

EXPLORING PEER MENTORS' ROLES IN A COLLEGE STUDENT TRANSITION MENTORING PROGRAM



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Abstract

Peer mentoring programs are common throughout the US in supporting college students who are transitioning to a new campus, yet most studies on peer mentoring have described who peer mentors are rather than capturing what the peer mentors' role is or tasks that they engage in during peer mentoring. The purpose of this case study was to explore peer mentors' roles in a mentoring program supporting students in an agricultural sciences college at The Pennsylvania State University. This research used six-phase thematic analysis. A total of six female peer mentors participated in the research, and four primary roles being filled by peer mentors were identified: active communication, information support, safe space, and context awareness. The findings align with Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory and provide scholars and practitioners with a deeper understanding of peer mentoring to provide a possible road map for purposeful professional development of peer mentors targeting the roles they might be asked to fill as peer mentors.

Keywords: peer mentoring, peer mentor, college transition, transition theory

Mentoring has become an intervention in the higher education setting mainly due to the impact that it has on students, especially those who are just starting their college careers (Asgari & Carter, 2016; Collings et al., 2015; Elliott et al., 2011). Specifically, peer mentoring has been considered an alternative approach to education (Miller et al., 2001) due to the benefits it has on students' academic achievement and transition to college (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). Peer mentoring is generally implemented with a specific goal such as to improve students' academic performance in the classroom or to bolster students' professional and personal development (Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Hall & Jaugietis, 2011; Heirdsfield et al., 2008; Prunuske et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2013; Vandal et al., 2018).

Terrion and Leonard (2007; p. 150) defined peer mentoring as:

Peer mentoring is a helping relationship in which two individuals of similar age and/or experience come together, either informally or through formal mentoring schemes, in the pursuit of fulfilling some combination of functions that are career-related (e.g., information sharing, career strategizing) and psychosocial (e.g., confirmation, emotional support, personal feedback, friendship).

Peer mentoring is a relationship between mentee and mentor with both individuals playing critical roles in the success of that relationship. Mentor and mentee benefit from a reciprocal relationship in which the mentee can have knowledge and support as well as a sense of belonging, thus reaching an outcome of successfully adapting to a new

environment. The mentor benefits from improved altruistic, cognitive, social, and personal growth through the mentoring process (Beltman & Schaeben, 2012; Fletcher & Ragins, 2008; Nykodym et al., 1995). The mentor and the mentee can share each other's experiences without concerns in this relationship because the mentee does not feel the status difference that sometimes exists between professor and student (Hall & Jaugietis, 2011).

Research on mentoring published between 1980 and 2009 largely considered mentees' outcomes (Haggard et al., 2011; Splan et al., 2016). Other studies investigated peer mentors' characteristics, benefits, experience, and roles (Beltman & Schaeben, 2012; Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Heirdsfield et al., 2008; Holt & Fifer, 2018; Rodger & Tremblay, 2003). Only a few studies have investigated peer mentors' roles in a transfer or transition context. Hall and Jaugietis (2011) investigated the impact of a peer mentoring program on first-year undergraduate students' decision to remain in school from 2004 to 2009. The results show that peer mentoring made major contributions to student retention. Students described peer mentoring programs as helpful, and mentors reported that their communication skills, social skills, and self-confidence have improved through the mentoring process. Despite these benefits, we still do not know about what mentors experienced in the mentoring process and which mentor's role leads to this impact.

Peer mentoring is particularly critical for students in university institutions that have multiple campuses where students must transition from one campus to a university's flagship campus to complete their studies (Bundy et al., 2022; Fillmore, 2022). More than 50% of the students enrolled in the College of Agricultural Sciences at The Pennsylvania State University start their academic programs at a campus other than the flagship campus (Undergraduate Admissions, n.d.). Previous research and documented a range of reasons, including high tuition costs, fear of adapting to a new environment, and a desire to remain close to home (College Board, 2017; Knight et al., 2014). To help the transitioning students adapt to the flagship campus, the university's undergraduate education office created a peer mentoring program. The program is called the Agricultural Sciences Change of Campus Mentoring Program (ACCoMPLish), and the mentors consist of students who have previously transitioned from campus to the flagship campus.

