

Transforming the Honors College Experience at SUNY Brockport

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Introduction

College is often a place where students are shaped in a way that allows them to find their true self. Oftentimes, a key influence in this process is a mentor. The relationship a student forms with a mentor can make or break their experience at college, which is why it is necessary to facilitate good mentoring relationships early on. In the SUNY Brockport Honors College, we attempt to do this through the Peer Mentor Program. However, with recent factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and leadership changes, this program, like many others, would benefit from an evaluation of its practices and effectiveness. To promote a better honors college experience, I will examine the mentoring literature regarding effectiveness and the impact an effective mentor can have on a student's trajectory. Next, I offer strategies that work in the peer mentoring program for Academic Planning Seminar (APS) at SUNY Brockport based on an informational interview with the program's director. Then, I pinpoint where it seems the Honors peer mentor program could benefit from improvement, based on an analysis of surveys and my own experience. Finally, I offer suggestions to the Honors College for what they can do to practically develop the program to its fullest potential, based on the combination of literature, surveys, interviews, and my knowledge of psychology and communication.

What Makes for Good Mentoring?

According to the literature, successful mentorship does not always have to look the same, but there are a few key components of mentorship in college students which seem to correlate the most strongly with beneficial outcomes. These components are mentor-mentee relationship quality, faculty relationships, and specific to honors students, self-efficacy.

Quality of Mentor-Mentee Relationship

As a mentor to a first-year college student, there is a wide variety of important responsibilities to take on, from teaching all the information they need to know to being a social connection that acts as a support and helps students expand their network. According to Schockett and Haring-Hidore (1985), mentoring functions can be separated into two categories: psychosocial, which includes acts of role modeling, counseling, and encouragement, and vocational, which includes educating, coaching, and sponsoring. While the vocational side certainly has an important purpose, the quality of the mentor-mentee relationship is a main factor in determining whether either party reaps the intended benefits of mentoring (Rhodes et al., 2002). In fact, Rhodes et al. (2002) note that “the presence of a mentor alone is often insufficient for positive outcomes” (Glass, 2023, p.147). The socio-motivational perspective of constructive educational relationships says that “the effectiveness of educational relationships depends on their capacity to fulfill autonomy, relatedness, and competence motivational needs” (Larose et al., 2005, p.113). According to self-determination theory, autonomy is defined as one’s need to feel ownership over their behavior and to feel psychologically unrestricted (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Relatedness is the desire to feel closely connected to others (Van den Brock et al., 2016) and competence is the need to feel a sense of mastery or effectiveness in the environment and to seek out optimal challenges (Van den Brock et al., 2016; McNall, 2022b). In a study that evaluated students’ perceived relatedness and autonomy in their relationship to a teacher-mentor and its effects on their social, academic, institutional, and personal adjustment to college, Larose et al. (2005) argued that feelings of relatedness and autonomy are crucial for the mentee to perceive in order to gain the positive impact that mentoring can have. They found mentoring relationships where the mentee perceived weaker feelings of relatedness and autonomy produced a more negative outcome than students without any mentor (Larose et al., 2005). In other words, it may

be more harmful on students' adjustment to have a poor-quality mentor relationship than to have no mentor at all.

Additionally, mentees even agree that the quality of their relationship with a mentor is more valuable than receiving information from them. Upon analyzing survey responses from a group of mentees in a study, Haring (1999) discovered that mentees felt they needed the psychosocial aspect of mentoring most. Girves et al. (2018) found that academic integration is a major factor in determining whether students thrive, with the students who interact more frequently and meaningfully with peers and faculty outside the classroom being more successful. Academic integration is analogous to a sense of belonging which Strayhorn (2019) defines as “students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community or others on campus such as faculty, staff, and peers” (p. 4). As one might expect, students' sense of belonging translates into retention rates. As Walters and Kanak (2016) note from a study that included a first-year student retreat as part of their honors curriculum, the more a student is integrated to life at the university, the more likely a student will stay at the university, which often translates to retention in honors programs too. They saw direct effects of this first-hand, as eighty-eight percent of students who attended the retreat are still in the program (Walters & Kanak, 2016). Mentors can play a key role in facilitating students' integration and involvement, especially when thinking about the social capital that first-year students often lack when they come to college. Social capital that a mentee gains from their mentor allows the mentee to expand their social network – a vital asset when beginning college – and gives them access to a greater variety of resources and information necessary for college (Glass, 2023).

Social capital is a particularly important aspect of mentoring to focus on because of the significant effects it has on underrepresented groups of students, including first-generation, low-income, and minority students. Both first-generation and low-income college students have a particularly difficult challenge when coming to college, which is a lack of information and resources that help with adjustment (Glass, 2023). This disparity makes these students susceptible to dropping out, truancy, and lower self-esteem, among other issues (Glass, 2023). However, having a school-based mentor with a meaningful, high-quality relationship has been shown to reverse these outcomes and have a positive impact on academic and other school-related activities (Glass, 2023). In a study that examined the effects of hybrid mentoring on high school students, Glass (2023) found that relationship quality can be developed through similarities between mentor and mentee, amount of time spent together, and level of trust, with frequency of communication being a crucial factor in the success of a mentoring relationship. Therefore, while focusing on the vocational side of mentoring is necessary, the needs that are met from the psychosocial mentoring aspects seem to be more significant when looking at what makes a successful mentor.

Faculty Relationships

As mentioned above, frequently engaging in meaningful relationships with faculty has been shown to positively influence a student in many ways. In fact, for some students, experiences with faculty may even influence their decision to remain in an honors program (Kampfe et al., 2016). One of the major correlations with faculty relationships seems to be students' perceived sense of belonging. Western Kentucky University noticed that their Honors College was lacking this sense of belonging among students, faculty, and staff, which was causing the programs energy, visibility, and retention to plummet (Cobane & Thurman, 2007).

Attempting to fix this, they implemented an event called “BBQ with the Profs.” The purpose of the event was to give freshmen Honors students a chance to informally network with faculty, administration, staff, and other peers early in the semester (Cobane & Thurman, 2007), in hopes of cultivating communal relationships and thus improving some of the issues mentioned. What Cobane and Thurman (2007) found was that 92% of students agreed that they would be more comfortable approaching faculty members in the future, and that the program allowed them to get to know both faculty and peers that they may not have met otherwise. Additionally, “99% of students ‘Strongly Agreed’ or ‘Agreed’ with the statement that they enjoyed the opportunity to network with faculty/peers” (Cobane & Thurman, 2007, p.133). Based on student testimonies and the increased energy among honors students throughout the year, the chance to informally engage with faculty members early in the year can really make a difference in students’ perceptions of belonging.

