching leader
Termination: how relationships are ended	Ehrlich & Hansford, 1999; Jorgenson, 1992; Riabschlegler & Cross, 2011	End of semester; poor performance; no-fault exit clause for mentees	End of semester; no-fault exit clause for mentors and mentees; coordinator may suggest termination of nonfunctioning relationships, particularly at midsemester

Note: SI = Supplemental Instruction; CMC = computer-mediated communication.

Data Source: Dawson, P. (2014, April). Beyond a Definition: Toward a Framework for Designing and Specifying Mentoring Models. *Educational Researcher*, 43(3), 137-145

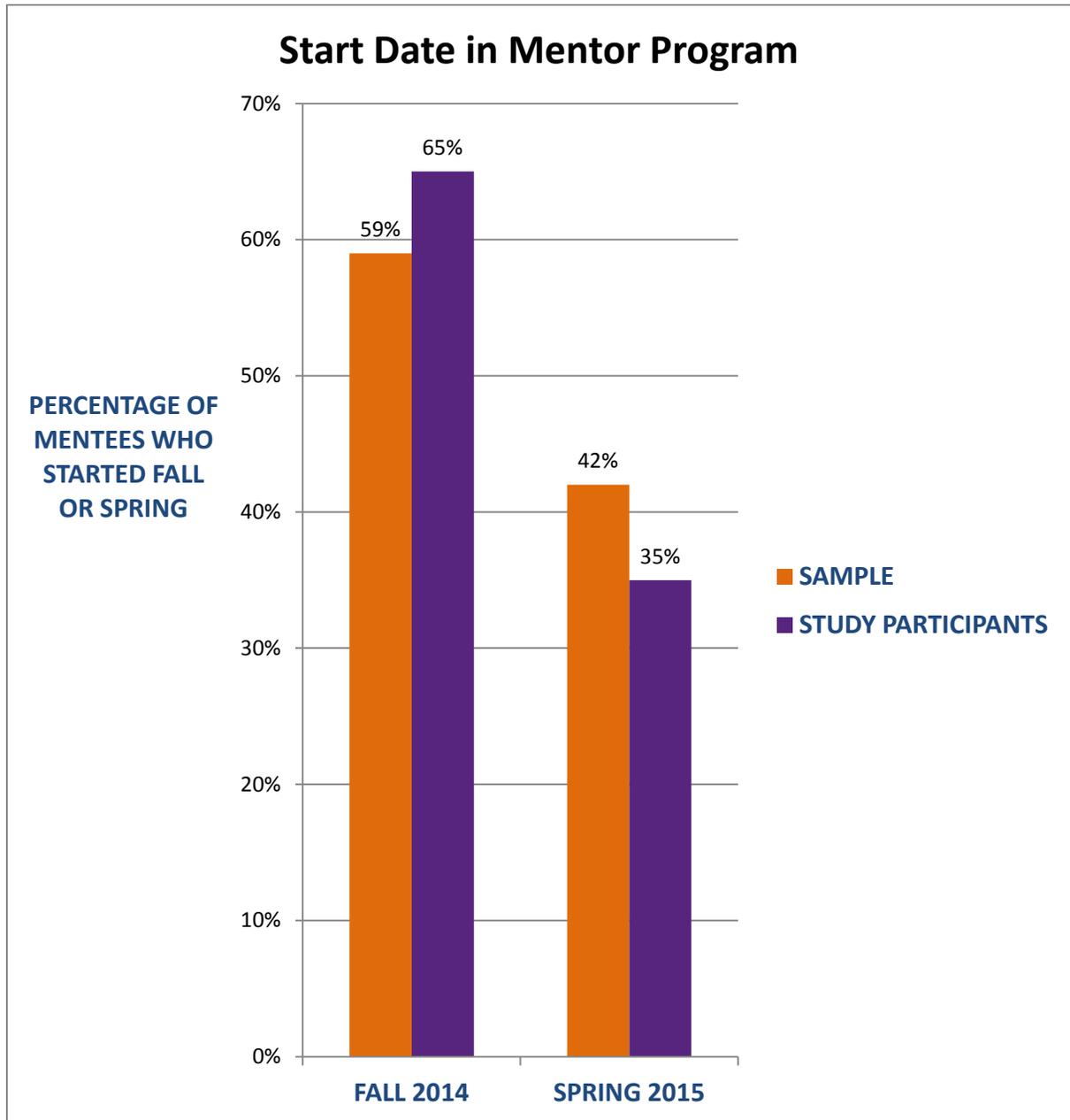
APPENDIX H

MENTEE AGES

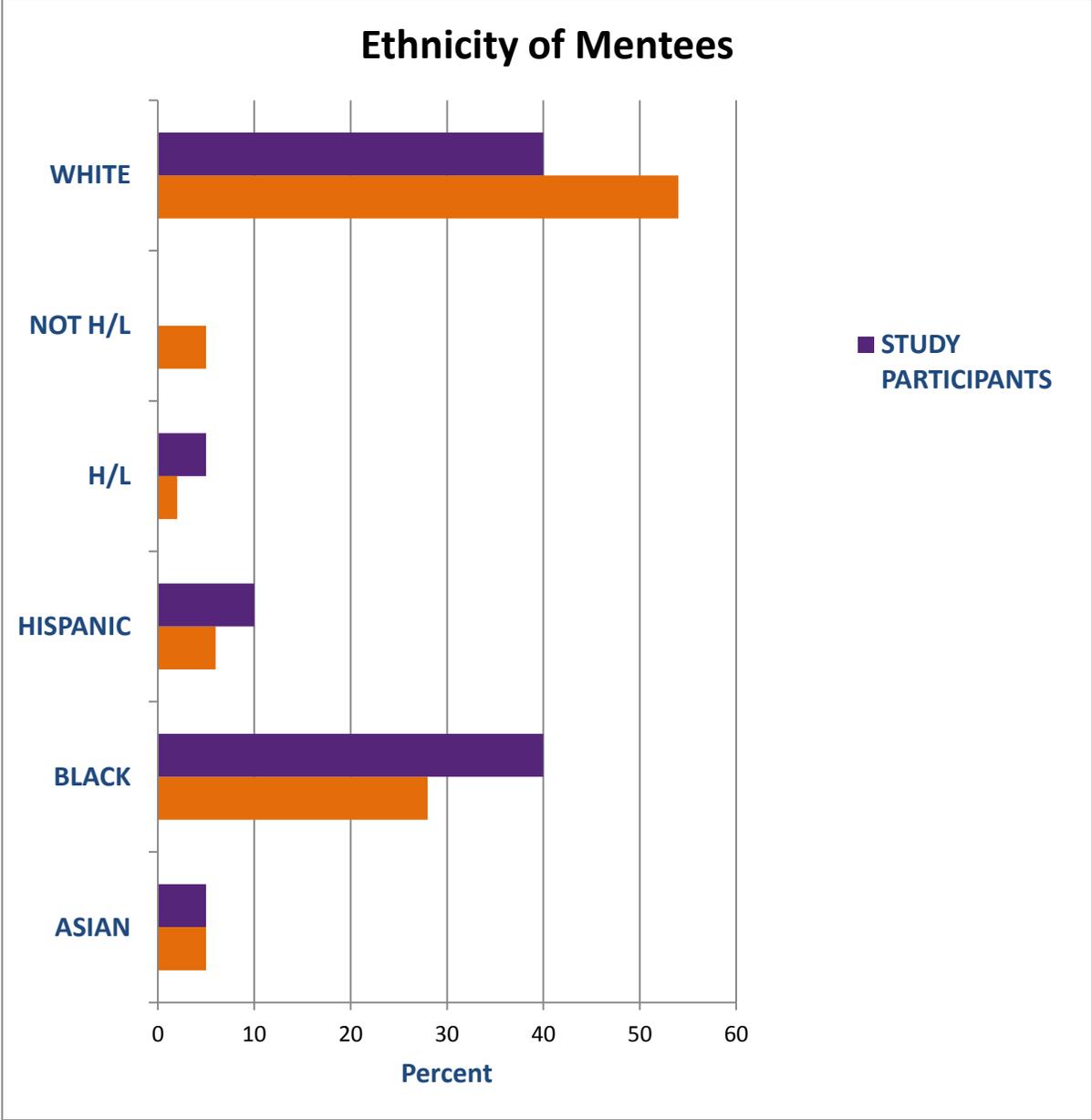


APPENDIX I:

MENTEE START DATE

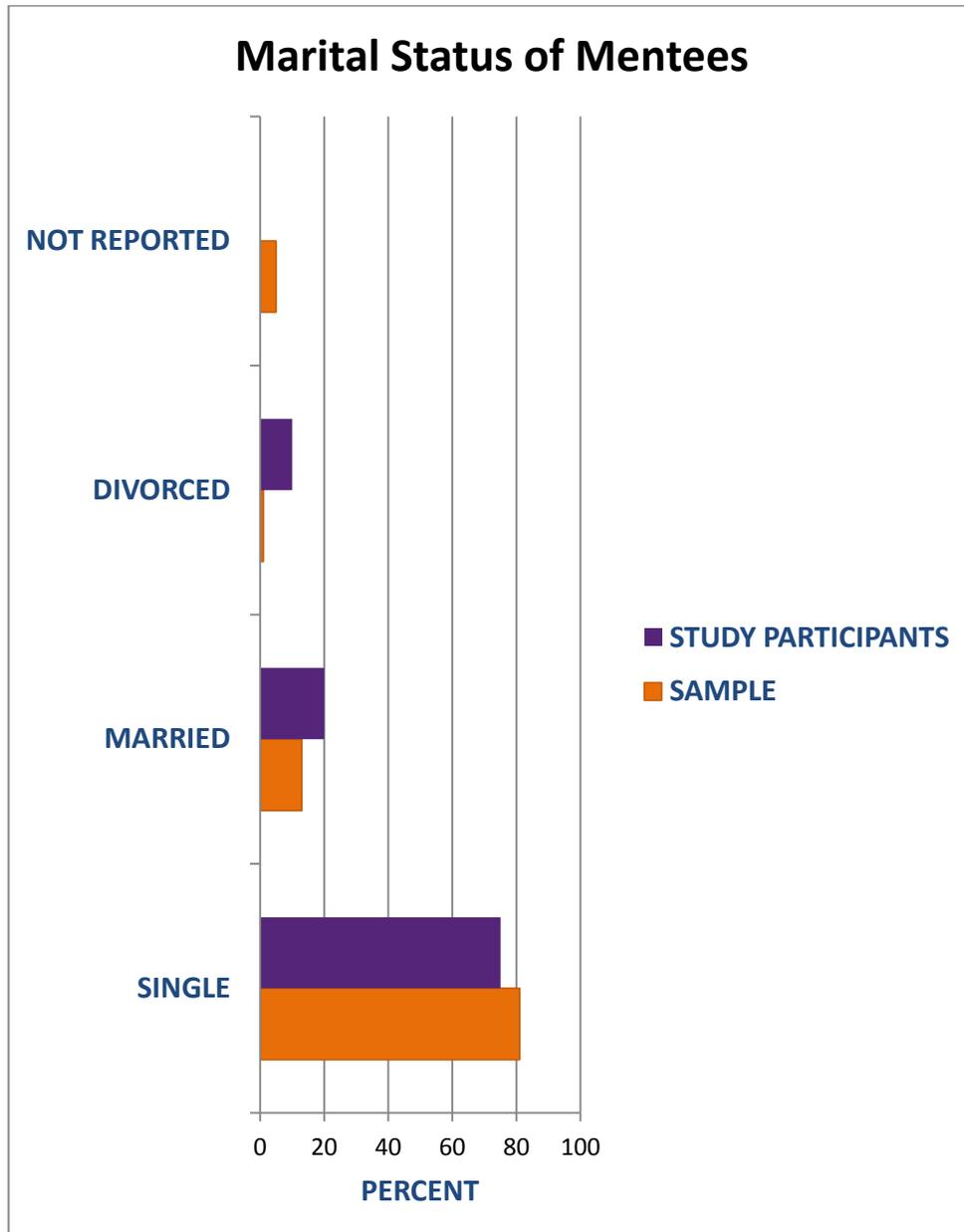


APPENDIX J:  
MENTEE ETHNICITY



APPENDIX K:

MENTEE MARITAL STATUS



APPENDIX L:

INTERVIEW NOTATION FORM – MENTEES, INDIVIDUAL

Date                      Time                      Place                      Participant Pseudonym

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Participant responses to questions (*written on separate pad and tape-recorded*):

1. What influenced your decision to request a mentor in this program?
2. Tell me about when you and your mentor made the first connection.
3. Describe your feelings about the interactions you and your mentor have had.
4. Describe a high point or experience in your mentoring relationship.
5. Describe a low point or negative experience in your mentoring relationship.
6. Can you tell me about any ways that your experience or attitude at GHC changed after having a mentor?
7. In what ways do you think you may be different after having a mentor?
8. What would you change about your mentor’s interactions with you?
9. What would you change about your mentoring experience?
10. What do you think your mentor would say about you?
11. What would you tell students about asking for a mentor or joining a mentor program?
12. What advice would you give a new mentor?
13. What advice would you give a new mentee?
14. How would you design a college mentor program?
15. What do you think your reaction would be if asked to participate in a mentor program at your next college (or workplace, if you do not plan to continue your education past GHC)?
16. What would you think about being offered a mentor at your workplace?
17. Is there anything else about the mentoring program, your mentor, or mentoring that you would like to share?

OBSERVATIONS

Receptivity to interview:	
Ease in discussing mentor program:	
Manner during interview:	
Negative comments about mentor program:	
Positive comments about mentor program:	
Amount of comments:	
Passion (or lack of) for mentor program:	
Overall attitude about mentor program:	

APPENDIX M:

ARTIFACT / OBSERVATION NOTATION FORM

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Item or Event:** \_\_\_\_\_

Items that immediately stand out:	
Symbols:	
Power words:	
Comparisons:	
Inconsistencies:	
Repetitions:	
Compliments:	
Critiques:	
Overall thoughts:	