Previous studies did address official roles that peer mentors engage in relation to academic help, cultural adjustment, and professional and personal development (Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Hall & Jaugietis, 2011; Heirdsfield et al., 2008; Prunuske et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2013; Vandal et al., 2018); however, there appears to be a dearth of information on describing the other critical, but perhaps not enumerated roles that peer mentors play unofficially throughout the mentoring process. This study explores what peer mentors encounter and the actions that occur after the mentoring process in an effort to help scholars and practitioners at colleges and institutions understand the peer mentoring relationship on a deeper level. In this study, both the defined and undefined roles, by the program, of

peer mentors will be examined. The research question aimed to explore the specific roles of peer mentors within the educational framework. To address this central inquiry, "What are the peer mentor's roles?", eight guiding questions were developed to facilitate the self-reflection process and collect qualitative data.

Theoretical Framework

The study is framed around Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory and Kram and Isabella's (1985) work on peer relationships. Schlossberg argues that transition causes change, and transition experience influences adaptation or "change". For transition students, moving to a new campus is an event that causes change, and peer mentoring is an intervention to assist with adaptation. In other words, participating in peer mentoring is considered as a process of adaptation. Schlossberg (1981) suggests three variables influence the process from transition to adaptation: (a) perception of the transition, (b) characteristics of the pre and post-transition environment, and (c) characteristics of the individual. Interpersonal and institutional support are elements corresponding to pre and post-transition environment characteristics. In this study, peer mentoring is a program supported by the university (institutional support) and provides a mentoring relationship with more experienced peers (interpersonal support). It is assumed that transition students could be affected by the characteristics of two transition environments through peer mentoring, and the transition students will adapt to the change.

The foundation of many peer mentoring programs is based on Kram and Isabella (1985) who emphasized the value of peer relationships. While Kram's (1980) earlier work is based on the importance of hierarchical mentoring relationships, Kram and Isabella (1985) saw the value in peer mentoring in certain contexts. They posit that communication, mutual support, and collaboration could be more easily achieved in peer relationships than in hierarchical mentoring. The researchers also state the benefits of peer mentoring relationships.

This study investigates the roles that the peer mentors play when the transitioning students, or the peer mentees, are going through the transition process of moving to a new campus. According to the transition theory (Schlossberg, 1981), there are supporting system, which includes institutional and interpersonal support, provided that could help the transition students to adapt to the change. This study equates the peer mentors to institutional and interpersonal support as described by Kram and Isabella (1985).

Case Background

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EXPLORING PEER MENTORS' ROLES IN A MENTORING PROGRAM

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Research Methods

This study investigated three iterations of a mentoring program. In this descriptive case study, the focus was on the phenomena of peer mentoring and the central research question, "What are the peer mentor's roles?" The research study received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) under the protocol number STUDY00016372. The following section describes the method utilized to conduct the research.

Study Population

The population of this study was peer mentors who participated in the program during the fall 2019, spring 2020, and/or fall 2020 semesters (maximum variation sampling). The program coordinator provided the list of peer mentors. The total number of participants in the peer mentoring program during the fall 2019, spring 2020, and fall 2020 semesters was 13. Seven mentors in the fall 2019 semester returned as mentors for the spring 2020 semester. In the spring 2020 semester, three new mentors joined the peer mentoring program. In the fall 2020 semester,

all the mentors from the previous semester returned and no new mentors joined the program. The number of peer mentors per semester is shown in Table 1. From the list of peer mentors provided by the program coordinator, the peer mentors were contacted via email and asked if they would like to participate in this study. Thirteen peer mentors were invited to participate in the study, consisting of 2 males and 11 females. Ultimately, eight peer mentors chose to participate, and all of the participants were female. After the participants expressed consent to the study, the data were collected and utilized. Because all of the participants were females, the data may be reflective of female mentors' perspectives.