Self-Efficacy

In Honors Colleges across the country, one of their defining features is a higher academic standard of excellence that usually involves research involvement. Self-efficacy is defined by Albert Bandura as “a person's belief about his or her ability to successfully perform and complete a given task or behavior” (Hill et al., 2022, p.67). In terms of motivation, Artino (2012) notes that because self-efficacy influences self-confidence, it also influences a person’s attempt and persistence at a particular task (Hill et al., 2022). Across multiple studies (e.g., Artino, 2012; Robbins et al., 2004), results have shown that “students with greater self-efficacy tried more difficult activities, persisted longer, and displayed more mature and efficient techniques in academic efforts” (Hill et al., 2022, p.67). Therefore, if institutions want Honors students to

succeed academically at a higher level by persisting at rigorous academic projects such as research, they must pay attention to how they foster students' self-efficacy.

There are various ways to increase one's self-efficacy, and particularly in the case of students' research self-efficacy, one way to do this is through meaningful faculty relationships – yet another reason to nurture and help cultivate faculty relationships with students. Bishop and Bieschke (1998) define research self-efficacy as “an individuals' belief in his/her ability to carry out and complete tasks associated with research” (Hill et al., 2022, p.68). A student's initial sense of research self-efficacy can be influenced by a variety of factors, from their past experiences with research and whether they were positive or negative to their own preconceptions of research (Hill et al., 2022). But, regardless of a student's experiences or preconceptions about research, any negative preconceptions can be altered with the meaningful interaction of a faculty mentor (Hill et al., 2022), as they have the power to expose students to research opportunities early on. A study by Hill et al. (2022) found that both the student-reported quality of the mentor-protégée relationship as well as the student's amount of research experience contributed to the student's research self-efficacy. In other words, a student's amount of exposure to research, which is influenced by their relationship with faculty, will influence their ambition and persistence at academically rigorous tasks that are encouraged by Honors Colleges. This also translates into their future paths, as a study from Hathaway et al. (2002) suggests that students are more likely to pursue graduate school when they are exposed to research as an undergraduate student (Hill et al., 2022). Therefore, promoting students' interactions with faculty early on may make a difference in whether students engage in research and pursue further education, which as an Honors College, is the hope for as many students as possible.

What makes for a good mentor team?

Training Mentors on Interpersonal Skills

As mentioned above, one of the key aspects to successful mentoring is creating meaningful relationships between mentor and mentee. One of the ways to do this is through interpersonal communication. According to Solomon and Theiss (2012), interpersonal communication is defined as “the communication that occurs between people and creates a personal bond between them” (p. 5). As they break the definition down even further, they describe the *inter* part of the word as meaning “a connection between people, such that one person’s actions affect and reflect the other person’s actions,” and the *personal* part of the word to mean “paying attention to the characteristics and circumstances that make the participants unique individuals” (Solomon & Theiss, 2012, p.5). As mentioned earlier, perceived relatedness is vital to the mentor-mentee relationship in order to reap the benefits of mentoring, and interpersonal communication is the way to create that perception. A study by Larose et al. (2005) that consisted of successful mentoring due to high perceptions of relatedness noted that since mentors were not clinically trained, they were instructed to mentor using basic interpersonal communication skills, such as active listening. Additionally, several interpersonal communication scholars (e.g., Burke et al., 1993; Kalbfleisch & Davies, 1993; Kram, 1985) agree that a key part of effective mentoring is communication skills, because they help mentors and mentees build quality relationships (Burke et al., 1993; Young & Cates, 2005). Therefore, training mentors on interpersonal communication may have a significant impact on their effectiveness as a mentor.

Open Upward Communication

When discussing a moderate to large sized mentoring team, the collaborative nature of everyone involved is similar to that of an organization. For any organization to be successful, it is imperative to have a culture that fosters open upward communication. Upward communication is when information is transmitted from the bottom levels of the organization to the top levels (Housel & Davis, 1977). The purpose of this type of communication is for employees on lower levels to give feedback to managers at higher levels. However, problems can arise when information is translated inaccurately, or not at all. This is called upward communication distortion (Housel & Davis, 1977). One potential cause of upward communication distortion is lack of a clear channel (Housel & Davis, 1977). Channel refers to the medium through which information is conveyed, and such mediums may be face-to-face, written, or telephone (Housel & Davis, 1977). Each of these channels has their pros and cons. For example, face-to-face is positive because it allows for verbal and nonverbal communication, but it also makes the subordinate more aware of their evaluation from the supervisor (Housel & Davis, 1977). Without a clear, consistent, and satisfying channel, employees are subject to increased distortion, which makes the organization vulnerable to ill-informed decision-making and lower employee commitment to organization goals, among other problems that result from distortion (Housel & Davis, 1977). Openness of upward communication, or how freely employees feel they can accurately communicate upward, is another variable that contributes to distortion (Housel & Davis 1977). According to Housel and Davis (1977), “the channel that subordinates use to communicate upward will affect how openly they feel they can communicate” (p. 50). If employees perceive that they cannot communicate openly, or the organization has a closed communication climate, segments of information will get omitted significantly more often (Housel & Davis, 1977). Regardless of how open of a communication climate the organization

fosters, however, “there is a need in any organization...to reduce barriers to upward communication” (Housel & Davis, 1977, p.53). According to the results of Housel and Davis’ (1977) study, which aimed to evaluate the differences in openness and satisfaction based on anonymity and channel, one way to reduce barriers and increase satisfaction is to encourage face-to-face interaction as much as possible. Given that the Honors Peer Mentor program functions as an organization, these findings are applicable to mentoring in that reducing barriers to upward communication are imperative in order to maximize mentors’ commitment to the program’s goals and values.

Frequent Face-To-Face Meetings and Ongoing Training

Not only do frequent face-to-face interactions help combat upward communication distortion, but they also appear to make a difference when it comes to training mentors effectively. A large part of what contributes to a mentor being effective is how they are trained. According to studies from DuBois et al. (2002) and Herrera et al. (2000), mentoring produces the best results when mentors are provided with pre-mentoring and ongoing training through structured activities (Larose et al., 2005). Contrary to this format, Larose et al. (2005) found that when training consists of one initial day and weekly meetings that are only used to discuss problems as opposed to training mentors further, it is insufficient for some mentors to create feelings of relatedness with their mentees. This illustrates the importance of not simply having weekly meetings, but also carefully considering how to utilize this time.

What Works in the SUNY Brockport APS Mentoring Program?