## APPENDIX N:

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS – MENTEES

1. What influenced your decision to request a mentor in this program?
2. Tell me about when you and your mentor made the first connection.
3. Describe your feelings about the interactions you and your mentor have had.
4. Describe a high point or experience in your mentoring relationship.
5. Describe a low point or negative experience in your mentoring relationship.
6. Can you tell me about any ways that your experience or attitude at GHC changed after having a mentor?
7. In what ways do you think you may be different after having a mentor?
8. What would you change about your mentor's interactions with you?
9. What would you change about your mentoring experience?
10. What do you think your mentor would say about you?
11. What would you tell students about asking for a mentor or joining a mentor program?
12. What advice would you give a new mentor?
13. What advice would you give a new mentee?
14. How would you design a college mentor program?
15. What do you think your reaction would be if asked to participate in a mentor program at your next college (or workplace, if you do not plan to continue your education past GHC)?
16. What would you think about being offered a mentor at your workplace?
17. Is there anything else about the mentoring program, your mentor, or mentoring that you would like to share?

## APPENDIX O:

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS – MENTORS

1. What influenced your decision to serve as a mentor in this program?
2. Tell me about when you and your mentee made the first connection.
3. Describe your feelings about the interactions you and your mentee have had.
4. Describe a high point or experience in your mentoring relationship.
5. Describe a low point or negative experience in your mentoring relationship.
6. Can you tell me of any ways that your experience or attitude at GHC changed after having a mentee?
7. In what ways do you think you may be different after having a mentee?
8. What would you change about your mentee's interactions with you?
9. What would you change about your mentoring experience?
10. What do you think your mentee would say about you?
11. What would you tell students about asking for a mentor or joining a mentor program?
12. What advice would you give a new mentor?
13. What advice would you give a new mentee?
14. How would you design a college mentor program?
15. What would you think about being assigned a mentor for your job?
16. What would you think about serving as a mentor at work for another employee?
17. Is there anything else you would like to share?

## APPENDIX P:

### ETHICAL ISSUES AT SEVEN RESEARCH STATES

*Thematizing.* The purpose of an interview study should, beyond the scientific value of the knowledge sought, also be considered with regard to improvement of the human situation investigated.

*Designing.* Ethical issues of design involve obtaining the subjects' informed consent to anticipate in the study, securing confidentiality, and considering possible consequences of the study for the subjects.

*Interview Situation.* The personal consequences of the interview interaction for the subjects need to be taken into account, such as stress during the interview and changes in self-understanding.

*Transcription.* The confidentiality of the interviewees needs to be protected and there is also the question of whether a transcribed text is loyal to the interviewee's oral statements.

*Analysis.* Ethical issues in analysis involve the question of how penetratingly the interviews can be analyzed and of whether the subjects should have a say in how their statements are interpreted.

*Verification.* It is the researcher's ethical responsibility to report knowledge that is as secured and verified as possible. This involves the issue of how critically an interview may be questioned.

*Reporting.* There is again the issue of confidentiality when reporting private interviews in public and of the consequences of the published report for the interviewees and for the groups they belong to.

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Data Source: Kvale, S. & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

APPENDIX Q:  
EMAIL TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS  
(MENTEES AND MENTORS)

Dear [Name]:

I am conducting a study on the experiences of mentees and mentors in the AAWCC female mentoring program at GHC. You are invited to participate in this study. This study seeks to understand what mentees and mentors have experienced in this program in the hopes of informing future planning of the mentoring program and in adding to what is known about college mentoring. This study is conducted to satisfy my doctorate research requirement.

If you agree to participate in this study, your involvement will consist of a one-hour interview. It is possible that you may be asked to provide a follow-up interview of an hour or less time.

Your involvement is purely voluntary with no negative consequence should you choose not to participate.

If you do decide to participate, you are free to drop out of the study at any point, with no negative consequence to you. Details surrounding your possible involvement in the study are outlined in the attached consent form.

I hope you will consider participating in this study, as your input and perspective is very important to this research.

If you are interested in participating, simply respond to this email. If you do not wish to participate, you do not need to respond. Your time is very much appreciated.

Sincerely,



Joan Ledbetter  
University of Alabama graduate student

APPENDIX R:

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA  
HUMAN RESEARCH PROTECTION PROGRAM  
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

**Title of Research: The experiences of female mentees and mentors in a fledgling community college mentor program: A qualitative case study**

**Investigator: Joan Ledbetter, M.A., M.Ed.**

**IRB Approval #: 15-OR-173**

**OSP #:**

Individual's Consent to be in a Research Study

**You are being asked to be in a research study.**

**The name of this study is** “The experiences of female mentees and mentors in a fledgling community college mentor program: A qualitative case study.”

**This study is being conducted by** Joan Ledbetter. She is on staff at Georgia Highlands College and a graduate student at the University of Alabama.

**What is the purpose of this study – what is it trying to learn?**

This study seeks to understand the experiences of female mentees and mentors in the female mentoring program at Georgia Highlands College.

**Why is this study important—What good will the results do?**

College student retention is of great concern nationally, locally, and at this institution. It is of importance to the individual and to society. Mentoring has been shown to aid in college retention. The results of this study will assist making this mentoring program better and in institutional support for the program.