Table 1

Total Participants in Peer Mentoring Program During 2019–2020 Academic Year

Semester	Total number of participants	
	Total number of mentors	Total number of mentees
Fall 2019 semester (August–December)	7	48
Spring 2020 semester (January–May)	10	12
Fall 2020 semester (August–December)	10	30

Note. Seven mentors in the fall 2019 semester returned as mentors for the spring 2020 semester. In the spring 2020 semester, three new mentors joined the peer mentoring program. In the fall 2020 semester, all the mentors from the previous semester returned and no new mentors joined the program. A total of 13 peer mentors were part of the mentoring program from the beginning of fall 2019 to the end of fall 2020.

Data Collection

Data were collected through two sources: self-reflections and email correspondence. Each participating peer mentor was asked to submit a written reflection because it helps uncover the holistic experience as well as the unique personal experience (Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999). The written reflection consisted of eight guiding questions which were created based on mentoring definitions and guides (Cabrera et al., n.d.; Wayne State University, 2012). The guiding questions were designed to encourage participants to engage in self-reflection regarding their experiences as peer mentors. These self-reflection questions included: (a) How did you prepare for the peer mentoring?; (b) How did you start the peer mentoring?; (c) What did you do for your mentee(s) during the peer mentoring?; (d) How did you communicate with your mentee(s)?; (e) How was the relationship with your mentee(s)?; (f) How did the peer mentoring end?; (g) What do you think about the peer mentoring program?; and (h) What does peer mentoring mean to you?

In addition to the self-reflections, we collected email correspondence that showed the communication between the mentors and their mentees. The email correspondence

EXPLORING PEER MENTORS' ROLES IN A MENTORING PROGRAM

provided additional data and evidence to the conversations between mentors and mentees. The participants gave their consent for these data to be used in the study as well. All data were collected from January 11 to January 17, 2021.

Data Analysis

This research used six-phase thematic analysis (TA) to draw out the roles of peer mentors. TA is "a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 57). Grouping the data is essential since the research revolves around identifying the roles of peer mentors in a mentoring program. A total of two researchers participated in the coding process. First, we familiarized ourselves with the data. While reading and re-reading the data, we analyzed the meaning of the data. Next, we generated preliminary codes. One member of the research team was the coordinator for the peer mentoring program while the other coder was not associated with the program. We used investigator triangulation to provide different perspectives on the findings of this research (Denzin, 1978, as cited in Carter et al., 2014). We analyzed the data together to reduce the possibility of bias and to ensure the data was credible. Each written reflection was independently coded by each of the team members. The coding results were compared, and different parts were recoded or newly coded through an agreement between each coder. Third, we critically analyzed existing themes from the coding. The codes were clustered by finding overlapping parts between codes. Fourth, we confirmed whether each theme was independent, but all themes were connected within one frame. Unnecessary codes were discarded. New themes were created for codes that did not fit the previously established themes. We reached a consensus on the final version of the themes. Next, we defined and named the themes. We confirmed that each theme focused on one topic and that the themes did not overlap. We also considered the order of themes. Finally, we organized all the findings.

Trustworthiness was established by addressing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba 1985). Credibility and dependability were established through data triangulation by comparing the data from multiple participants who had shared experiences and through data review by multiple researchers. Transferability was established by articulating the case of the study, which provides the background and context in which the study was conducted. Confirmability was established through the audit trail created throughout the data collection and analysis process.

Results

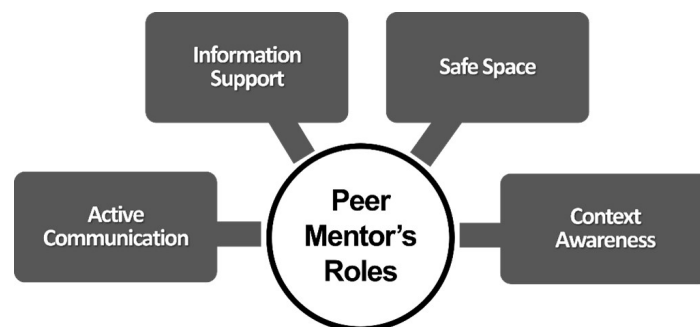
Eight mentors participated in the research study. Of these, two engaged solely through email correspondence, with their email interactions analyzed for documentation. The remaining six mentors contributed both through email interactions and by answering self-reflection questions.