For the purpose of gaining additional qualitative feedback on successful mentoring practices, I conducted an interview with the Director of APS Peer Mentoring at SUNY Brockport

(see Appendix A). In the past, these two programs have not collaborated on their approaches to mentoring. Having been a part of APS peer mentoring for a semester in 2020, I noticed prominent differences in both the information that was covered in each program and the methods through which mentoring was carried out. Given that each program is currently lacking awareness of what the other may have to offer, I seek to bridge this gap by using this interview as a source to utilize when deriving suggestions for the honors program. But first, it is important to note a few key differences that vary between programs and cause practical implications for mentoring styles.

The first, and arguably most important distinction is that the APS mentoring program is significantly larger than the honors peer mentor program. The Honors program deals only with first year and transfer students in the Honors College, amounting to about 120 mentees. By contrast, the APS program involves every other first year student at SUNY Brockport, which amounts to over 1,000 mentees. Thus, there is a forced differentiation between the two programs for how mentoring is delivered and managed due to size of the programs.

The second difference is the format in which mentoring occurs. The Honors College takes the approach of small group mentoring, wherein mentors meet with mentees once a week for 50 minutes. The ratio of mentors to mentees can range from 1:5 to 1:10, with groups having two to three mentors each. Mentors and mentees are split into groups based on similar majors, with some groups being more random (e.g., childhood inclusive education, history, journalism, and English majors grouped together), and some more specific (e.g., direct entry nursing students in one group). Contrary to this, the APS program assigns one mentor to a GEP class to act as a teaching assistant. Their mentoring is mostly conducted in the classroom, with mentors only meeting mentees outside of class if they request to. Both this style and the size of the program

are key differences to note when considering how to integrate various parts of one program into the other.

For Guiding the Mentors

There are four main takeaways from this interview regarding the coaching of mentors. Three out of the four were found as a response to the question, “What strategies work well for you right now, in terms of how you lead the mentors?” The first involves pairing the mentors up strategically in the mentoring class, in hopes that two individuals with differing skillsets will be able to learn from each other when developing mentorship skills. The second has to do with how the mentors are engaged in what they are learning. The approach that Ives takes to coach the mentors in an engaging way is a three-step method called, “discuss and teach, then model, then practice.” For instance, the third takeaway, which Ives called “taking down the professional veneer,” is something that can be applied to the three-step method. First, he may talk with the mentors about how emphasizing humanity and talking like human beings rather than professionals helps cultivate a greater sense of trust and comfort between individuals, which leads to a quality relationship much faster than only engaging in professional dialogue with one another. Then, to model what he teaches, he adopts this practice when talking to the mentors. Rather than acting as if he is an educator that does not have human flaws or problems, he is open in his communication with his students and treats them as equals. Furthermore, this is not a principle that is only modeled after the teaching, but rather continuously throughout any interactions with the student. This modelling helps the mentor to know how to practically implement something they are taught, especially in the case of mentors who have a harder time naturally being comfortable with their mentees. As a result, they are aided in carrying out the last part of the three-step method, which is practicing. The fourth and final main takeaway from the

interview came from the question, “How do the regular mentor meetings affect the program overall?” Ives’ response brought up important points that significantly influence the mentors’ attitudes about the program, claiming that the weekly meetings create a sense of community and identity among the mentors. He also states that “you lose out on so much when mentors are not connected to each other and can’t learn from each other.” When mentors can hold strongly to their identity of being a mentor and are able to share this identity with a group of others, they are likely able to be more committed to the goals of mentoring and embody what a mentor is, based on their concept of the mentor identity.

For Mentoring the Mentees

When asked about what makes for successful mentoring and what is focused on to mentor students well, Ives answered with two main points: emphasizing humanity and interpersonal connection and caring. He believes that the most important aspect of mentoring is connection and trust, and elaborated that emphasizing humanity is the way to foster this as a mentor. He claims that in order to teach mentors how to emphasize humanity, it must be modeled to them. In other words, to ensure that mentors connect interpersonally with their mentees, Ives aims to do the same with the mentors as their coach. This means that when interacting with the mentors, he actively listens, and he includes personal details about them as well as himself, rather than letting professional roles get in the way. This helps prevent a transactional relationship, which he claims is much less impactful than one which includes vulnerability, trust, and caring. By teaching mentors on this strategy through case studies and modeling, the intention is that they will apply the same method to their interactions with mentees, which will contribute to successful mentoring.

Opportunities for Improvement in the Honors Mentoring Program

Mentor Perspective

At the end of each fall semester (when the mentoring takes place), the Honors College Director sends a survey to the mentees and mentors to capture their experience. This survey consists of both Likert scale-type questions (5 = *strongly agree* and 1 = *strongly disagree*), and open-ended questions. Out of the 19 peer mentors, 11 responded to the end-of-semester survey in fall 2022. Based on the thematic analysis of both open-ended and numerical responses, the peer mentor program needs improvement in four key areas: initial training, continued training/the mentor class, communication, and relatedness (see Appendix B).

Initial Training

In regard to initial training, there were three questions, two numerical and one open-ended, that provided insight to the training's effectiveness. The first item reads, "The training in August prepared me to handle the informational side of mentoring," which was the second lowest scoring question on the survey ($M=3.5$, $SD=1.27$). Furthermore, what echoes the findings results of this question is the open-ended question regarding training, which asks, "In which aspects did the training fall short of preparing you?" One student's answer to this question noted that training fell short on equipping them with necessary information, not because it wasn't given, but because it was too much at one time. As a result, it was harder to remember the information when it was needed at a later time. Another student's response reads, "there should be a change in how we prepare." The second item that indicates a need to improve training was the third lowest scoring question on the survey ($M=3.6$, $SD=1.07$), and says, "The training in August prepared me to handle the relational side of mentoring." The results of this question also support the need for improvement in relatedness, though this area will be discussed more in depth later.

Continued Training/The Mentor Class

Much of this feedback reflects positively on the meetings that take place for the mentor class, with some also indicating a desire for even more of these interactions. First is the second highest scoring item on the survey (“It is important to interact with the entire team of peer mentors and directors on a regular basis throughout the mentorship experience”; $M=4.4$, $SD=.84$). Additionally, the survey included a question that asked respondents to comment on the content and quality of the monthly meetings with peer mentors and how they could be better. At least four responses depicted a positive experience with the meetings, saying they were a safe space, helpful to share ideas, and a good chance to connect with other mentors. Three other responses stand out, as they indicate the desire for changing the meetings, in that it would be useful to have the connection provided by them more often. The first response claims that more needs to be discussed at the meetings. The second states that there could be more contact between groups and other mentors. Finally, the third notable response explicitly suggests that there should be individual meetings with the director, or the coordinator, once a month.