**Why have I been asked to take part in this study?**

You have been asked to take part in this study because you participated in the mentoring program at GHC and this study seeks to interview participants in this mentoring program.

**How many other people will be in this study?**

A total of 30 individuals who have participated in the mentoring program will be asked to participate in this study.

**What will I be asked to do in this study?**

If you agree to be in this study, Joan Ledbetter will interview you at the GHC campus most

convenient to you. The interview will last approximately one hour and will be audiotaped to be sure that all your words are captured accurately. However, if you do not want to be taped you may let Ms. Ledbetter know your wishes, and she will then take handwritten notes.

**How much time will I spend being in this study?**

The interview will last approximately an hour, depending on how much information about your experiences you choose to share. It is possible you may be asked to participate in a follow-up interview to clarify comments. It will be your decision as to whether you participate in a second interview, if asked. Total participation time should be no more than two hours.

**Will being in this study cost me anything?**

The only cost to you from this study is your time.

**Will I be compensated for being in this study?**

In appreciation of your time, you will receive a \$10 Visa gift card.

**What are the risks (problems or dangers) from being in this study?**

There are no risks involved with participating in this study. Your identity will be confidential, and you may discontinue your participation at any time. Participation or lack of participation in this study will in no way affect your standing as a student at GHC or your involvement in the mentoring program.

**What are the benefits of being in this study?**

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. You may enjoy assisting in the study and in furthering knowledge of this mentoring program and mentoring in general.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

Your involvement in the study is completely confidential. Your name will not be provided to anyone. You do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer and you may stop involvement at any time.

**How will my confidentiality be protected?**

The only place where your name appears in connection with this study is on this informed consent. The consent forms will be kept in a locked file drawer in Joan Ledbetter's office. When we record the interview, we will not use your name, so no one will know who you are on the tape. When the interviews have been typed, the tapes will be destroyed. This should occur at the end of the study. You may also refuse to be audio taped, in which case the interviewer will take handwritten notes. Electronic data will be maintained on a password-protected home computer. When the data from this study is reported, participants will not be identified.

**What are the alternatives to being in this study?**

The alternative is not to participate. You may also start the study and decide to stop at any time.

**What are my rights as a participant?**

Being in this study is totally voluntary. It is your free choice. You may choose not to be in it at

all. If you start the study, you can stop at any time. Not participating or stopping participation will have no effect on your relationships with Georgia Highlands College or the mentoring program.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board is a committee that looks out for the ethical treatment of people in research studies. They may review the study records if they wish. This is to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

**Who do I call if I have questions or problems?**

If you have questions about this study right now, please ask them. If you have questions later on, please call Joan Ledbetter at 706.252.4452 (or email [jledbetter@highlands.edu](mailto:jledbetter@highlands.edu)). If you have questions or complaints about your rights as a research participant, call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University at 205-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066.

You may also ask questions, make a suggestion, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach Website at [http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO\\_Welcome.html](http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html). After you participate, you are encouraged to complete the survey for research participants that is online there, or you may ask Joan Ledbetter for a copy of it. You may also e-mail us at [participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu](mailto:participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu).

At Georgia Highlands College for questions or problems about your rights as a research subject, please call or write: Institutional Review Board, Georgia Highlands College, TBD, Rome, GA, 30161; 706-295-6331; [dlangston@highlands.edu](mailto:dlangston@highlands.edu).

I have read this consent form. I have had a chance to ask questions.

---

Signature of Research Participant	Date
<hr/>	
Signature of Investigator	Date

**Audio Taping Consent**

As mentioned above, the individual qualitative interview will be audio recorded for research purposes to transcribe for further analysis. These tapes will be stored in a locked file cabinet and only available to the principal investigator. These tapes will be destroyed at the completion of the study.

**I understand that part of my participation in this research study will be audio taped and I give my permission to the research team to record the interview.**

- Yes**, my participation in this study can be audio taped.
- No**, I do not want my participation in this study to be audio taped.

## APPENDIX S:

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL - MENTEES

**Project:** A case study of a two-year college female mentoring program.

**Time:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Place:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Interviewer:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Interviewee:** \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Interview Procedure:**

You are being asked to participate in a research study investigating what mentees and mentors experience in a mentoring program. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of participants, female mentees and mentors, in a new college mentoring program. During this interview, you will be asked to respond to several open-ended questions. You may choose not to answer any or all of the questions. There is no penalty for not participating. The procedure will involve audio taping the interview and the recording will be transcribed verbatim. You will have the opportunity to review your interview transcript. Your results will be confidential; you will not be identified individually.

#### **Informed Consent:**

Please sign the informed consent form signaling your willingness to participate.