The participants majored in different fields: agricultural

and extension education, animal management, animal sciences, and pharmacology and toxicology. The frequency with which the peer mentors took on the role of a peer mentor is as follows: Two peer mentors served for one semester, two served for two semesters, and the last two served for more than three semesters. Based on the research question of "What is the peer mentor's role", four main themes were drawn from the data analysis: active communication, information support, safe space, and context awareness (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

A Peer Mentor's Roles



Active Communication

Active communication refers to peer mentors' active attempts to communicate and form relationships with their mentees. The results showed that the initial contact was critical because it determined whether the peer mentoring relationship would continue. The first contact was made via email. The program coordinator provided an email template to the mentors to help ensure the first contact was effective. The mentors added their own information to the content of the email template and sent the modified emails to the mentees. Each of the mentors introduced themselves by providing their name, department/major, clubs, sports, favorite hobbies, and information about whether they participated in an honors program, among other details. Once a mentee responded to their mentor, more private communication began.

The second communication took place via email, text message, a virtual meeting, or an in-person meeting, according to the mentees' preferences. This communication mainly consisted of casual conversations between the mentors and their mentees about campus or daily life. This second communication was an important step in the peer mentoring process because it confirmed the mentee's desire to maintain the relationship. If a mentee did not respond to this second communication, mentoring program engagement from the mentee was minimal to non-existent despite the preparation and best intentions of the peer mentor assigned. Most mentors had low expectations because when they recalled their own past experiences as mentees, they remembered that they were often too busy adjusting to the new campus and were not strongly motivated to participate in peer mentoring. Despite these low expectations, the mentors continued to persist through the semester to contact nonresponsive mentees via text

EXPLORING PEER MENTORS' ROLES IN A MENTORING PROGRAM

message or email on a regular basis to check on the overall transition status of their mentees.

The mentors used various communication strategies to elicit responses from their mentees. The mentors asked questions that the mentees could quickly respond to, or questions related to campus life. One peer mentor said, "I also tried to text more during finals to make sure they are handling things okay." Another mentor said, "I found that, in the email, if I asked for action from the mentee like 'send me an emoji to describe your day,' they were more likely to reply than if I did not include a call for action."

In some cases, communication between a mentor and a mentee was unexpectedly spontaneous. If the mentor and the mentee were in a similar major, attended classes in the same building, or belonged to the same honors program, they met unintentionally. In these cases, they talked briefly and promised to keep in touch.

Information Support

Providing *information support* for a mentee means responding to the mentee's questions and providing guidance by predicting what the mentee might need before the mentee asks. Each semester, the peer mentors collected mentees' information, such as their majors and career goals. Based on this information, the mentors determined which content would be most useful to their mentees based on their lived experiences. They provided information about campus life as well as the mentees' majors and career goals, even if the mentors and mentees' majors were different.

To provide information support, the peer mentors acquired and reviewed a variety of information. The peer mentors prepared to share information that the mentees might need. Preparation included collecting information, reading the peer mentoring guidebook, and acquiring various pieces of information from other people. For example, some peer mentors contacted a more experienced peer mentor or a program coordinator to understand what they should share with the mentees. One peer mentor said, "I prepared by looking at the resources this university offers to students so I could be more prepared when they asked me questions," while another indicated, "I contacted peer mentors who have mentored before and talked to them on what to expect and what all I should include in my email. Along with reading through material provided in our Canvas page."