Communication

Overall, there were three distinct pieces of feedback pointing towards the need for communication improvement. One open-ended question asked, “What were you lacking from the director(s) that could have made for a better mentoring experience?” and another asking similarly what was lacking from the coordinator. Both questions consisted of less feedback compared to others, but each comprising mostly of requests for more communication, nonetheless. Additionally, one other response to a different question also expressed a desire for more communication between mentors and the coordinator, specifically.

Relatedness

As mentioned previously, the third lowest scoring item on the survey notes a need to improve training, but also overlaps with relatedness. The fourth lowest scoring item (“I was able to connect on a personal level with some of my mentees”; $M=3.9$, $SD=.88$), also supports room to improve relatedness. Furthermore, other feedback was found to show the importance of fostering relatedness among mentors. For example, one student’s response to a question stated that the ropes course, which mentors did as a part of training in August, was a fun way to engage and connect with other mentors.

Mentee Perspective

Based on the survey responses of first-year students from the fall 2022 semester, where 86 out of 132 students completed the survey, the mentor program is falling short in two main areas: relatedness and structured activities. Similar to the peer mentor survey, students responded to a variety of Likert scale-type questions ($5 = \textit{strongly agree}$ and $1 = \textit{strongly disagree}$) and open-ended questions, and themes were recorded based on an analysis of responses (see Appendix C).

Relatedness

The first area is a common theme that can be found among several responses to both numerical and open-ended questions. The lowest scoring numerical question ($M= 3.28$, $SD=1.39$) was, “I will likely stay in contact with my mentor(s) after this semester.” Given that a major goal of mentoring is to connect with the other person, these responses indicate the lack of a meaningful connection. Of the open-ended questions, specifically asking about mentor weaknesses, at least three responses noted elements consistent with the theme of relatedness,

mentioning issues of mentors connecting with mentees or being impersonal. Though at least five responses about mentor strengths noted the mentors' ability to connect well, connection was the third most common theme among the mentor weaknesses, behind organization and communication. Additionally, two quotes provided by different mentees seemed to illustrate the significance of relatedness. The first quote reads, "just asking about our week isn't enough to make us feel connected," which indicates that some efforts being made to try connecting with mentees are insufficient. The second quote says, "their experiences as a student plays the biggest role as a mentor," referring to a meeting designated for mentors to share about their struggles as a student. This quote is clearly on the positive side and shows how vulnerability and openness from the mentor can impact the mentee's perception of connection.

Structured Activities

The second area of improvement based on the mentee perspective is having structured activities prepared for meetings. This finding is supported by the open-ended responses, of which at least four contained notes regarding use of meeting time. According to one student, "some meetings lacked substance," particularly referring to the ones that did not have anything to do with classes or schedules. Another student echoes this belief, saying there was "nothing to talk about at some meetings." Finally, two more students went so far as to explicitly say there needs to be more activities "for group talking" and "to actually connect." It is also noteworthy that no responses directly contradict this viewpoint. In other words, there were no responses that mentioned understanding the purpose of each meeting, or belief that meeting times were used effectively. Therefore, there appears to be a significant need for mentors to have more structured activities available to them, and for mentors to put them to use often.

My Personal Anecdote

As a peer mentor myself for three years and a peer mentor coordinator for two, I have first handedly seen the innerworkings of the honors peer mentor program. In addition, I have been a part of many other leadership teams on campus, two of which are Resident Assistants and Orientation Leaders. This means I have had considerable time and experience to evaluate our mentoring practices and compare them against other groups and leadership methods. I believe that there are four main areas of the honors peer mentor program that would benefit from adjustment: upward communication and training, which ties in with relatedness and interpersonal communication.

Upward Communication

As previously mentioned, any organization can benefit from reducing barriers to upward communication. In my experience as a peer mentor and as the coordinator, there were often times when I and other mentors were unsatisfied with certain practices in the program but did not feel as though we had a way to adequately communicate those concerns to the people who could do something about them. While there were meetings that had the goal of being a place where mentors could raise concerns and openly discuss issues, these topics were not always discussed in full honesty, and some were omitted completely. For instance, one piece of feedback from mentor surveys was dissatisfaction with communication from the director and coordinator in terms of clarity, frequency, and timing. However, neither myself nor the director were aware of this amid the semester, and therefore were not able to fix the problem. This is because mentors clearly did not feel as though they had a safe and adequate channel through which they could deliver productive feedback upward, despite mine and the director's best intentions. This is a classic example of upward communication distortion. When this happens repeatedly, it causes the leaders to be out of touch, just as the example illustrates (Lyon, 2017). Ultimately, this can

lead to a lack of mentors' satisfaction in their role and lack of commitment to the goals of the program (Lyon, 2017).

Content and Length of Training

For the three years I have attended and/or led a peer mentor training, it has always occurred on a single day in August and is delivered in the format of a three-hour lecture that is mostly informational. In other words, mentors are presented with all the practical “need-to-knows” at one time and are not trained at all on how to cultivate relationships. One issue this leads to for several mentors, especially those who are not as naturally gifted at being personable, is impersonal communication. This is when the interaction is generalized, goal-driven, or the personal qualities of each individual are irrelevant (Lyon 2017; Solomon & Theiss, 2012). When communication is consistently impersonal between the same parties, it has the tendency to dehumanize and objectify those in the interaction (Lyon, 2017). As a result, individuals' desire to continue interacting with the other party will decrease, tensions between the parties may rise, and feelings that one is valued by the other party will diminish (Lyon, 2017). In other words, the two parties or individuals will feel less and less connected to and trusting of each other. Because of the importance relatedness plays in a mentoring capacity, training should strive to make mentors more aware of the effects of impersonal communication, and equip them with strategies to make their communication with mentees more interpersonal.