#### **Questions:**

1. What influenced your decision to request a mentor in this program?
2. Tell me about when you and your mentor made the first connection.
3. Describe your feelings about the interactions you and your mentor have had.
4. Describe a high point or experience in your mentoring relationship.
5. Describe a low point or negative experience in your mentoring relationship.
6. Can you tell me about any ways that your experience or attitude at GHC changed after having a mentor?
7. In what ways do you think you may be different after having a mentor?
8. What would you change about your mentor's interactions with you?
9. What would you change about your mentoring experience?
10. What do you think your mentor would say about you?
11. What would you tell students about asking for a mentor or joining a mentor program?
12. What advice would you give a new mentor?
13. What advice would you give a new mentee?
14. How would you design a college mentor program?
15. What do you think your reaction would be if asked to participate in a mentor program at your next college (or workplace, if you do not plan to continue your education past GHC)?
16. What would you think about being offered a mentor at your workplace?
17. Is there anything else about the mentoring program, your mentor, or mentoring that you would like to share?

#### **Closing:**

Thank you for participating in this interview. I very much appreciate you taking the time to do this. I may contact you in the future to review your interview transcript for accuracy and possibly for a follow-up interview. I assure you of the confidentiality of your interview responses and that you are not required to participate further if that is your wish. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me by phone (706.252.4452) or email (joanledbetter@gmail.com).

## APPENDIX T:

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL - MENTORS

**Project:** A case study of a two-year college female mentoring program.

**Time:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Place:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Interviewer:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Interviewee:** \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Interview Procedure:**

You are being asked to participate in a research study investigating what mentees and mentors experience in a mentoring program. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of participants, female mentees and mentors, in a new college mentoring program. During this interview, you will be asked to respond to several open-ended questions. You may choose not to answer any or all of the questions. There is no penalty for not participating. The procedure will involve audio taping the interview and the recording will be transcribed verbatim. You will have the opportunity to review your interview transcript. Your results will be confidential; you will not be identified individually.

#### **Informed Consent:**

Please sign the informed consent form signaling your willingness to participate.

#### **Questions:**

1. What influenced your decision to serve as a mentor in this program?
2. Tell me about when you and your mentee made the first connection.
3. Describe your feelings about the interactions you and your mentee have had.
4. Describe a high point or experience in your mentoring relationship.
5. Describe a low point or negative experience in your mentoring relationship.
6. Can you tell me of any ways that your experience or attitude at GHC changed after having a mentee?
7. In what ways do you think you may be different after having a mentee?
8. What would you change about your mentee's interactions with you?
9. What would you change about your mentoring experience?
10. What do you think your mentee would say about you?
11. What would you tell students about asking for a mentor or joining a mentor program?
12. What advice would you give a new mentor?
13. What advice would you give a new mentee?
14. How would you design a college mentor program?
15. What would you think about being assigned a mentor for your job?
16. What would you think about serving as a mentor at work for another employee?

#### **Closing:**

Thank you for participating in this interview. I very much appreciate you taking the time to do this. I may contact you in the future to review your interview transcript for accuracy and possibly for a follow-up interview. I assure you of the confidentiality of your interview responses and that you are not required to participate further if that is your wish. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me by phone (706.252.4452) or email (joanledbetter@gmail.com). Thank you, again!

APPENDIX U:

TRANSCRIBER AGREEMENT

**Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement**

I Dawn Callaway agree to transcribe the interviews for doctoral candidate Joan Ledbetter entitled "The Experiences of Student Female Mentees and Staff and Faculty Mentors in a Fledging Community College Mentor Program: A Qualitative Case Study." I will maintain strict confidentiality of the data files and transcripts. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- I will not discuss them with anyone but the researcher.
- I will not share copies with anyone but the researcher.
- I agree to turn over all copies of the transcripts to the researcher at conclusion of the contract.
- I will destroy the audio files I receive upon conclusion of the contract, after verifying with the researcher.

I have read and understood the information provided above.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Transcriber's Signature

7/15/2015  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature

7/15/15  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

APPENDIX V:

MENTEE NEEDS SURVEY

Quick statistics: (P2 Mentee Survey Fall15)

**Results**

Number of records in this query: 17

Total records in survey: 17

Percentage of total: 100.00%

**Field summary for Planning**

**How much do you need academic and career goal planning?**

<b>Answer</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Great Need (4)	8	47.06%
Some Need (3)	9	52.94%
Not Sure (2)	0	0.00%
No Need (1)	0	0.00%
No answer	0	0.00%
Not completed or Not displayed	0	0.00%

**Field summary for Balance**

**How much do you need help with balancing work and family life with your academic goals?**

<b>Answer</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Great Need (4)	9	52.94%
Some Need (3)	5	29.41%
Not Sure (2)	1	5.88%
No Need (1)	2	11.76%
No answer	0	0.00%
Not completed or Not displayed	0	0.00%

**Field summary for Resources**

**How much need do you have to learn about resources to help you with academics, career planning, and personal success?**