The information that the peer mentors provided their mentees mainly centered on campus life (e.g., sports, clubs, social events), city life (e.g., food/restaurants/cafés for studying, weather, transportation system), and academic resources (e.g., classes, jobs, careers, internships, tutoring, study tips, research/thesis writing, and study-abroad programs). One peer mentor said, "I helped my mentees with questions about getting around campus and how to get involved. One of the mentees actually joined the same sorority as me." The shared information was more often practical tips than general information. For example, regarding internships, peer mentors did not only inform their mentees of internship opportunities, but they also shared with their mentees the kinds of duties they would have in a

particular position, with whom they would work, and whom they should contact to apply for the position. One peer mentor said to a mentee via email:

They do require at least one shift a week though, so keep that in mind for the future. They also have shadowing opportunities. All you need to do is reach out to physicians and physician's assistants that you'd be interested in shadowing. They have actually an infectious disease specialist [at the hospital] that you should just reaching [sic] out to, considering your career goals!

The same peer mentor shared information about how to contact faculty members by saying:

I would recommend looking at the faculty that are a part of your department and reaching out to them (not just with an email, stop into their office and show them how much you'd like to do research with them!). Once explaining [sic] that you are in the [honors program], many professors become more willing to make space for you in their lab.

The information provided by mentors was helpful for the students who transitioned to the main campus, especially those who transitioned during the spring semester. In the agricultural sciences college, the most important information sessions are held during the fall. Although mentees who transitioned in the spring were not able to attend the information sessions, the peer mentors filled the void by providing their spring-semester transition mentees with the information that was originally provided in the fall semester. One mentor pointed out:

It is vital to the success of students transitioning ... especially in the spring semester. It has been my own experience and I have observed the same thing in my mentees that becoming a student at the main campus in the spring versus the fall is much harder because those introductory activities like tours, finding your classes, making friends has already happened for everyone except a very small group.

Nevertheless, the mentors also experienced negative emotions about their playing the role of an information desk, so to speak. One peer mentor said, "I am there to answer questions and occasionally I do get to answer questions." Another mentor said, "I have contacted my mentees but none of them ever needed someone more than just answering a few questions they had." Although the mentors were aware of their role of providing information, the mentors sometimes felt they had been disregarded when their relationships with their mentees did not progress.

Safe Space

In the context of this study, a *safe space* is a psychologically comfortable space created by peer mentors so that their mentees can experience emotional stability. Peer mentors create this space by empathizing with their mentees' feelings of anxiety and loneliness in their new surroundings and encouraging the mentees. By creating this space, the mentors make it easy for their mentees to approach them and talk about their concerns. One mentor said:

EXPLORING PEER MENTORS' ROLES IN A MENTORING PROGRAM

Personally, I really enjoyed the peer mentoring program and think it is a great opportunity to meet new people who are also in the same situation as you are. It is also very helpful to know that there is a place where you can reach out to ask questions and voice concerns you may have.

Because the peer mentors were mentees before they became mentors, they were familiar with how their mentees felt during the transition. By recalling past experiences and demonstrating empathy towards their mentees, the peer mentors made their mentees feel safe and comfortable. The following statements were provided by mentors: "Having been through the process/a similar experience, I know how overwhelming it can be and have [sic] some tips to make the transition run smoothly, or as smoothly as possible"; "I know how much students can struggle and feel alone when changing campuses so I like to be there for them"; "Throughout the program it created a safe space to ask the questions that you can't find on Google and don't want to ask your advisors"; "It is an amazing way to help those transitioning from another campus or another school to feel like they aren't in it alone. It gives you a support group that wants you to succeed."

A word of encouragement was another way to form a safe space. The peer mentors provided mental support by periodically encouraging their mentees. One peer mentor said to a mentee:

If you're willing to put the time into classes, the content in them won't be much harder to learn than in your commonwealth campus's classes. Any resource that you might need in your classes is available on campus at your disposal as long as you ask for it, so succeeding is 100% possible!