Practical Recommendations for Improvement

Recommendation 1: More Face-To-Face Meetings Between Director and Mentors

The first suggestion for improvement focuses on how to reduce barriers to upward communication. Currently, the barriers in the peer mentor program are insufficient amounts of

face-to-face meetings between coordinator/director and mentors, and a general culture that does not seem to encourage open upward communication. One way to counteract this culture is to increase the number of face-to-face meetings between the director, coordinator, and mentors, which can be done in a few different methods (Lyon, 2017). The first is focus groups (Lyon, 2017), where some or all of the mentors would meet together with the director and coordinator and discuss any relevant issues, questions, or other information. This is similar to a format that was implemented this past semester, which, based on the mentor survey responses, seemed to be beneficial. If this is a chosen option going forward, the suggested changes would be to have them more frequently, either weekly or biweekly, and to have the meetings structured with specific questions that prompt feedback. The two other methods are monthly skip-level meetings or monthly one-on-one meetings with direct reports (Lyon, 2017): the former being monthly meetings with the director of the program, and the latter being with the student coordinator. These meetings should consist of the leader directly asking the mentor for feedback on specific things (Lyon, 2017), such as their communication style, regardless of which method is chosen. This is because an open-door policy is not enough to expect that a subordinate will regularly and accurately provide feedback. An open-door policy is when a supervisor frequently says something like, "Let me know if there's anything you need!" rather than directly asking the subordinate what they are lacking from the supervisor (Lyon, 2017). The advantage of asking a subordinate directly for their input is the establishment of that clear channel. When this happens, the subordinate is significantly more likely to perceive a safe way to raise potentially uncomfortable or confrontational issues with their supervisor's leadership. All three of these methods to increase open upward communication have their pros and cons as well as practical limitations, but there is one difference that is crucial to consider when deciding how to as for

feedback. While there is certainly an importance to gathering several mentors together at once, mentors will likely feel the most comfortable and perceive the clearest, safest channel in those one-on-one meetings with leaders. In this setting, they do not have to think about how their peers will perceive them for bringing up touchy subjects or other hesitations that result from social comparison (i.e., “my peers aren’t saying anything, so I’m not going to say anything”). Ideally, implementing both group and individual meetings throughout the semester will likely yield the best results.

Recommendation 2: Expand the Time Allotted for Training and Include More Relational Lessons

The second suggestion aims to improve the effectiveness of training for the mentors. The training that mentors currently receive takes place on one day before the fall semester, and it consists of a lecture-style presentation about information that mentors must convey to the students, plus a few activities for co-mentors to interact and plan for their first meeting. Notably, the current training agenda lacks lessons on the relational side of mentoring. Aside from the dedicated time for co-mentors to interact, there is little to no instruction or examples on how to be personable with mentors. While the informational side of mentoring is certainly important, the relational side is just as, if not more important, as the research shows (Rhodes et al., 2002). With these two concerns combined, and results from the mentor survey, it can be said that mentors overall are left feeling ill-equipped to mentor effectively.

One simple way to mitigate the effects of information overload is to spread training out across two or three days, as opposed to one. However, there should also be changes made to the content of the training if the honors college wants to truly prepare mentors adequately, and one of these changes should be the addition of lessons on interpersonal skills. Not everyone is

familiar with these skills, and as the literature suggests, mentoring rooted in interpersonal communication is successful in the absence of clinical training (Larose et al., 2005). A practical way to incorporate this topic is to have a professor come in and give a brief lesson on interpersonal skills. Since training already consists of mostly a lecture-style format, this lesson may be a combination of lecture and practice. For instance, Dr. Joseph Chesebro in the Communication department at SUNY Brockport specializes in interpersonal communication and tends to deliver lessons where students apply what they have learned to real life scenarios. Furthermore, Alex Ives mentioned that the strategy he finds most successful in guiding the mentors is teaching and discussing, modeling, then practicing. So, to combine these two pieces of information, the Honors College might have Dr. Chesebro give a lesson on tactics and theories such as social penetration theory, the power of asking questions, and the “UP Approach” (Chesebro, 2022), followed by a case study where mentors analyze and practice the applications of these skills with each other. Then, this offers the students practice and feedback from each other as well as the expert, which is consistent with both the three-step teaching strategy that Ives uses as well as literature on effective training and performance management (McNall, 2022a). This may be a strategy for the honors college to consider adopting in their training of mentors, and a great place to start using this strategy is with interpersonal skills.

Another change to the content of training should be the inclusion of more team building/bonding activities. Not only would this help mentors become comfortable with each other and strengthen their identity as a mentor, but the hope with doing these activities would be that mentors can take them to their mentees and help the mentees become more comfortable with their peers and their mentors. One point that Ives asserted in the interview was that taking down the professional veneer with students and emphasizing their humanity makes all the difference in

the level of comfort and potential for relatedness that students perceive. So, to apply the teach-model-practice strategy here, the director and coordinator should teach and model this by being vulnerable and personal with mentors, and the mentors would then be able to practice doing the same with their mentees. Incorporating more team building/bonding activities during mentor training, which is included in the following suggestion, would assist in both of these contexts by giving each participant the space and permission to be themselves.

Recommendation 3: Incorporate More Activities to Promote Connection and Vulnerability

The third recommendation for the Honors College seeks to increase the perceived relatedness to mentors that mentees feel. As research supports, it is important for mentees to have a good quality relationship with their mentor for both parties to receive the maximum benefits. As evidenced by the surveys, mentees do not tend to stay in contact with their mentor after the semester ends, and mentors' connection with mentees could be improved, according to both perspectives. In order to increase relatedness, mentors should try their best to be vulnerable and interact with their mentees as equals. As the mentee survey responses showed, they particularly enjoyed the meeting where mentors shared stories about their struggles while being a college student, with one student saying, "their experiences as a student plays the biggest role as a mentor." Practically, this is where training on interpersonal communication comes into play, so the mentors know how to interact in this manner. This is especially helpful to those who have a more difficult time forming relationships easily. Additionally helpful for anyone like this, but also to every mentor, is having a repertoire of structured relationship-building activities ready to go at any time. As Cobane and Thurman (2007) found in the feedback from the "BBQ with the Profs" event, cultivating relationships is done efficiently by doing several clear, structured, "get-to-know-you" activities. Between this and the survey responses saying that meeting times could

be use more effectively, it makes sense to provide mentors with this repertoire of activities, which would be accomplished by doing these activities more in training (see Appendix D).

The other factor that could substantially increase perceptions of relatedness is the amount of communication and face-to-face meetings between mentor and mentee. In the hybrid iMentor program tested by Glass (2023), results indicated that the organic, face-to-face meetings with a mentor seemed to be more influential toward positive college outcomes, at least compared to the online curricular sessions. The results also showed that number of meetings outside of the program were linked to positive outcomes for the students (Glass, 2023). This indicates the possibility that a greater frequency of face time between mentors and mentees could make a difference, which may or may not be linked to a greater perception of relatedness. As for ways to increase the communication between mentor and mentee, making it a habit to meet up outside of the program would contribute to this, but another option could be making it part of the mentors' assignments to reach out to their mentees individually every so often. This could look like asking them how they felt about a recent exam, or how their trip home over the weekend was. This is also a responsibility that could fall on the coordinator, as part of their job could be nudging the mentors every few weeks with ideas of what they can say to a mentee to build that relationship. It can be something simple, as long as it is a little personal (i.e., more than just something like "Checking in, hope you're doing well!"). All of these suggestions considered, arguably the most important one to focus on is helping mentors to be more vulnerable and to communicate interpersonally. The key above anything else to increase this vulnerability though, is self-disclosure and reciprocity. As social penetration theory says, self-disclosure – intentionally revealing information about oneself – is what increases intimacy in a relationship (Carpenter & Greene, 2015). Included in this theory is the norm of reciprocity, which is the obligation that one

has to disclose the same level of personal information in return, to maintain the social norm (Carpenter & Greene, 2015). As such, it is important to encourage mentees' self-disclosure, but mentors must also participate in this exchange of information for intimacy to actually be increased. So, while conversation starters may help mentors (see Appendix E), the personal level of their response is equally as important, and these skills can be learned via interpersonal communication training.