<b>Answer</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Great Need (4)	10	58.82%
Some Need (3)	5	29.41%
Not Sure (2)	1	5.88%
No Need (1)	1	5.88%
No answer	0	0.00%
Not completed or Not displayed	0	0.00%

**Field summary for Jobs**

**How much need do you have of job acquisition knowledge and skills (e.g. resume and cover letter writing, job searches, etc.)?**

<b>Answer</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Great Need (4)	10	58.82%
Some Need (3)	7	41.18%
Not Sure (2)	0	0.00%
No Need (1)	0	0.00%
No answer	0	0.00%
Not completed or Not displayed	0	0.00%

**Field summary for Support**

**How much need do you have for emotional support and confidence building.**

<b>Answer</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Great Need (4)	8	47.06%
Some Need (3)	6	35.29%
Not Sure (2)	3	17.65%
No Need (1)	0	0.00%
No answer	0	0.00%
Not completed or Not displayed	0	0.00%

**Field summary for Comments**

**Please add any comments you would like to help us understand what you need most from mentors and this new mentoring program. Thank you. Sponsored by the GHC chapter of American Association of Women in Community Colleges.**

<b>Answer</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
	4	23.53%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Really I just need help with planning what I'm going to do after GHC. I'm not really sure what I want to do after and would appreciate any advice.</li> <li>▪ Thank you for this survey. There is such a diversity of women at this college.</li> <li>▪ Thanks for everything you guys do!!</li> <li>▪ I don't need so much of emotional support I get that from my therapist. I need more help with time management and academic support. I would love resume help along with job support for when I can devote my time to that.</li> </ul>	13	76.47%

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Data Source: Mentee Survey, Fall 2015

APPENDIX W:

LISTS OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS

MENTEES IN THE STUDY							
MENTEE	START TERM	MAJOR, start	MAJOR, finish	RACE	MARITAL	AGE	MENTOR
Amy	Fall 2014	Pre-Pharmacy	Chemistry	B	S	20	
Farah	Fall 2014	Pre-Nursing	Pre-Nursing	B	M	46	Joanne
Florence	SP 2015	History	History	W	S	24	
Gwendolyn	Fall 2014	Art	Art	B	S	21	
Holly	SP 2015	Pre-Nursing	Pre-Nursing	W	M	36	Janie
Janice	Fall 2014	Pre-Nursing	Pre-Nursing	B	S	22	
Laura	Fall 2014	Pre-Nursing	Early Childhood Education	H	S	24	Louise
Mary	Fall 2014	Human Services	Physical Education	B	S	31	Patty
Melody	Fall 2014	Human Services	Human Services	B	S	24	
Mildred	Fall 2014	Early Childhood Education	Early Childhood Education	Not H/L	S	24	Harriet
Quinn	Fall 2014	Communications	Business Administration	H	S	23	
Rebecca	SP 2015	Business Administration	Business Administration	A	S	26	Wanda
Rhonda	Fall 2014	Art	Art	W	S	29	Rhonda
Samantha	Fall 2014	Pre-Nursing	Pre-Nursing	W	D	50	Hazel
Sarah	SP 2015	Business Administration	Biology	W	S	20	
Terri	SP 2015	Pre-Nursing	Pre-Nursing	W	N / R*	22	Hazel
Whittney	SP 2015	Pre-Nursing	Pre-Nursing	W	M	28	
Wilma	Fall 2014	Pre-Nursing	General Studies	W	M	24	Janie
Winnie	SP 2015	Communications	Communications	B	S	23	
Wynne	Fall 2014	Pre-Nursing	Pre-Nursing	B	S	48	

\*Not Reported

<b>MENTORS IN THE STUDY</b>		
<b><u>PSEUDONYM</u></b>	<b><u>CAMPUS JOB</u></b>	<b><u>MENTEE</u></b>
Margaret	Staff	
Patty	Faculty	Mary
Harriet	Faculty	Mildred
Dorothy	Faculty	
Janie	Faculty	Wilma & Holly
Wanda	Staff	Rebecca
Olivia	Staff	
Ariel	Staff	
Louise	Staff	Laura
Betty	Faculty	
Hazel	Faculty	Samantha & Terri
Joanne	Staff	Farrah
Willow	Faculty	Rhonda