Context Awareness

In this study, *context awareness* refers to mentors' understanding of themselves (peer mentors), their mentees, and the external situation. Peer mentors had to adjust to unique circumstances every semester. First, peer mentors demonstrated self-awareness while part of the peer mentoring program. Peer mentors tried to maintain a balance between their work as students and their work as peer mentors. Regarding time management, they weighed their top priorities and determined how much time they needed to devote to their mentees. One peer mentor said, "I [am] only available to go to the fair. . . . I still highly encourage you to go on your own." Additionally, peer mentors recognized their emotions. At times peer mentors felt disappointed if they did not receive responses from their mentees. However, the peer mentors kept contacting their mentees, assuming the mentees would need their support in the future. Even though some mentees did not respond to the peer mentors until the very end of the program, the peer mentors were still proud to be mentors and happy to repay the help that they had received when they were mentees. Statements made by peer mentors include "As a mentor, I feel as if I am giving back to the community and my fellow students"; "I'm more than just a random person walking around campus"; "I enjoy being a resource to those who

need me"; and "I do enjoy being there in case they need me." As these statements show, the peer mentors were able to maintain a positive spirit and mental state because of their pride in being peer mentors.

Peer mentors also strove to understand mentees' characteristics, preferences, and situations based on their communication. In addition to communicating the way mentees liked to communicate, the peer mentors considered each mentee's situation when giving advice. There was an overenthusiastic mentee who had taken on many different activities in addition to their schoolwork. The peer mentor advised them by saying,

I would recommend waiting a few weeks to see how smoothly things are going for you. Don't overload yourself. You certainly know yourself and how much you can handle more than I would know, but I would just advise you to take it easy the first few weeks. Sometimes it can get very overwhelming.

In addition, peer mentors were fully aware that not all mentees wanted to be friends with them. Some of the relationships were unidirectional. Some peer mentors wanted to establish friendships. One stated in their reflection that "being a mentor to me is being a friend." However, other peer mentors made statements such as "I had to remind myself that not everyone needed someone to talk to but they know I am there if they had questions"; "I have contacted my mentees but none of them ever needed someone more than just answering a few questions they had"; and "It was very surface level as after the initial contact and then them asking questions there was no real communication or want to seek a friendship or relationship." It was clear that the relationship between a mentor and a mentee and the way of communication varied depending on the mentee's needs.

Lastly, peer mentors understood the external situation and change. During the spring and fall 2020 semesters, the university shifted to all online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This meant that the peer mentors had to approach and prepare for peer mentoring differently than they had pre-pandemic. One peer mentor said, "I mentally tried to prepare myself as well because I was a first[-]time mentor then was sent home due to Covid," while another remarked, "It is a tad more difficult when you are strictly online but we are making do." The peer mentors also changed the format of their peer mentoring in consideration of external circumstances.

Conclusion and Implications

This study reveals four roles played by peer mentors. First, active communication is essential in peer mentoring. Within the mentor-mentee relationship, the peer mentors were the first to communicate and they regularly initiated communication with their mentees. The first two communications were the most important in determining the start of an actual peer mentoring relationship. Although active communication did not guarantee a positive relationship between mentor and mentee, the peer mentors actively and continually approached their mentees. At times, a mentor needed a communication strategy to elicit a mentee's response. A previous study also emphasized

the need for effective communication in peer mentoring programs (Heirdsfield et al., 2008) to establish the support system as a peer mentor, which is defined as an essential component discussed in Kram and Isabella (1985).

Second, the peer mentors did not just share information; they also collected and gathered information in advance through various routes, reviewed the importance and usefulness of the resources to be shared, and shared this information with their mentees. Previous research has shown that as part of their service, peer mentors learn about university resources that are useful for their mentees (Beltman & Schaebein, 2012). It is necessary to provide various information resources to peer mentors before they start mentoring. Providing resources to mentees is a critical part of the support system mentioned in the transition theory (Schlossberg, 1981).

Third, the peer mentors and the mentees did not always form two-way friendships; sometimes they experienced one-sided relationships in which the peer mentors provided a safe space for mentees and acted like counselors. This finding is not congruent with the results of previous studies (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). Previous studies have described peer mentor as a friend to their mentee. This could be due to mentors and mentees having different perceptions of the mentoring role and the degree of perceived support (Holt & Fifer, 2018). Nevertheless, peer mentors have created a safe space by expressing empathy and encouraging their mentees so that the mentees feel comfortable when interacting.