Recommendation 4: Nurture Self-Efficacy Through Faculty Relationships

The last suggestion to improve the peer mentor program is regarding student relationships with faculty members. Fostering student-faculty relationships is not currently a primary focus of the peer mentor program, but it should be due to the goal of the Honors College, as these relationships do influence how students meet the expectations of the Honors College. Part of the Honors College's mission statement is, "students work closely with distinguished faculty and participate in small, highly interactive courses that advance skills in critical thinking, research, and oral and written communication," (Mission and learning outcomes, n.d.). Since the peer mentor program aims to prepare students for success in the Honors College, it would make sense then to facilitate these faculty relationships. Additionally, research shows that a quality relationship with a faculty mentor increases students' research self-efficacy (Hill, 2022). In other words, students will be more likely to pursue more difficult tasks, such as research, and persist in them longer, when they have a meaningful faculty relationship. This does not necessarily mean that faculty should be intentionally trying to increase the student's self-efficacy, but rather, focusing on creating a personal relationship with the student will allow their self-efficacy to increase as a result. Since the Honors College strives to have students be academically ambitious, the peer mentor program should be playing a part to foster that ambition. To do just that, the peer

mentor program might consider embedding ways of connecting with faculty into the curriculum. This could consist of larger events like BBQ with the Profs, which seemed to be helpful in easing students' nerves about interacting with faculty, or unique smaller-scale challenges such as prompting each mentee to stop into a professor's office hours to start a conversation (see Appendix F). Either one of these options reduces the pressure on students to be the first to reach out to a professor, which often can feel intimidating. Again, the hope of incorporating this suggestion into the peer mentor program would be that these relationships translate into increased opportunities for research and more students pursuing these opportunities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Honors peer mentor program clearly serves an important purpose in the lives of students, but just like any organization, there is always room for improvement. The literature emphasizes the importance of having quality mentor relationships and the impact that faculty relationships can have on students' self-efficacy. In terms of leadership when it comes to teaching students how to be mentors, the literature illustrates the relevance of open upward communication and interpersonal communication, when viewing the mentor team as an organization. Based on APS mentoring, strategies that appear to have success are pairing mentors up strategically, taking down the professional veneer, teaching through modeling and learning by practicing, and having weekly meetings with all mentors and the director. Given the apparent weaknesses of the Honors peer mentor program, the four suggestions to implement are as follows: increase the number of meetings between the director and mentors, expand training to occur over a longer period and incorporate more training on interpersonal communication, incorporate more activities during group meetings that promote vulnerability and connection, and dedicate time in the curriculum for events that will foster student-faculty relationships.

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Appendix A – Interview Outline with Alex Ives

1. What do you believe is the most important aspect of mentoring?

- Connection, trust - must happen to produce real benefits
- Responsibility on the mentor - be vulnerable and open; transactional relationship is much less impactful
 - How do you foster that as a mentor, especially as someone who is not natural at creating relationships?
 - Emphasize humanity; important for mentors to have a good model (active listening, engaging communication) during weekly mentor meetings - case studies & practice

2. What is your vision/mission for mentoring? What do you focus on?

- Create a more compassionate society; interpersonal connection/caring

3. What mentoring strategies work well for you right now?

- Developing theoretical grounding and discussing that with mentors (especially new mentors)
- Professional development – skills that go into mentorship (passively and actively); discuss and teach, then model, then practice
- “sneakily” pair mentors who have different skill sets when working together on developing skills
- Talk like human beings! The professional veneer goes away

4. What improvements do you want to see in your program and why?

- More ways to get mentors connected with each other and mentors connected with mentees
- More engagement – finding ways to get everyone together (example mentors taking apps group out & combining groups to do activities)

5. What strengths help make your leadership in this program successful?

- Take down professional blind

6. How do the regular mentor meetings affect the program overall?

- Create Community and identity

- "You lose out on so much when mentors are not connected to each other and can't learn from each other."
- When identity is rooted in community of mentors, it is much easier to keep that spirit going than just being on your own.

Other Notes

- 2 separate mentor classes - 1 (online) for returning mentors, 2 (in person) sections for new mentors - both meet weekly
- Student affairs background helps, rather than academic background

Strategies that are used in the program are rooted in literature

Appendix B – Peer Mentor Survey

Table B1

Means and Standard Deviations for Likert Scale Items

Q#	Question	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	I was able to connect on a personal level with some of my mentees.	3.9	.88
2	The training in August prepared me to handle the relational side of mentorship.	3.6	1.07
3	The training in August prepared me to handle the informational side of mentorship.	3.5	1.27
4a	The training in August equipped me to collaborate with another mentor successfully.	4.2	1.23
5a	It is important to interact with the entire team of peer mentors and directors on a regular basis throughout the mentorship experience.	4.4	.84
6a	I felt actively supported by the Honors director(s) throughout the mentorship experience.	4.1	1.10
7a	I felt actively supported by the peer mentor coordinator throughout the semester.	4.2	1.23
8	I had sufficient opportunity to bring up challenges with mentoring to the Honors directors and/or peer mentor coordinators.	4.2	.79
9	The meetings and activities coordinated by my mentor team were well-planned.	4.2	.42
10	The collaboration within my mentor team was effective.	4.6	.70
11a	Participation in Honors Gives Back community service project was a positive experience.	3.2	1.32
12	Participating in the Strategizing Your Brockport Career workshop was a positive experience.	4.1	.99

Table B2

Representative Quotes of Open-Ended Items

Q#	Question	Quotes of responses
4b	In which aspects did the training fall short of preparing you (e.g., planning, communication, teamwork, other)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I would say it fell short in the information aspect. I feel like this flood of information made it hard for me to remember everything we talked about simply because there's an overwhelming amount of information, not because it wasn't provided.” • “Some more communication between the coordinator and mentors would've been more helpful.”