## APPENDIX X:

### COLLEGE MATTERING INVENTORY ITEMS

1. There are people at the college who are determined to see me succeed.
2. Instructors generally do not care about students' well-being.
3. I often feel my instructor(s) care more about other things than me as a student.
4. Knowing that other people at the college care for me motivates me to do better.
5. There are people at the college that sincerely appreciate my involvement as a student.
6. It is comforting to know that my contributions are valued by my instructors.
7. Sometimes I feel that I am not interesting to anyone at the college.
8. Instructors sometimes tell me how much they appreciate my comments and participation in class.
9. Students in my classes show interest in me because I make good contributions.
10. Most of my professors would not miss me if I suddenly stopped attending classes.
11. I believe that my counselor(s) would miss me if I suddenly stopped attending college.
12. Based on my experience so far, there seem to be many people on campus who wish to see me succeed.
13. It is comforting to know that my contributions are valued by other students.
14. People on campus are generally accepting of me.
15. My counselor is generally receptive to what I have to say.
16. I sometimes feel alone and isolated at the college because of my gender.
17. I sometimes feel my instructor(s) want me to hurry up and finish speaking.
18. Other students rely on me for support.
19. If I stopped attending college, most of my instructors would be disappointed.
20. If I stopped attending college, my counselor(s) would be disappointed.
21. Sometimes my instructors simply do not listen to what I have to say.
22. Other students are happy for me when I do well in exams or projects.
23. My instructors are sensitive to my non-school responsibilities.
24. Sometimes I get so busy with my off-campus activities that I distance myself from others at the college.
25. Instructors appear genuinely happy when I do well in class.
26. Sometimes I feel that no one at the college notices me.
27. Sometimes I feel alone at the college.
28. Sometimes I get so wrapped up in my personal problems that I isolate myself from others at the college.
29. Other students in my classes would miss me if I suddenly went away.
30. I often feel isolated when involved in student activities (e.g., clubs, events).
31. I receive thoughtful and timely comments on my work from my instructors.
32. Sometimes other students simply do not listen to what I have to say.
33. My instructors sometimes ignore my comments or questions.
34. If I had a personal problem, I believe that counselors would be willing to discuss it with me.
35. People on campus seem happy about my accomplishments.
36. It is good to know that others at the college care about my well-being.
37. When in groups, other students tend to rely on my contributions.

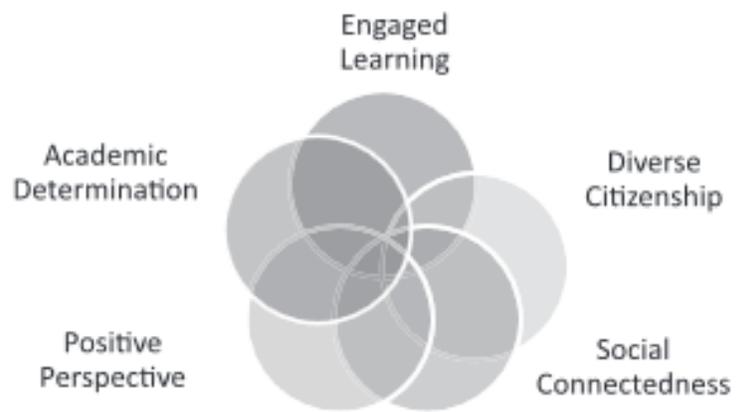
38. If I asked my instructors for help, I am confident that I would receive it.
39. Students in my classes have shown interest in my personal well-being.
40. There are enough social or academic opportunities for me to get connected with others at the college.
41. There are people on campus who are sad for me when I fail in something I set out to do.
42. I often feel that I do not belong at this college.
43. It is important for me that my professors notice my presence or participation in class.
44. Some students are dependent on my guidance or assistance to help them succeed.
45. Some people on campus are disappointed in me when I do not accomplish all I should.
46. People on campus are generally supportive of my individual needs.
47. There are people at the college who are genuinely interested in me as a person.
48. I sometimes feel alone and isolated because of my race/ethnicity.
49. I often feel socially inadequate at school.
50. Most of my instructors know my name.
51. If I had a personal problem, I believe that instructors would be willing to discuss it with me.
52. Counselors at the college generally show their concern for students' well-being.
53. My opinions are generally valued at the college.
54. There are people at the college who are concerned about my future.
55. I sometimes feel pressured to do better because people at the college would be disappointed if I did not.

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Data Source: Tovar, Simon, & Lee, 2009)

APPENDIX Y:

THE FIVE FACTORS OF THRIVING



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Data Source: Schreiner, 2010

APPENDIX Z:

APPROVAL LETTER FROM UA INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Office for Research  
Institutional Review Board for the  
Protection of Human Subjects



May 22, 2015

Joan Ledbetter  
College of Education  
Box 870302

Re: IRB#: 15-OR-173 "The Experiences of Female Mentees and Mentors in a  
Fledgling Community College Mentor Program: A Qualitative Case Study"

Dear Ms. Ledbetter:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for  
your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part  
46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined  
below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but  
not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language,  
communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research  
employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation,  
human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies

Your application will expire on May 21, 2016. If your research will continue  
beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application.  
If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved  
Protocol Form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval,  
except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants.  
When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of the IRB Request for  
Study Closure Form.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved stamped consent forms to obtain  
consent from your participants.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal,  
please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,



Cepantony T. Myles, MSM, CIM, CIP  
Director & Research Compliance Officer



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