Finally, the peer mentors considered three factors when proceeding with peer mentoring. Peer mentoring was different every semester due to different mentees and circumstances, so peer mentors had to consider not only the peer mentoring itself, but also their own circumstances, the new mentees, and external situations. Like their mentees, the peer mentors in this study were students. This made finding time for mentoring a significant challenge. There is a risk of trying to effectively balance both to fulfill the requirement as a student and to fulfill the role of a mentor (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). In addition, depending on the mentee's disposition and the purpose of the mentoring, the relationship between the peer mentor and the mentee was at times limited to information sharing, not necessarily friendship. It is important to recognize that mentoring may simply involve providing information to another person rather than forming a friendship, depending on the mentee's preference. Although the peer mentors did not always receive responses from their mentees (Heirdsfield et al., 2008), pride in their work was an important driving force for them. This result is congruent with previous studies showing that peer mentors experience pride, confidence, and satisfaction when peer mentoring (Beltman & Schaebein, 2012; Heirdsfield, et al., 2008).

This study focused on the support in the transition theory by Schlossberg (1981) and the assumption made by Kram & Isabella (1985). Based on the result of the study and in the context in which the study was conducted, the institutional support and interpersonal support mentioned in Schlossberg (1981) can be defined as active communication, information support, safe space, and

context awareness. Specifically, active communication, information support, safe space, and context awareness are the roles and support that peer mentors and the peer mentoring program provide to help the transition students get through and adapt to the change.

The results of this study may be useful to scholars and practitioners aiming to better understand peer mentoring. We found that in this peer mentoring program, the mentees may have considered obtaining information to be a higher priority than building relationships. This may be due to the structure of the mentoring program and the context of the study being academia. Future researchers are encouraged to study mentees' perceptions of their peer mentors' roles and compare their results with the results of this study.

In addition, further research exploring the various forms of peer mentor–mentee relationships besides friendship are necessary to shed light on the dynamics of such relationships. For future practice, there might be a need to identify the gap between the roles that are assigned to peer mentors and the roles peer mentors play. Identifying this gap could help program coordinators develop better training programs for peer mentors. Also, providing peer mentors with institutional support (e.g., the necessary resources to prepare mentors) is crucial.

After data were analyzed, we met with the peer mentors who had participated in the research. We shared the findings with the peer mentors, and they agreed with the research findings and shared additional opinions. When the peer mentors recalled their experiences as mentees, they mentioned that during their first semester, they were too busy adjusting to school to be active participants in the peer mentoring relationships. Most of the time the peer mentors only wanted to obtain necessary information about the transition process. The peer mentors said they did not prioritize relationship building in the peer mentoring program at the time. In their second semester, when the peer mentors were less stressed and better acclimated to campus life, they regretted some of their choices in their first semester. Looking back, the peer mentors shared that they regretted not focusing on building those relationships with their mentors from the beginning.

Limitations

This study has a few limitations. It was conducted exclusively with female peer mentors, reflecting the higher number of female mentors in the peer mentoring program compared to male mentors. As a result, the study lacks data on male peer mentors, making it difficult to assess whether their roles differ from or resemble those of their female counterparts. Furthermore, the study's scope was limited in capturing male mentor perspectives. Additionally, most of the data that were collected reflects the peer mentors' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. The experiences that the peer mentors had pre-pandemic might not be holistically reflected in the study.

This study assumed that peer mentoring was a critical role of the mentees transitioning to a new setting. The assumption is made from the peer mentors who have shared the benefit of peer mentoring, which is also supported by

EXPLORING PEER MENTORS' ROLES IN A MENTORING PROGRAM

our theoretical framework (Kram & Isabella, 1985). The peer mentors are past mentees of the same mentoring program, who have also been through the transition process. However, this study does not claim that it is more or less effective than other types of mentorships, such as mentorship between an academic advisor and a transition student. Also, this study is focused on a transition mentoring program called ACCoMPLish. The results of this specific case study should not be generalized to peer mentors' roles for general transition students.

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