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I learned a lot about my mentees and was glad to do this program, but I think there should be a change in how we prepare for it!” • “Trying to get the mentees to participate.”
5b	Please comment on the content and quality of the monthly meetings with peer mentors. How could they be better?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I enjoyed them. It was a great chance to connect with all the mentees and touch base on current happenings, prepare for future events, and engage in useful activities.” • “I think at meetings people were able to share ideas and thoughts of how their own meetings were coming along and others were able to get some new ideas if needed.” • “I enjoyed the monthly meetings, and I thought it was a great way to connect and help each other if advice was needed. It was a safe space to discuss certain issues.” • “I think there's a lot of information provided which is useful, however if the program wanted to focus more on building a community, I think that using the meetings as a starting point is a good idea. I think there could be more contact between groups and other mentors or more activities involved in the meetings.” • “I think peer mentors should meet with the student director or Dr. Busch once a month and talk individually. Having a whole group meeting would be awesome a couple of times a month like we did to see everyone and learn a group lesson, but I think individual meetings are important too.”
6b	What were you lacking from the director(s) that could have made for a better mentoring experience?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I only think there could be more communication. Direct and simple answers to questions that we have to provide to our mentees is the most important part.” • “Communication.”
7b	What were you lacking from the coordinator that could have made for a better mentoring experience?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Just some more communication and explanation of a few tasks.” • “I think my group needed more communication from the Honors College, but I had a great experience.” • “Finding more information with the question(s) asked.”
13	Comment on how well your weekly group meetings and activities went, including structure/organization, participation, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “There was a good amount of participation!” • “Our weekly meeting followed the provided syllabus; I feel like when there was no plan, we did not know what to do with our group.” • “It felt like our mentees felt like they were being forced to be there rather than they found it helpful. I know that weekly meetings have to be mandatory, but there has to be a better way to structure the content so that its more

		<p>interesting and encourages participation from people just because they want to, not because they have to.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I think my group meetings went well because the students knew they had to be there. The participation was pretty good because the majority had become friends with them. The structure of the meetings on the syllabus could have been more because the meetings seemed to be quick because no one had questions or concerns.”
16	Provide recommendations for changes or new initiatives for Honors Peer Mentoring next year (e.g., mentor training adjustments, program structure, program events, group size/make-up).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “More Honors-wide and Honors class-wide events would be nice.” • “Interactive activities that connect to students' major process and...find meaningful conversations.” • “Have one of the directors participate in a meeting or two thought the semester?” • “I think that the information provided to mentors at the beginning of the year needs to be split up, I forget half of it right after the session just because it's so long, which then stinks when my mentees have a question, and I can't give them an answer.”
17	Provide additional feedback here:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Honors College needs to make drastic changes if they want to keep mentors around. I am not returning to mentorship next year because of the constant aggravation this was. The workload is a lot more than a 1-credit, pass/fail class.”

Appendix C – First-Year Student Survey

Table C1

Means and Standard Deviations for Likert Scale Items

Q#	Question	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	Mentoring support in making a smooth transition from high school to SUNY Brockport.	4.15	.79
2	Mentoring support in understanding the resources available on campus, such as academic support services, campus health care, library, etc.	4.21	.87
3	Mentoring support in preparing my 3- or 4-year academic plan.	4.03	1.05
4	Mentoring support in understanding my degree audit.	4.37	.78
5	Mentoring assistance with registration for spring semester courses.	4.19	.96
6	HON 112 instructor advisement in preparation for spring semester courses.	3.69	1.35
7	Participation in the Honors Gives Back community service event.	3.75	1.18
8	Participation in the Strategizing Your Brockport Career workshop.	3.41	1.36
9	Informal social activities, games, and/or socializing in general with members of my peer mentor group.	3.90	1.07
10	I felt personally connected to one or more of my mentors.	3.69	1.25
11	I felt comfortable bringing up my academic struggles to one or more of my mentors.	4.08	.96
12	I felt comfortable bringing up my personal struggles to one or more of my mentors.	3.77	1.24
13	I feel like one or more of my mentors made an effort to get to know me.	4.05	1.07
14	I will likely stay in contact with my mentor(s) after this semester.	3.28	1.39

Table C2

Representative Quotes of Open-Ended Items

Q#	Question	Quotes of responses
16	Please let us know what you found to be the strengths and weaknesses of your peer mentors. Consider such issues as their general availability, your sense that they cared for you as a person, their knowledge about relevant issues and information regarding your Brockport career, and so on. Feel free to use brief bullet points for strengths and weaknesses.	<p data-bbox="704 235 834 264">Strengths:</p> <ul data-bbox="753 277 1458 1020" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="753 277 1365 340">• “I thought they were good at connecting and listening to their mentees.” <li data-bbox="753 352 1419 453">• “my peer mentors were very welcoming and understanding of any struggles I brought to their attention” <li data-bbox="753 466 1458 529">• “I enjoyed a more personal dialogue and felt a very good connection with my peers and mentor.” <li data-bbox="753 541 1386 604">• “I liked that they were very truthful with their struggles as well.” <li data-bbox="753 617 1094 646">• “Good with small talk” <li data-bbox="753 659 1321 722">• “Good communication, connections, and community” <li data-bbox="753 735 1435 798">• “It was very useful to have mentors with the same major as me.” <li data-bbox="753 810 1435 945">• “They made sure that we didn’t feel alone in the process of navigating college and the future years to come and shared their experiences to help us learn from their mistakes and successes.” <li data-bbox="753 957 948 987">• “Relatable” <li data-bbox="753 999 932 1029">• “Genuine” <p data-bbox="704 1041 867 1071">Weaknesses:</p> <ul data-bbox="753 1083 1458 1845" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="753 1083 1386 1146">• “communication sometimes took longer than I expected” <li data-bbox="753 1159 1289 1188">• “sometimes did not know what to do” <li data-bbox="753 1201 1458 1281">• “It seemed like they were trying their best but often didn't get essential communication relating to program things” <li data-bbox="753 1293 1240 1323">• “lack of productivity in meetings” <li data-bbox="753 1335 1240 1365">• “Could be a little more organized” <li data-bbox="753 1377 1458 1440">• “some meetings felt like there was nothing really to talk about” <li data-bbox="753 1453 1321 1482">• “Bad use of time and time management” <li data-bbox="753 1495 1435 1575">• “I felt it was hard for them to connect with me since they don’t have the same major. Felt it was hard to connect with them almost unprofessional” <li data-bbox="753 1587 1435 1722">• “were not very personable. didn't seem like they wanted to get to know me as a person. almost felt like they just did the peer mentor program just to get the credit.” <li data-bbox="753 1734 1458 1845">• “They need more activities to actually connect with us during the 50 min. Just asking about our week and classes is not enough to make us feel

connected, activities that work on group talking together would help.”

- “really only one mentor made an effort to help and listen to us...sometimes the meetings were useless and we never covered anything important, mentors took awhile to answer texts and emails, only one mentor really cared to get to know us, one mentor was not very friendly and accepting to us”

17 Please provide any additional feedback on your experience with the Honors Peer Mentoring Program. Feel free to write about items not included in the above questions.

- “It was extremely helpful to have someone help with my schedule but some classes were pointless.”
 - “Their experience as a college student plays the biggest role as a mentor and that does help us.”
 - “More structured; we end class very early”
 - “some of the meetings lacked substance and felt like a waste of time. Specifically, the ones that didn’t concern our classes, schedules, and degree audits.”
 - “I just felt that my mentors didn’t have the proper training and were often just as confused as I was.”
 - “During a lot of the meetings there was no main objective, we sat and talked majority of the time.”
 - “The best thing about it was that I was able to connect with people in my major.”
 - “it started to get a little pointless because we would spend the whole hour saying good thing, bad thing and just talking about random stuff to fill the time.”
 - “I honestly feel that peer mentoring did very good things for me mentally and was a very welcome place to ask questions and bring up concerns.”
-

Appendix D – Structured Activities List

Icebreakers & Other Activities, for introductions and various occasions:

Over the Mountain

- Form a circle with one person in the middle
- The person in the middle introduces themselves (name, pronouns). Then they say, “Over the mountain if _____”
 - Ex. “Over the mountain if you have brown eyes”
 - Whatever the middle person says must also apply to them
- Those in the circle who have brown eyes must leave their spot and find a new, vacant spot
 - Cannot be the spot next to them
- The person who is unable to get a spot must go in the middle
- Repeat

Group Stare

- Everyone forms a circle
- Everyone stares at the ground, and someone starts a countdown from 3.
- After the countdown, everyone looks up and must stare at someone
- If two people make eye contact, they are both out
- Continue until 2 people are left, then they play rock, paper, scissors to determine the winner.

Rock, Paper, Scissors Tournament

- Everyone pairs up with one person and plays RPS
- The person who doesn't win is now a cheerleader for the winner
- The winners then take on another opponent who also won against their partner

- This repeats until eventually, everyone is cheering for 2 people in the final round

Solemn and Silent

- Everyone finds a partner and stands back-to-back
- On the count of 3 everyone turns and faces their partner. Participants must remain silent with a blank expression for 5 seconds
- Anyone who laughs or shows emotion is out
- Reset and go again

Name and Animal Game

- Everyone forms a circle (sitting or standing)
- One person will start by naming an animal that has the same first letter as their first name, followed by their name
- The next person must repeat everyone's name and corresponding animal that went before them, and then add their own.
- Repeat until everyone in the circle has gone
 - This can also be done by saying a food instead of an animal, but must be limited to only one category of things

Stranded on a Deserted Island

- The moderator of the activity will start the game by saying, "If you were stranded on a deserted island, alone, for 24 hours, how many individual squares of toilet paper do you think you would need?"
 - They should also specify minimum and maximum numbers that people are allowed to answer with (ex. Min. 0, Max. 20)
 - It is wise to set a cap for time purposes, likely no greater than 30

- As everyone answers, the moderator should keep track of the number each person says (to avoid cheating/changing)
- After everyone has answered, the moderator will say, “For each square that you said you would need, you now have to say one fun fact about yourself.”
 - Ex. If a person said they would need 14, they have to say 14 fun facts
- This can get time consuming
- Can also be done by using post-it notes and having each person physically take the number of squares they think they would need, then hand you them one by one as they say their fun fact
 - If doing it this way, set the cap at a lower number so we don’t need a ton of post-its
 - We collect the post-its back so they can still be used

Going on a Trip

- This is played like the name and animal game
- Everyone forms a circle (sitting or standing)
- The moderator starts by saying, “We’re going on a camping trip, but we only have room for everyone to bring one thing.”
- The person starting must say their name and one thing they would bring on the trip
- Every person that goes after must say everyone’s name and what they are bringing before adding in their item
- Continue until everyone has gone

Other things you can do

- Use a blank course schedule grid to calendar your week, including class time, set extracurriculars (sports, clubs, etc.), socializing, and so on. (Good at beginning of semester)
- Pick a student union-sponsored event and invite mentees to come with you. A couple mentor groups could even do it together. Try to have a good time with some relaxed conversations.
- Compare final exam schedules. Whose is worst? Whose is unfairly easy? (Good at end of semester)
- Some good standard icebreakers/social warm-ups: good thing/bad thing; rose/bud/thorn; two truths and a lie; etc.
- Bring a card or board game to play for part of a meeting!

Appendix E – Questions for Mentors to Ask Mentees

*REMEMBER: the key getting mentees to open up is responding to them with self-disclosure and answers that aren't general or vague. To help do this, consider asking a follow up question on something they already said!

- To the whole group at once:
 - Did anyone do anything fun over the weekend?
 - What is your biggest stress or fear about midterms?
 - Follow up with something you're struggling with or something you have struggled with in the past and maybe how it affected you
- To an individual mentee:
 - How did your chemistry test go last week?
 - What kind of music do you like?
 - Ask if they are going to any big events coming up, such as a local concert
 - What was your favorite part about being home over the weekend?
 - Tip: capitalize on similarities between the two of you
 - E.g. if your mentee says “getting to see my dog,” you might say “Awe, I miss my dog. What kind do you have?” This creates an opportunity for further discussion
- Other ideas to start conversation among the group:
 - Come up with a question of the week
 - What is everyone's favorite podcast or book?
 - If money was no object, where is one place you would travel to?
 - What's everyone's happiest memory?

Appendix F – Questions Students Can Ask Professors

- Introduce yourself, say you're in their class and just wanted to introduce yourself
- “What’s your area of research?”
- Approach them with something you enjoyed from class and why
- “What first sparked your interest in your area of research?”
- “What’s your best piece of advice for navigating college?”
- “What were some of your struggles in college?”
- “Is there anything you regret not doing in college or anything you would have done differently?”
- “How did you find a mentor in college?”

*Note: professors like getting questions. It may seem weird to approach a professor and bluntly ask them a somewhat deep question, but if you say right off the bat, “Hi, I have a random question for you,” it will help get the awkwardness out of the way.